



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## STEPS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY AND ITS IMPACT

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### Abstract

For the development of human resources of any country, equal participation of men and women is necessary. Women's lives should be safe and future should be bright, they should get equal status and respect, society and family should respect them. Women are given due respect in Indian society. But this is not completely true, because people with different types of thinking and ideologies live in the society. Some people consider women weaker than men. They look at women inferiorly. The issue of women empowerment and women rights has been the main issue of the society since ancient times and even in the present times the issue of women empowerment and women empowerment is burning.

Efforts in the last few decades in all government and non-government sectors have been successful to a great extent in bringing about change in the attitudes of men. Today there is hardly any field where women have not been able to make their presence felt. There has been a change in the society due to the efforts of women empowerment, whether it is through binding policies or through awareness. They are playing an important role by taking their own decisions in matters related to their rights and family and are achieving their sustainable development. 50 percent reservation has been provided to women in local bodies also. Therefore, in the present scenario, the study of Women Empowerment in India: Recent Government Initiatives and their Impact is timely. The present study has been conducted in this context.

**Key Words:** Women Empowerment, Government Schemes, Sabla, Swadhar, Maternity Support, Ujjwala Yojana, Mahila E-Haat

### Introduction

Even in a democracy with universal adult franchise, every adult citizen has one vote. But, this does not ensure that every citizen is equally empowered. Empowerment of women is a prerequisite for a developing society. Women constitute 50 percent of the world's population. It is important that every section of the society develops equally and lives in harmony with each other, for this social change requires that women are empowered to take decisions. Therefore, special efforts have been made to empower them so that the rationality of equality of votes in democracy can be fulfilled. The importance of development of women and children is of paramount importance and from these flows the overall development. In this context, a separate Ministry of Women and Child Development was formed by the Government on January 30, 2006 with a view to fill the gap in governance activities in the matters of women and children and to enhance inter-ministerial and inter-regional integrity so that women and children rights can be ensured. Working on the rights and concerns of women and children and ensuring their survival, protection, development and participation are the primary duties of the Ministry.

Women empowerment has become a buzzword in the current context. Empowerment is an important value and that is why both are seen as an end and a means to an end. The idea of empowerment can be talked about in virtually any context: human rights, basic needs, economic security, capacity building, skill building or conditions of dignified social existence. Irrespective of one's social and economic status, the Constitution has created rights for all members of the society. Empowerment is seen as a way to fulfill unenacted rights

with a renewed emphasis on building social and economic capabilities among individuals, classes and communities. Effective policy action by the state is an important determinant for the economic, social and political empowerment of women. There are many schemes, policies and programs for the empowerment of women in India. Governments can intervene and do something about these existing inequalities through intelligent policy initiatives. The situation of women can change only if a multi-sectoral approach is adopted. Thus, there has been a new emphasis of the government on building social capabilities. Therefore, plans have been made to build capacity for implementation through the state.

In the context of women, empowerment is seen as a response to exploitation, oppression and injustice through their capacity building or skill development towards literacy and education. Being disabled means being deprived of choices and empowerment is the process that enables a person to have choices that have previously been denied to them. Empowerment and autonomy of women and improvement in their political, social, economic and health status is very important in itself. Moreover, it is essential to achieve sustainable development. The full participation of both men and women is essential in productive and reproductive life, including shared responsibilities for the care and nutrition of children and the maintenance of the household.

From the beginning of the twenty-first century, special initiatives towards women empowerment started, hence this century is also known as the Women's Century. It can be said that among the two wheels of the chariot of society, one wheel is a man and the other is a woman, so women also have to be as strong and capable as men. And this weakness and capability of women is the identity of their real empowerment.

### **Women Empowerment**

Empowerment is the weapon which not only gives voice to women for their rights but also awakens every human being of the society towards their rights. The simple meaning of women empowerment is to make women more powerful. So that development of their latent consciousness, capabilities and abilities can be possible and their active participation in every area of life can be ensured. Also, for this it is necessary that they should accept freedom of opportunity in the form of social beliefs. Women empowerment means making women so empowered by making them aware of their capability, independence and liberation that they can become participants in the decision making process at both personal and social levels. In fact, women empowerment remains a social issue not only in India but also around the world. This started with the beginning of celebrating International Women's Day on 8 March 1975 by the United Nations.

### **Current Status of Women Empowerment**

Women empowerment is an important problem of the modern world. Today there is no country in the world where women's rights, respect and preserving their identity are not being discussed. This issue is also important because half of the world's population is women. Women are an integral and important part of human society.

Women have played an important role in the civilization and development of mankind. The place of women has been important in the Indian social system. When we talk about women, it directly means social development which can be accessed from women's education, their economic independence and their decision making ability.

But after 70 years of independence, we find that India's progress in creating an egalitarian society is slow and disappointing. Discrimination against women is still thriving today. In the present time, while education, employment opportunities and social networks have fooled some women, many women are still enduring injustice in the name of family, tradition, religion and culture.

In the form of women empowerment, the first effort of the twenty-first century was made to empower women by developing their capabilities and to make the entire society aware of their status and role among women. But all these efforts are mainly limited to metros and cities. Some news of these works reaches the villages through newspapers and mass media, but at the ground level, rural areas remain almost untouched by the impact of these measures. The result is that most of the rural women, despite being full of possibilities and capabilities, remain deprived of empowerment or rights consciousness. If the status, contribution and prospects of progress of rural women are evaluated on the basis of basic parameters of empowerment, it becomes clear that a significant section of the Indian society is still a victim of neglect. Empowering them too is an essential need of the nation. Women in rural society are still victims of exploitation by family and society. The birth of girls is still considered inauspicious in the village. In some communities the girl child is killed as soon as she is born. Therefore, women empowerment is necessary to get rid of these problems. Keeping these things in mind, the government has made many laws for women's safety and is running many schemes for empowerment.

## Recent Government Initiatives

Improvement in the status of women increases their decision-making capacity in all areas of life. Thus, it is very important for the long-term success of population programs. Experience shows that population and development programs are most effective when combined with measures to improve the status of women. The Government of India has taken steps to enhance the capabilities of girls and women through education, skill development and eradication of illiteracy for all girls and women without any kind of discrimination, while giving utmost importance to eradicating poverty and disease. The Government has taken necessary steps to ensure universal access to appropriate, affordable and quality health care for women throughout their life cycle on an equitable basis between men and women.

Some of the important programs launched by the Government of India in 21<sup>st</sup> century have been thoughtfully designed and include many initiatives towards the upliftment of women. There are many such schemes which have been started with a good idea, which are as follows-

**National Policy for Women Empowerment (2001):** The National Policy for Women Empowerment, implemented by the Government on March 20, 2001, aims to ensure the progress, development and empowerment of women and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and ensure that they are empowered to fulfill their duties in every aspect of life. Participate openly in the field and activity. A national action plan was prepared to achieve the goals of this policy.

**National Nutrition Mission (2001):** Under this scheme, which has been running since August 15, 2001, food grains are provided at cheap rates to poor women living below the poverty line.

**Swadhar Ghar Yojana (2001-02):** This scheme was started by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2001-02. Under this scheme, prostitutes, widows, women released from prison and other victimized women are rehabilitated. These women are provided necessary legal advice, medical and other facilities under this scheme. Under this scheme, the aim is to strengthen these victimized women physically and mentally and connect them with the main stream of society.

**Jeevan Bharti Mahila Suraksha Yojana (2003):** Started from March 8, 2003, under this scheme, Life Insurance Corporation of India provides security cover to rural women aged 18-50 years in case of serious diseases and disability of their children etc. To achieve the goal of gender equality, the government has taken several steps towards the overall empowerment of women. The planning process has moved beyond a pure welfare measure to an effort to bring them at the center of development planning. The future of women lies in a strong, self-reliant society that breathes in a healthy and safe environment.

**Gender-Based Budget (2004-05):** In order to mainstream gender in the budgetary process, the Ministry has initiated Gender-Based Budget in the year 2004-05 for which the Ministry of Women and Child Development was made the nodal ministry and a strategic framework has also been prepared to implement that mission. Gender considerations are incorporated at every level and stage during the budget process itself. Along with this, by estimating gender discrimination in the budget, those measures are completed in the budget itself. So far, the Government of India has established gender based budget units in 56 ministries and departments.

**National Women Empowerment Mission (2010):** This new program was launched on March 8, 2010 with the objective of social, economic and educational empowerment of women by convergence of schemes/programmes of various ministries and state governments. At the top level, the National Mission Authority will give policy guidelines, it will be headed by the Prime Minister and 13 ministers will be its members. There will be a Central Committee and Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee to assist them. At the central level, the National Women's Resource Center will provide technical support to the Mission Directorate. It will conduct research and impact assessment studies on policies, programs and schemes of the Central Government, and will liaise with existing institutions/institutions. It will also prepare media strategies to highlight government schemes and programs as well as create awareness programs about the social evils plaguing the society. On similar lines, there will be State Mission Tribunal and State Women Resource Center at the state level. The states of Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Tripura, Rajasthan, Gujarat, West Bengal, Punjab and Union Territory Chandigarh Administration have informed about setting up of State Mission Tribunals. Gujarat and Jammu and Kashmir have also constituted State Women's Centres. The key functions of the National Mission are economic empowerment of women, elimination of violence against women, with special emphasis on health and education, monitoring of gender mainstreaming work of programmes, policies, institutional arrangements and processes of participating ministries, institutions and organisations.

**Rajiv Gandhi Kishori Empowerment Scheme-Sabla (2010):** The Government of India implemented this new scheme on a pilot basis in 200 districts using the ICDS platform in the year 2010-11. It is a 100% centrally funded scheme run through State Governments/Union Territories. Under this, the Central Government will finance all other components except supplementary nutrition and will share the cost of supplementary nutrition with the states/UTs on 50:50 basis. Under this, a target has been set to provide nutritious food to all school girls of 11 to 18 years of age and 14 to 18 years of age. Apart from this, adolescent girls will also be educated about nutrition, health, family welfare, reproductive and sexual health, child care and life skills. In this way, we will become healthier, self-confident and truly empowered women who will be able to take decisions as per their wish and will be able to take better care of the future girls. According to the survey conducted by the States/Union Territories, approximately 1 crore adolescent girls in the country have been found eligible to avail the benefits of the Sabala Scheme.

This project is implemented through Social Welfare/Women and Child Development Departments, Women Development Corporations, Private, Public Trusts or Voluntary Organizations of Urban Bodies etc. but the condition for this is that they are so funded on individual project basis. Have the desired experience and skills for rehabilitation of women.

**Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahayog Yojana (2010-11):** This new scheme for pregnant and lactating mothers was started in 52 districts on an experimental basis in 2010-11. Under this, pregnant women above 19 years of age are given assistance of ₹ 4000 in three installments till the age of six months of their first two living children. Its purpose is to compensate for the salary loss due to leave during pregnancy so that they do not have to go to work for economic reasons till the last days of pregnancy or immediately thereafter. Besides, the health of mother and child can also be taken care of. This scheme is being run in 52 districts of the country.

**Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (2015):** One of the most brilliant initiatives of the Government of India which deals with the upliftment of women while ensuring the safety and survival of the girl child in the face of falling boy-girl ratio. It was started by the current Prime Minister in January 2015 to fulfill one of his election promises. Even after 70 years of independence, we are still suffering from the poor mentality of the inhuman act of female foeticide. This scheme focuses on celebrating the birth of girl child and making them feel proud like their boys. For this, Rs 1 crore each will be provided for awareness and promotion in such 100 identified districts. A social campaign is run with an allocation of Rs. where the boy-girl ratio is very worrying.

**Sukanya Samridhi Account (2015):** It was launched in January 2015. The government is not only making efforts towards saving more and more girl children but is also equally determined to provide them a better and economically secure future. Although India is a country where women are revered in every religion, the society is more eager to marry them rather than educate them. Instead, the scheme focuses on helping families finance their daughters' education and marriage expenses. According to this savings scheme, the parent or guardian can open a specific account in the name of his/her daughter in any bank or post office with a minimum amount. After this, multiple deposits of any amount can be made every year for 14 years from the date of account opening. The deposit amount will mature after 21 years. The deposited amount can be claimed as deduction under Section 80C of Income Tax. Also, the interest earned, which is currently 8.4 percent per annum, is also tax free.

**One Stop Center Scheme (2015):** Women in the society are facing exploitation, torture and violence, which needs to be curbed. This violence can be in the form of physical, sexual, mental, economic or psychological harassment. The primary responsibility of the government of any country is to provide a suitable and safe environment for the prosperity of its citizens. In line with this goal of upliftment of women, One Stop Center Scheme was launched in April, 2015. These One Stop Centers (OSCs) have been set up to provide immediate assistance, emergency support, medical assistance and legal and psychological support to affected women and even girls below 18 years of age.

**National Skill Development Mission (2015):** A streamlined institutional mechanism under the National Skill Development Mission launched in July 2015 by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) to enhance skill training activities in the States, employment opportunities and skills has been launched with additional focus on empowerment of women. For this, out of 812 PMKKs distributed to 36 states and union territories of the country, 738 have been established so far in 707 districts.

**Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (2016):** This initiative of the Government of India, launched in March 2016, aims to provide cooked food to everyone and under this, free LPG connections are provided to women below the poverty line. This came into sharp focus due to social campaigns and appeals to the affluent sections to give up their subsidies for the weaker sections. Ensuring every household has an LPG connection would yield two benefits. This will not only work for the upliftment of women by improving their health, freeing them from smoke and dust, but will also save non-renewable resources used by these people for lighting fires. They only need to submit an application form and required documents to avail the benefits of this scheme.

**Mahila E-Haat (2016):** This scheme focuses on empowerment of women entrepreneurs, NGOs, self-help groups and small products. Launched in March 2016, this bilingual portal provides an online marketing platform to women across the country to showcase their manufactured products and services provided to attract customers. This portal will act as a catalyst for their business and it requires only a mobile number to connect from anywhere at any time. This is a huge effort in line with the social campaigns 'Digital India' and 'Stand Up India' to strengthen the Indian economy.

**Maternity Benefit Program (2017):** This scheme is for the benefit of pregnant and lactating women in India and envisages providing proper care, treatment and efficiency utilization under government sponsored facilities. To curb the increased maternal mortality rate, this scheme, earlier known as Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana, was renamed as Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana in 2017. In this, conditional cash transfer is made for the first two living children of women aged 19 years and above who are about to become mothers or who are breastfeeding. This additionally includes the employment related loss occurring during this period.

**Women Helpline (2015):** Launched in April, 2015, the Women Helpline 1091 Scheme is an initiative towards the upliftment of women who are facing violence and need immediate assistance. In this, 24-hour toll-free telephonic assistance is provided to any woman or girl facing violence in public or private life. It can also spread awareness about various schemes and programs launched by the government and government agencies to help them. These helplines also provide assistance in difficult situations like transportation to the nearest hospital, ambulance facility, police station, fire department and others.

### **Impact of the Policies Mentioned Above**

Government policies have an important contribution in bringing change in the society. In the coming time, such policies will bring tremendous changes in the status of women. Different policies fulfill different needs which is the success of these initiatives. Women's concerns cover a wide range of aspects, it would be more appropriate if the government comes up with more policies. One of the weaknesses of these efforts is the execution or implementation mechanism. These mechanisms are often hampered by unclear mandates, lack of adequate staff, training, data and adequate resources, and inadequate support from national political leadership.

### **Conclusion**

Women empowerment is one of the most important concerns of the 21st century, not only at the national level but also at the international level. The society should provide equal opportunities to both men and women for the upliftment of the society and the betterment of the society as a whole. Women represent half of the world's population and gender inequality exists in every country. Unless women are given equal opportunities as men, all-round development of the entire society is not possible. For overall social development, it is very important to ensure that every individual is economically, socially and politically empowered. The achievement of these goals needs to be supported by the allocation of necessary human and financial resources to ensure gender equality at the local, regional, national and international levels. For this, government initiatives alone will not be enough because empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed with income and assets, so that they can stand on their own feet and make their mark in the society. The society should take the initiative to create an environment in which they can get proper benefits from the schemes made by the government for women's development. There should be no gender discrimination and women should have full opportunity to take their own decisions and participate in the social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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