

An Initiative On Women Equality And Empowerment By Indian Government (An Overview)

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Abstract

In India, the major section of the society comes from the deprived and marginalized background. Besides this deprivation, the women folk suffers from the various grave issues like domestic violence, verbal and physical abuse, sexual harassment, trafficking, dowry harassment, negligence, discriminatory treatment, poverty, backwardness, illiteracy, unawareness and unemployment. Therefore, it is vital to generate awareness and formulate measures that would help in lowering as well as in eliminating all these problems and encourage them towards the attainment of empowerment opportunities. Women's equality and empowerment are crucial for a society's overall development and prosperity. When women have equal opportunities and rights to participate in all aspects of the society, it can lead to significant positive change in the progress and development of the country. Over the past few years, the Indian government has implemented several laws and policies to protect women's rights and promote gender equality. Even the Indian Constitution provides the principle of gender equality in its Preamble, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The constitution not only grants equality to women, but also confers equal rights and opportunities to men and women in the political, economic and social spheres. The main area covered under this paper is to highlight the measures and policies taken by the Indian government for the protection, empowerment and upliftment of the status of women. Such policies will create an enabling environment for the development of women, besides can provide them equal access to all the basic minimum services so as to enable them to realize their full potential. Furthermore, the purpose of this paper is to make women well aware about the different initiatives taken by the Indian Government and use it as powerful tool to fight against any injustice done to them at home, work or in community and the society at large.

Keywords: Women, Equality, Empowerment, Gender, Government, Rights and Policies.

Date of Submission: 06-11-2023

Date of Acceptance: 16-11-2023

I. Introduction

Equality, when we talk about the term equality it indicates the equal access for everyone in every sphere of the life, irrespective of the gender. But unfortunately equality is being restricted particularly among the women folks. It has been observed that societies with greater equality between women and men experience faster economic growth, increased agricultural productivity, and resilience. Besides, women play critical roles as effective advocates for peace, community leaders and champions of civil and human rights. Gender equality and Women's empowerment are the basic drivers of sustainable development and self-reliance. Self-reliance is a country's capacity to plan, finance and implement solutions to its own developmental challenges and includes a commitment to see these solutions through effectively, inclusively and with accountability. This, in turn, empowers and enables them to help to shape their lives and contribute positively to their families, communities, and countries together. In Indian Constitution, Gender Equality is one of the fundamental Human Rights. Gender equality necessitates the sustainable growth and development between the nations and the worldwide. A nation cannot develop or prosperous by keeping half of its population deprived from the basic rights and opportunities. Women is always an important part in the socio-economic development of the society, which thereby needs an equal participation in the developmental program. By promoting gender equality, the nation can progress in all its aspects and fields. For women empowerment and gender equality it is important to change the mindset and orthodox attitude of people. The society needs to be made conscious about the significant role of women at home, work and society in general.

II. Objectives:

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

1. To highlight the constitutional measures taken by the Indian government for empowering women.
2. To focus on the Policies and schemes framed by the Indian government for the upliftment of women.

III. Methodology

The source and analysis of the paper is based on the secondary data collected from various journals, research papers, articles and websites.

IV. Findings and Discussion

The major initiatives taken by the Indian Government on Women Equality and Empowerment

Article 14 provides equal rights to both men and women in the political, economic and social opportunities irrespective of gender.

Article 15 stands for no discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc.,

Article 15 (3) enables the State to make special provisions to make affirmative discrimination in safeguard of women.

Article 16 assures equal opportunities for all the citizens in public appointments.

Article 39 (a) the State shall direct its policy to ensure equal rights and privilege to all the citizens (men and women) and have the right to means of livelihood,

Article 39 (c) confirms equal wage for equal work.

Article 42 seeks to ensure humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929)

Child marriage restraint act fixed the marriageable age for girls at 14 years and boys at 18 years. The objective of the act was to eliminate the evil of child marriage, which was threat for the health and to the life of young girls and minor mothers.

The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA)

The Immoral Traffic Act prevents commercial sexual exploitation of child or women. Any person involved in such an activity may be imprisoned for seven years or more. The act criminalizes the various forms of sex work and hence may gradually prohibit the prostitution in India.

Dowry Prohibition Act (1961)

The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 makes it illegal to accept or give any form of dowries before or after marriage. The definition of "dowry" in the act is any asset or valued security given or agreed to be given by one party to the other, directly or indirectly, but it excludes Muslim personal law who give, dower or mahr in marriage. The penalty for the person while giving or taking dowry, shall be punished with at least five years in jail and 15,000 rupees as a fine or an amount of the valued dowry.

Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986

The act prohibits the immoral presentation of women in print media such as advertisement, magazines, pamphlets etc. or in any other manner.

Legal Services Authorities (LSA) Act, 1987

The Legal Services Authorities (LSA) Act, 1987 provides free and competent legal services to eligible persons, including women and children. It organises Lok Adalats to promote justice on the basis of equal opportunities and organises legal awareness camps particularly in rural areas.

National Commission for Women (NCW), 1992

National Commission for Women (NCW) was set up by the Government of India in January 1992 as a statutory body under the National Commission for Women Act (1990). The function of the commission is to study and monitor all the matters relating to the Constitutional and legal safeguards. It also recommends and reviews the existing legislation, and look into the complaints concerning the deprivation of the rights of women and give suggestions for the implementation of different policies affecting women and recommends the establishment of the State Commissions for Women (SCW) by all state governments.

Mission Shakti, 2001

Mission Shakti is a large scale awareness programme given by the Ministry of Women and Child Development that aims to upgrade the empowerment, safety and security of women. The scheme focuses on

empowering women economically and gives them freedom to make their own decisions about their physical appearances/mind sets and provide them an environment that will be free from abuse and threat. It targets at lessening the burden on women and at the very same time it enhances their involvement in the labour force by encouraging the skill development programmes, capacity building, financial literacy, etc.

Swadhar Greh Scheme, 2001-02

The “Swadhar Greh Scheme” is a scheme launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2001-02. The programme strives to rehabilitate women who have lost their homes due to family strife, crime, violence, mental stress, and social isolation economically as well as emotionally. The programme meets the basic requirements of women like shelter, food, clothing, counselling, training, clinical assistance, and legal aid. The scheme provides a good support system for victimized women, so that they could live their life with honour and dignity.

Domestic Violence Act, 2005

Domestic Violence Act was passed in 2005, which provide women a legal right to protect herself from domestic violence. Domestic violence covers every kind of violence not only physical but also psychological, sexual, and financial. The act guarantees protection of the rights of women under the law who are facing any sort of violence within the family.

Ujjawala Scheme, 2007

In India there are several grave reasons that give space for trafficking of children and women around and for that purpose Indian government initiated the Ujjawala Scheme in 2007 to stop trafficking of children as well as women. The aim of this scheme is to prevent, rescue, rehabilitate, reintegrate and repatriate the trafficked victims for commercial sexual exploitation.

Nirbhaya Fund, 2012

It has been seen that girls and women are being exploited and abused on the streets, in transit, and in other public settings that refrains the freedom of movement for them and discourage women from moving freely in the public locations of their choice. Nirbhaya fund was set after the gang-rape of a paramedical student in 2012. As a result, the government initiated the Nirbhaya Fund, a special fund that aimed on enhancing women’s protection and security in the country being managed by the Ministry of Finance’s Department of Economic Affairs. The funded money has been used to establish one stop centres, to make safety devices, and to set up fast-track courts for the victimized women.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal Act (POSH), 2013

In 2013, Government passed an act against the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION and REDRESSAL).The act guarantees the security of women at work. Women are entitled to have restroom as well as facilities for child care and feeding at workplaces.

One Stop Centres scheme (Sakhi), 2015

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has carried of the centrally sponsored scheme that is Sakhi -One Stop Centre (OSC) for women. These OSCs offer a variety of integrated services, which includes emergency response and rescue services, police facilitation, medical assistance, legal aid, psychological counselling, and temporary shelter, to women who have faced violence in private or public, within the family, community and at workplace. It furnishes video conferencing facility to facilitate the hassle free police and court proceedings prior to consultation with superintendent of police and district and session Judge. The OSC will facilitate all the affected women irrespective of their caste, colour, class, religion or marital status.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, 2015

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao was launched on 22 January 2015 by prime minster Narendra Modi. It is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Women & Child Development, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education. The aim of this initiative is to ensure the survival & protection of the girl child as well as to ensure the education and participation of the same.

Digital Shakti Campaign, 2018

The National Commission for Women (NCW) launched the Digital Shakti Campaign in June 2018 that focuses on making women and girls digitally aware. Through this scheme the women across India have been made

aware about cyber safety tricks and tips to create safe cyber space for them and besides this the Campaign empowers the women to report and fight against any kind of cyber crime.

Stree Manoraksha Project, 2022

The Ministry of Women and Child Development in collaboration with National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru launched Stree Manoraksha Project on 2 March 2022 to train the staff engaged in one stop centre across the nation, with an aim to handle the psych-social and mental needs of women affected by any sort of violence.

V. Conclusion

Women play an indispensable role in the socio-economic progress of the country. Women have been considered the pillar of any nation but yet they are unable to meet their ends. Therefore, it is very important to make them aware about their basic rights so that they can know their status and position in the society in order to make themselves self-sufficient in every sector of life. It is essential to generate information in terms of various areas for acquiring proper understanding of the measures for bringing out improvements in the status of women. Women empowerment schemes in India are aimed to ensure their equal access to resources, opportunities and safety. The main areas that have been taken into consideration in this research paper include, socio-economic and political status of women, measures to raise the status of women, human rights of women, protection of women's rights by the Constitution of India and Indian Laws for the protection of women's rights. But unfortunately, despite numerous initiatives taken by the Government of India for gender equality and women empowerment, the gap still exists. Women being an integral part of any society have been neglected all the times. India has to continue to make progress in improving the status of women. It is well said by **Malala Yousafzai** "I raise up my voice not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back"

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