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ISSN (Online) : 2455 - 3662

SJIF Impact Factor :5.148

# EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

Monthly Peer Reviewed & Indexed  
International Online Journal

Volume: 5 Issue: 3 March 2019



Published By :EPRA Publishing

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## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT – A STUDY OF PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES.**

**Asiya Jabeen**

Assistant Professor in Commerce,  
Indira Priyadarshini Govt Degree College for  
Women,  
Nampally, Hyderabad,  
Telangana

**Seema Jabeen**

Lecturer,  
David memorial Degree College,  
Tarnaka

### **ABSTRACT**

*The topic on “Women Empowerment” is a burning issue all over the world. “Women empowerment” and “women equality with men” is a universal issue. “Women Empowerment” 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. After attaining independence, the Government of India, initially decided to pave a path to bring about social change based on three major areas, viz., constitutional and legal reforms, planned development based on mixed economy and state support to social welfare activities. All these three policies are expected to create a democratic, just and prosperous society. All these three steps have their impact on the status of women. The constitution of India has given special attention to the needs of women to enable them to exercise their rights on equal footing with men and participate in national development. It aims at creation of an entirely new social order where, all citizens are given equal opportunities for growth and development and that no discrimination takes place on the basis of race, religion, caste, sex, etc., 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. However, there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. Various policies and programmes intended for empowerment of women have been implemented for which special budget allocations are made in Five Year Plans. Besides, various schemes are being implemented to uplift socio-economic status of rural poor women and paving a path for their empowerment. Thus 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. This study highlights the various governmental policies and programmes implemented for empowerment of women.*

**KEYWORDS:** Women Empowerment, Women Equality, Policies and Programmes.

## INTRODUCTION

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. The concept of “empowerment” traces its history in the mid-17th century with the legalistic meaning “to invest with authority”. Thereafter, this concept was modernized to mean “to enable or permit”. After 1980’s, the novel concept of measuring economic development through “human development” focusing on “political empowerment” linkage with feminist discourse went a long way in shaping the idea of “women’s empowerment”. During 1990’s economists argued that “development if not engendered, is endangered” and the major component of the global society i.e. women are left outside the purview of the fruits of development and planning, we cannot achieve the desired goal of a “developed status” of an economy, whether it is developed or developing. The United Nations has shown concern for women empowerment evident in “Millennium Development Goals” to trace the progress of women empowerment across the world. The Policy Research Report of the World Bank has also identified gender equality both as a development objective and as a means to promote growth, reduce poverty and promote better governance. Beijing Declaration (1995) presented women’s empowerment as a key strategy for development and stated that “women’s full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision making process and access to power are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. In recent years the concept of “empowerment” was modified to include “the power in plural form as “powers”. This “powers” approach was picked up by several feminist bodies and development NGOs which have argued that empowerment process should be broken down in four levels of power –power over, power to, power with and power within. Women empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location rural/urban), educational status, social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on women empowerment exist at national, state and local levels in many sectors including health, education, economic opportunities, and gender based violence and political participation.

## RIGHTS OF WOMEN

- To freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity,
- To have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace.
- To make their own choices and decisions,

- To have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities,
- To have equal social status in the society,
- To have equal rights for social and economic justice,
- To determine financial and economic choices,
- To get equal opportunity for education,
- To get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias,
- To get safe and comfortable working environment,
- Women have the rights to get their voices heard.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the concept of women empowerment and its importance.
- To know about the various plans, schemes, policies and programmes of central government for women empowerment.
- To highlight various strategies and challenges of women empowerment.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this study is based on secondary data. The data is collected from journals, newspapers and internet.

### 1. IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The importance of women empowerment is understood from the following factors:

- 1. 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.
- 2. Equally competent and intelligent:** Women are equally competent. Nowadays, women are even ahead of men in many socio-economic activities.
- 3. 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.
- 4. 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.
- 5. 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.

**6. 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.

**7. 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.

**8. 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.

**9. 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.

**10. Irreplaceable in some sectors:** Women are considered irreplaceable for certain jobs.

## **2. PLANS, SCHEMES, and POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:**

Policies relating to women's rights have had a positive trajectory in the past few decades with the central government articulating many progressive measures to advance gender equality in social, economic, and political arenas. The Government of India (GoI) has two main bodies to advance gender equality: the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the National Commission for Women, which is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Both bodies work on national-and state-level legal and social policies to advance gender equality. The Ministry has widely implemented local-level micro-finance schemes to advance economic opportunities for rural women. The National Commission for Women has been instrumental in creating legislative changes, and has set up Complaint and Investigate Cells at the state level. The Grievance Cells receive complaints of gender - based violence and are mandated to investigate, provide referrals and counselling, and ultimately report on such cases.

There also have been gains in women's inheritance rights, yet challenges remain in implementation. Social biases and lack of enforcement continue to hinder the full realization of Indian inheritance laws. Inheritance laws and property distribution fall under the Hindu and Muslim personal laws, both of which exempt agricultural land.

## **POLICY PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING**

It was only in the Sixth Five Year Plan the development of women had been considered a separate issue. Until then they were provided welfare services along with other weaker and handicapped sections. It was, for the first time that a chapter on women and development had been documented in the Sixth Plan. According to the document emphasis was on four strategies namely:

- (i) Economic independence,
- (ii) Educational advance,
- (iii) Access to health care and family Planning,
- (iv) Income supplementing of tribal women.

The government has also initiated certain programmes for women. They are social welfare, nutrition service, supplement income generation, girls education, equal remuneration for equal work, hostels for working women and crèches for children, functional and legal literacy, family, promotion and strengthening of self-employment, review and streamlining laws concerning women etc.

**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN:** It was launched by the government of India on International women's day in 2010 with the aim to strengthen the overall processes that promote all round development of women. The Mission aims to provide a single window service for all programs run by the Government for Women under aegis of various Central Ministries. In light with its mandate, the Mission has been named Mission Purna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women. The National Resource Centre for Women has been set up which functions as a national convergence centre for all schemes and programs for women. It acts as a central repository of knowledge, information, research and data on all gender related issues and is the main body servicing the National and State Mission Authority.

## **WOMEN WELFARE AND EMPOWERMENT SCHEMES OF GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**

Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India have come up with various schemes, programmes, social welfare schemes, Health and Nutrition, scholarship for women empowerment, Girl Child pregnant women, mothers, ward members, Anganwadi Workers, Women Health Volunteers, the women living in the rural & tribal areas, ex-servicemen, physically handicapped, nursing women, Lactating mother, widows/destitute, Old age women, women self-help group (SHG), Women Entrepreneurs and Adolescent Girls'. Also, it helps to the women and child belonging to Scheduled Caste(SC) and Scheduled Tribe(ST), Other Backward Classes(OBC), socially and Educationally Backward Classes(SEBC) Minority

Category, below poverty line(BPL) and also for General Category. These schemes provides assistance for Education, Training, Financial assistance/Cash, Subsidy on the loans, Scholarship, Nutrition, self-employment and other facilities. The prime goal is for empowerment, development, protection and welfare of Women & Child. There are many Central Government Sponsored Schemes for Women Empowerment, some of them are listed below:

- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme
  - The Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)
  - One Stop Centre Scheme
  - Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme For the Children of Working Mothers
  - Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)
  - Swadhar Greh- A Scheme that caters to primary needs of women in difficult circumstances
  - Women Helpline Scheme
  - Working Women
- Let us discuss the details about the schemes mentioned above.

**Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao** (Save girl child, educate girl child) is Central Government Sponsored Scheme by Government of India. The prime goal of this scheme is to generate awareness and improving the efficiency of welfare services meant for women. Also, it aims to celebrate the Girl Child & Enable her Education. The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme has been introduced to address the issue declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR). This scheme is being implemented through a national campaign and focused multi-sectoral action in 100 selected districts low in CSR, covering all States and UTs. This scheme is implemented by the joint initiative of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Prime Minister Modi launched the programme on 22 January 2015 from Panipat, Haryana on the occasion of International Day of the Girl Child, Prime Minister Modi, called for the eradication of female foeticide

### Objective

The objectives of this scheme are as follows:

- To prevent gender biased sex selective elimination.
- To ensure survival & protection of the girl child.
- To ensure education of the girl child.

**The Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)** is a maternity benefits scheme implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. This scheme is for the pregnant

and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for first two live births to contribute to a better enabling environment by providing conditional cash transfer for improved health and nutrition and to also promote health and nutrition seeking behaviour in them. It provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices. It provides cash maternity benefit to the women. The pregnant women of 19 years of age and above is entitled to a cash incentive of Rs. 4000 in three instalments for first two live births.

### Objective

The objectives of this scheme are summarised as below:

- To promoting appropriate practice, care and institutional service utilization during pregnancy, safe delivery and lactation
- To encouraging the women to follow (optimal) nutrition and Young Child feeding practices, including early and Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months; and
- To providing cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and lactating mothers in order to contribute to better enabling environment.

**One Stop Centres (OSC)** are meant to support women affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace. Women facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of age, class, caste, education status, marital status, race, and culture will be facilitated with support and redressal. Aggrieved women facing any kind of violence due to attempted sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, honour-related crimes, acid attacks or witch-hunting who have reached out or been referred to the OSC will be provided with specialized services. OSC are set up in each State/UT. This scheme facilitates access to an integrated range of services including medical, legal, and psychological support. 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.

### Objective

The objectives of this scheme are as below:

- 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.

**Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme for the Children of Working Mothers:** With rising employment opportunities for women and the growing need to supplement household income, more and more women are entering the job market. With the breaking up of joint family system and the increasing number of nuclear families, working women need help in terms of quality, substitute care for their young children while they are at work. Creche and Day Care Services are not only required by working mothers but also women belonging to poor families, who require support and relief for childcare as they struggle to cope with the burden of activities, within and outside the home. Therefore women need a safe place for their children in their absence. It has become necessary to provide support to the young children in terms of quality, substitute care and other services while the mothers are at work. A creche is a facility which supports/ make able to parents to leave their children while they are at work and where children are provided the stimulating environment for their holistic development. Creches are developed in such a way that they provide group care to children, usually up to 6 years of age, who need care, guidance and supervision away from their home during the day.

#### Objective

The objectives of this scheme are as follows:

- To provide day-care facilities for children (6 months to 6 years) of working mothers in the community.
- To improve nutrition and health status of children.
- To promote physical, cognitive, social and emotional development (Holistic Development) of children.
- To educate and empower parents /caregivers for better childcare.

**The STEP Programme** is a 100% Central Sector Scheme. Under this scheme, Training is provided to poor and marginalized women in traditional trades which are largely in the informal sector. The Programme of STEP advocates the objective of extending training for up-gradation of skills and employment for women through a variety of action-oriented projects. STEP Program has been introduced to address occupational aspirations of poor women who do not have the opportunity of formal skill training. This scheme emphasis on Skill Development for self or wage employment because Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development of a country.

#### Objective

The objectives of this scheme are as below:

- To provide skills that give employability to women.

- To provide competencies and skills that enable women to become self-employed/entrepreneurs.
- To upgrade the skills of poor and marginalized women.
- To provide employment to them on a sustainable basis.

**Swadhar** –A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances is meant to provide temporary accommodation, maintenance and rehabilitative services to women and girls rendered homeless due to family discord, crime, violence, mental stress, social ostracism or are being forced into prostitution and are in moral danger. Swadhar –A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances was initiated by the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India. This scheme provides shelter, food, clothing, counselling, training, clinical and legal aid aims to rehabilitate women in difficult circumstance.

#### Objective

Under the Scheme, Swadhar Greh aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To provide to the basic need of shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment and care of the women in distress and who are lacking social and economic support.
- To enable them to recover their emotional strength that gets hampered due to their encounter with unfortunate circumstances.
- To provide them with legal aid and guidance to enable them to take steps for their readjustment in family/society.
- To rehabilitate them economically and emotionally.
- To act as a support system that understands and meets various requirements of women in distress.
- To empower/encourage them to start their life afresh with dignity and conviction.

**Universalisation of Women Helpline** is a scheme meant to provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence. This scheme is being implemented since from 01-04-2015 by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development. The Scheme of Universalisation of Women Helpline is meant to provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence through referral (linking with appropriate authority such as police, One Stop Centre, hospital) and information about women related government schemes programs across the country through a single uniform number. Women Helpline (WHL) is working with the One Stop Centre Scheme (OSC) under which one OSC will be set up in every State/UT to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by

violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof. Women affected by violence and in need of redressal services will be referred to OSC through WHL. Under this Scheme, the States/UTs will utilise or augment their existing women helplines through a dedicated single national number. Department of Telecommunication, Government of India has allocated short code 181 to all States/UTs which is being used by some States/UTs such as Delhi, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh as Women Helpline. From any post/pre-paid mobile or landline services through any public or private network i.e. GSM, CDMA, 3G, 4G etc. can be called to 181 as Women Helpline (WHL).

### Objective

The objectives of the Scheme are:

- To provide toll-free 24-hours telecom service to women affected by violence seeking support and information
- To help crisis and non-crisis intervention through referral to the appropriate agencies such as police/Hospitals/Ambulance services/District Legal Service Authority (DLSA)/Protection Officer (PO)/OSC.
- To provide information about the appropriate support services, government schemes and programs available to the woman affected by violence, in her particular situation within the local area in which she resides or is employed.

**Working Women:** The many more women are leaving their homes in search of employment in big cities as well as urban and rural industrial clusters. One of the main difficulties faced by such women is lack of safe and conveniently located accommodation. Hence this scheme has been initiated by the Government of India. This scheme aims to promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women who need to live away from their families due to professional commitments.

### Objective

The objectives of this scheme are as below:

- To promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women, with day care facility for their children, wherever possible, in urban, semi urban, or even rural areas where employment opportunity for women exist.

### 3. CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

There are many challenges that are currently plaguing the issues of women's rights in India. Some of the challenges include the following:

#### • EDUCATION

While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since its independence the gap between women and men education is severe. In comparison to 82.14% of

adult educated men, only 65.46% of adult literate women are there in India. Additionally, the norm of culture that states that the man of the family is the be-all and end-all of family's decisions is gradually deteriorating the Indian society. Eradicating this gap and educating women about their real place in the world is a step that will largely set this entire movement rolling down the hill to crash and break the wall of intolerance, negligence and exploitation.

#### • POVERTY IN THE COUNTRY

Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to abject poverty, women are exploited as domestic helps and wives whose incomes are usurped by the man of the house. If poverty were not a concern, then the girl child will be able to follow her dreams without concerns of sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and no education or work.

#### • HEALTH AND SAFETY

The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country, and are important factors in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned. While there are several programs that have been set into motion by the Government and several NGOs in the country, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not. Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications with local quacks giving ineffective and downright harmful remedies to problems that women have. The empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety.

### CONCLUSION

India as a country is still recovering from years of abuse in the time of the Raj and more years of economic suffering at the hands of the License Raj. It is only now that globalization, liberalization and other socio-economic forces have given some respite to a large proportion of the population. However, there are still quite a few areas where women empowerment in India is largely lacking.

To truly understand what women empowerment is, there needs to be a sea-change in the mind-set of the people in the country. Not just the women themselves, but the men have to wake up to a world that is moving towards equality and equity. It is better that this is embraced earlier rather than later, for our own good. To face the challenges in women empowerment, it is essential to know its importance and also the factors to be emphasized to overcome the various challenges.

We have many schemes, many programs for the purpose of women empowerment at every stage of administration, all we need is a good system and

agencies for the implementation of these policies and programs. And if we can build up that system, we can implement these programs, then the goal of women empowerment can be achieved very easily through these programs. This can be done only if there is awareness created among women through proper education. Thus, women empowerment is very essential for empowering the Nation.

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