



## GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR WOMEN

\* *Rajakumar Baligheid,*

\* *Assistant Professor in English, C.G.Bellad GFGC Akkialur –581102 Tq: Hangal, Dt: Haveri*

### Abstract:

*There is no denying the fact that the past three decades have witnessed a steadily increasing awareness of the need to empower women through measures to increase social, economic and political equality and broader access to fundamental human rights, improvements in nutrition, basic health and education. The present paper introduces the impact of government policies for women's social and economic development. On the basis of the data collected the degree of empowerment is compared in the rural and urban areas. And it is measured on four indices; women's mobility and social interaction; women's labour patterns; women's access to control over resources and women's control over decision making. The critical aspect of social empowerment of women is the promotion of gender equality in which women enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations like men in all spheres of life. Economic development of women implies a better quality of material life through sustainable livelihoods owned and managed by women. It means reducing their financial dependence on male counterparts by making them a significant part of the human resource.*

**Keywords:** *Empower, Impact, Mobility, Decision Making, Human Resource.*

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### INTRODUCTION:

Need for empowerment arose due to centuries of domination and discrimination done by men over women; women are suppressed lot. They are the target of varied types of violence and discriminatory practices done by men all over the world. India is no different. Indian society consists of people belonging to almost all kinds of religious beliefs. In every religion women are given a special place and every religion teaches us to treat women with respect and dignity. But somehow the society has so developed that various types of ill practices, both physical and mental, against women have become a norm since ages. For instance, sati custom,, practice of dowry, parda custom, female infanticide, wife

burning, sexual violence, sexual harassment at work place, domestic violence and other varied kinds of discriminatory practices; all such acts consists of physical as well as mental element. The reasons for such behavior against women are many. But the most important one are the male superiority complex and patriarchal system of society. Though to eliminate these ill practices and discrimination against women various constitutional and legal rights are there but in reality there is a lot to be done. Several self-help groups and NGOs are working in this direction; also women themselves are breaking the societal barriers and achieving great heights in all dimensions: political, social and economic. But society as a whole has still not accepted women as



being equal to men and crimes or abuses against women are still on the rise. For that to change, the society's age-old deep-rooted mind set needs to be changed through social conditioning and sensitization programmes. Therefore, the concept of women empowerment not only focuses on giving women strength and skills to rise above from their miserable situation but at the same time it also stresses on the need to educate men regarding women issues and inculcating a sense of respect and duty towards women as equals. In the present write-up we will try to describe and understand the concept of Women Empowerment in India in all its dimensions.

#### **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: MEANING AND SCOPE**

Women empowerment in simple words can be understood as giving power to women to decide for their own lives or inculcating such abilities in them so that they could be able to find their rightful place in the society.

According to the United Nations, women's empowerment mainly has five components:

Generating women's sense of self-worth; Women's right to have and to determine their choices; Women's right to have access to equal opportunities and all kinds of resources; Women's right to have the power to regulate and control their own lives, within and outside the home; and Women's ability to contribute in creating a more just social and economic order.

Thus, women empowerment is nothing but recognition of women's basic human rights and creating an environment where they are treated as equals to men.

#### **CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:**

India's Constitution makers and our founding fathers were very determined to provide equal rights to both women and men. The Constitution of India is one of the finest equality documents in the world. It provides provisions to secure equality in general and gender equality in particular. Various articles in the Constitution safeguard women's rights by putting them at par with men socially, politically and economically. The Preamble, the Fundamental Rights, DPSPs and other constitutional provisions provide several general and special safeguards to secure women's human rights.

The Preamble to the Constitution of India assures justice, social, economic and political; equality of status and opportunity and dignity to the individual. Thus it treats both men and women equal. The policy of women empowerment is well entrenched in the Fundamental Rights enshrined in our Constitution. For instance:

Article 14 ensures to women the right to equality.

Article 15(1) specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.

Article 15(3) empowers the State to take affirmative actions in favor of women.

Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office.

These rights being fundamental rights are justiciable in court and the Government is obliged to follow the same.

Directive principles of State Policy also contains important provisions regarding women empowerment and it is the duty of the government to apply these principles while making laws or



formulating any policy. Though these are not justiciable in the Court but these are essential for governance nonetheless. Some of them are:

Article 39 (a) provides that the State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood.

Article 39 (d) mandates equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

Article 42 provides that the State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

Fundamental duties are enshrined in Part IV-A of the Constitution and are positive duties for the people of India to follow. It also contains a duty related to women's rights:

Article 51 (A) (e) expects from the citizen of the country to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Other Constitutional Provisions: Through 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment of 1993, a very important political right has been given to women which is a landmark in the direction of women empowerment in India. With this amendment women were given 33.33 percent reservation in seats at different levels of elections in local governance i.e. at Panchayat, Block and Municipality elections. Thus it can be seen that these Constitutional provisions are very empowering for women and the State is bound to apply these principles in taking policy decisions as well as in enacting laws.

### **SPECIFIC LAWS FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA**

Here is the list of some specific laws which were

enacted by the Parliament in order to fulfil Constitutional obligation of women empowerment: 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.

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.

Above mentioned and several other laws are there which not only provide specific legal rights to women but also gives them a sense of security and empowerment.

### **GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND SCHEMES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

Whatever improvement and empowerment women have received is especially due to their own efforts and struggle, though governmental schemes are also there to help them in their endeavor.

In the year 2001, the Government of India launched a National Policy for Empowerment of Women. The specific objectives of the policy are as follows:

Creation of an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.

Creation of an environment for enjoyments of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all political, economic, social, cultural and civil spheres.

Providing equal access to participation and decision



making of women in social political and economic life of the nation.

Providing equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public life etc.

Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.

Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.

Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.

Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal agency for all matters pertaining to welfare, development and empowerment of women.

It has evolved schemes and programmes for their benefit. These schemes are spread across a very wide spectrum such as women's need for shelter, security, safety, legal aid, justice, information, maternal health, food, nutrition etc., as well as their need for economic sustenance through skill development, education and access to credit and marketing.

Various schemes of the Ministry are like Swashakti, Swayamsidha, STEP, Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY), Ujjawala and Swawalamban enable economic empowerment. Working Women Hostels and Creches provide support services. Swadhar and Short Stay Homes provide protection and rehabilitation to women in difficult circumstances. The Ministry also supports

autonomous bodies like National Commission, Central Social Welfare Board and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh which work for the welfare and development of women. Economic sustenance of women through skill development, education and access to credit and marketing is also one of the areas where the Ministry has special focus.

### **SCHEMES FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:**

**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. **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.

**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.

**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 6.1 Hostel for Working Women.

**The Scheme of Hostel for Working Women:** This envisages provision of safe and affordable hostel accommodation to working, single working woman, women working at places away from their hometown and for women being trained for employment.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojna:** It was launched on January 22, 2015 to awareness and also improve the efficiency of welfare services meant for girl child .This scheme is to **prevent gender biased discrimination and ensure the education, survival and protection of a girl child.**

**Mahila E-Haat:** Launched on March 7, 2016, is an initiative for meeting needs of women enterpreneurs. It provides a unique and direct marketing platform for supporting women enterpreneurs.

**One stop centre scheme:** The OSCs are set up in each state to provide integrated medical, legal and psychological support to women across the country.

**Sukanya Samruddhi Yojna:** This scheme encourages parents to build a fund for the future



education and marriage expenses of their female child..

**CONCLUSION:**

To conclude, as Gandhi said, “Be the change you want to see in the world”, which means that despite all the Govt. policies and schemes for women, women empowerment is possible only when we change our attitude towards women and treat them equally like men. Without women, there will not be truest and fullest social and economic growth. Their contribution is really the need of the hour as UN agenda for 2030 has included gender equality as one of the most important SDGs. for sustainable development.

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**Cite This Article:**

\* *Ms. Baligidad R., (2023). Government Policies for Women, Educreator Research Journal, Volume– X, Issue– II, March –April 2023, 208-213.*