

## **GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

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### **Abstract**

Women constitute approximate half of the world's population, but in India population of female is comparatively low than male population. In India, generally women are also not treated as equal to men in majority of the places in society. It adds to the relevance of studying women empowerment in India presently. Women Empowerment is the process of upliftment of their economic, social and political status in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. It involves the building up of such an environment wherein women can take their own decisions for their personal development. This paper focuses on various initiatives taken by Indian Government for women empowerment. The Study is based on secondary data sources. The required information has been collected from secondary sources like Books, Journals, reports of various NGOs, Government organisations and websites etc. Further, the proposed changes required in education, employment and social structure for enabling women empowerment in the country are also highlighted.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, NGOs, Different Government Schemes for Women Empowerment

### **Introduction**

**“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its' women.”**

**-Jawaharlal Nehru**

Women and girls have been subjected to centuries of discrimination in a patriarchal society. Over the past few years, the situation is changing slowly due to increased awareness about gender equality. Women empowerment refers to increase the political,

social, educational and financial power of women in the society. Empowerment of women depends on different variables like geographical location, education status, social status, age etc. Empowerment means transforming oneself from a position of enforced powerlessness to a position of power (Batiawala, 1994). Empowerment is the expansion of humans' potential to make decision in life in a context that was formerly denied to them (Kabeer, 2001). Thus, women empowerment in broadly meant building up of a society, in which:

- Women can breathe without fear of exploitation;
- Women are having freedom to make the bright future of their family;
- Women have been empowered to become self-reliant and economical independent;
- Women have been given active participation in various social-political development activities;

Numerous policies on women's health, education, gender based violence etc. exist at the national, state and local level. The Government of India has started a number of schemes and financial aids to ensure the equality, welfare, education and health of a girl child. Various NGOs are also working for women empowerment in India. An empowered woman plays a very important role in the overall development of the society. So, in order to make the country fully developed, women empowerment is essential.

### **Review of Literature**

The following discussion shows the review of existing research work in the field of women empowerment in India:

**Shettar (2015)** attempted to analyze the status of Women Empowerment in India and highlighted the Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment with the help of a study based on secondary data. In the results women of India were found to be relatively disempowered. Further, acceptance of unequal gender norms by women was observed to be prevailing in the society. It was concluded that access to Education, Employment and Change in Social Structure are the factors which can enable Women Empowerment. **Mandal (2018)** attempted to find out the status of women empowerment and women education in pre-colonial, colonial and modern India. It was found that the historical background of women education in Indian society in Vedic era women education was good. This study also expressed that 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. **Menon**

**et.al. (2020)** attempted to measure the extent of women empowerment in urban Bangalore considering educational achievement, economic opportunity, health and well-being, decision-making, and autonomy in all matters with the help of primary data. It was found that decision-making power in households and freedom of movement of women varies considerably with age, education, and employment. Educational qualifications and access to employment were observed to be the essential factors for the promotion of women's empowerment. **Singh and Singh (2020)** conducted a comparative study to investigate the status of women empowerment in India and other countries with the help of secondary sources of data. In the study, constitutional safe guards as well as plans and programmes by the Government and their implementation, indicators of women empowerment were discussed in detail and found low rank of women empowerment in India.

It is very clear from the above discussion that researcher have done a lot of work in the field of women empowerment in India and worldwide. A large number of research studies have been conducted by various researchers considering women empowerment, women education, women rights, social status of women etc. The research gap for the present study is associated with a few studies on the Government initiatives for empowering the women in India. So, the present study has been conducted to create awareness regarding various schemes introduced by the Government of India for the empowerment of women.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To know the need of Women Empowerment;
2. To study the various Government Schemes for Women Empowerment;
3. To suggest some measures for ensuring the higher level of women empowerment in the country.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study is descriptive in nature and it is based on secondary data collected from various newspapers, magazines, Books, Journals, reports of various NGOs, Government organizations and websites of various departments of Indian Government.

### **Results and Discussion**

The following discussion is associated with the interpretation of results of the present study:

#### **Need of Women Empowerment**

As per a large number of research studies, the economic, social, health and political

situation of women in India is found to be very poor. Very few women are engaged in services or any other business activities. On the other hand, society is male dominated and women are also found to be less literate than man. According to census 2001, literacy rate among men was 76% while it was only 54% among women. It has also been noticed some women consumes less food and work more, so they are too weak to work. Another major problem with women is harassment at workplace. The cases related to rape, kidnapping of a girl child and harassment for dowry etc. are increasing day by day. Thus, women empowerment has become one of the most important issues of present times. Empowered women have the power to change so many things in the society. In order to remove gender discrimination and male domination from the society and to make our country a developed country, it is needed to empower women in as aspects. With the help of women empowerment, a bright future of women, families, society and country even we must say the future of world can be ensured.

### **Government Schemes for Women Empowerment**

Since 1969 Government of India has taken various initiatives for empowering women across the country. The Government of India had set up the Department of Women and Child Development (WCD) in 1985 as a part of Ministry of Human Resource Development. The objective of setting up this department was holistic development of women and children in the country. This department was upgraded to a full-fledged ministry i.e. Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) w.e.f. 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2006. Several other organisations are also working under the aegis of Ministry of Women and Child Development. For the advancement of women the ministry enacts/amends legislation, formulates plans, policies and programmes, and coordinates the efforts of various government and non-government organisation in the field of child and women development. Following acts related to women are administered by the ministry:

1. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, prohibition and redressal) Act, 2013;
2. Child Marriage Prohibition Act-2006
3. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act-2005;
4. National Commission for Women Act-1990;
5. The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act-1987;
6. The Dowry Prohibition Act-1961/1986

The Government has implemented various empowerment schemes at state and central level for improving the lives of girls and women in the country. Some of those schemes are discussed below:

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme (BBBP);

2. Women Helpline Sheme (WHL);
3. One Stop Centre Scheme;
4. Sukanya Samriddhi Yojna (SSY);
5. CBSE Udaan Scheme;
6. Support to Training and Employment Program for Women (STEP);
7. Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme (MPVS);
8. National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education;
9. Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK);
10. National Creche Scheme;
11. Working Women Hostel;
12. Swadhar Greh Scheme;

(Source- <https://wcd.nic.in/schemes-listing/2405>)

### **1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme (BBBP)**

The scheme was launched by the government on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2015. The scheme was jointly run by Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Education. The main purpose of this scheme was to address the issue of declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) through a national level strategy and to promote the girl child education. Education is considered as one of the most important means for women empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. This program was initially started in 100 districts of the country where the CSR was very low and then extended to other parts of the country. The main objectives of this scheme include:

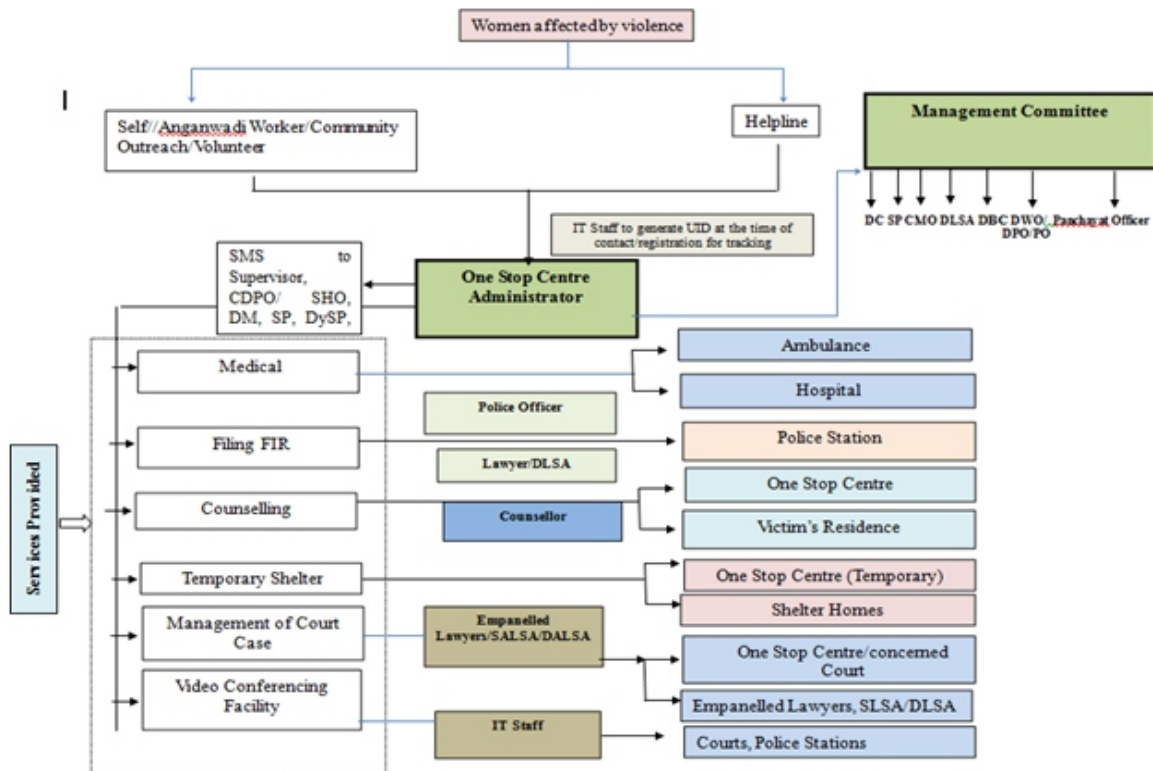
- Prevent gender biased sex selective elimination;
- Ensure survival and protection of girl child;
- Ensure Girl Child Education and Inclusion;
- Ensure Gender Equality in the Society

### **2. Women Helpline Scheme (WHL)**

The scheme of Women Helpline (WHL) was started by the government to ensure that a woman facing violence either home or outside could access various support services, through information and referral from a centralised and integrated body. For such purpose the MWCD has decided that a Women Helpline (State level toll free number such as 181) would be made universal for providing immediate emergency response to a women affected by violence. The helpline will also be accessed through text message for those who are unable to speak. Such scheme will function across the country by developing linkage between existing helplines i.e. 181 and 1091 numbers allotted to all the states and UTs.

### 3. One Stop Centre Scheme

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has started a scheme of setting up One Stop Centre on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2015. This was a sub-scheme of Umbrella for National Mission for Empowerment of Women including Indira Gandhi Matritav Sahyog Yojna. The main purpose of establishment of such centres is to provide integrated support and services including police assistance, medical aid, shelter and psychosocial counselling etc. under one roof, to those women affected by violence. This scheme is funded through the Nirbhaya Fund. The One Stop Centres would be set-up in phased manner across the country. In the first phase, one Centre shall be established in each state. As per the report of MWCD total 166 OSCs was operational out of 186 sanctioned as on 12-12-2017. The services rendered by OSCs along with the service provider have been explained with the help of following figure:



**4. Sukanya Samriddhi Yojna (SSY)**

To promote the girl child education the Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India has started Sukanya Samriddhi Yojna (SSY), and implemented it on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2015 as a part of Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme. It is a small saving scheme for a girl child. Under this scheme the parents can open a saving account of a girl child who is below the age of 10. Account can be opened in any Post Office or in any branch of authorised commercial bank. Further, the account is transferable anywhere in India. The main objective of this scheme is to encourage the parents to save for better higher education of a girl child.

**5. CBSE Udaan Scheme**

CBSE has started this scheme under the guidance of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India. The main objective of this scheme is to increase the enrolment rate of girl child in engineering and technical colleges all over India. This scheme encourages the girls to pursue for higher education through providing online/offline study materials to the deserving girl students of 11<sup>th</sup> standard of science stream. Such material will help them in preparation of entrance exams for engineering. Given below is the eligibility to enrol in this scheme:

- Only a girl student who are resident of india;
- The girl student must be studying in 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> standard (Science Stream with PCM) of CBSE affiliated schools across India;
- She must have secured at least 70% marks in class 10<sup>th</sup>;
- There is a reservation of seats of 15%, 7.5%, 27% and 3% for SC, ST, OBC and PWD respectively;
- Annual Income of family should not exceed Rs. 6 lakhs p.a.

**6. Support to Training and Employment Program for Women (STEP)**

Support to training and employment for women (STEP) is one of the most important schemes started by Govt. of India for women empowerment. The scheme was launched by Central Government in 1986-87. The main purpose of this scheme was to increase employability of women by enhancing their skills and competencies. To enhance their skills and productivity proper training is to be provided to poor and asset less women in different sectors viz. agriculture, handloom, handicrafts, fisheries etc. Those who are above the age of 16 years are eligible under this scheme.

**7. National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education**

If a woman is uneducated then the future generation will also be uneducated. Once

Greek warrior Napoleon once said, “Give me a few educated mothers, I shall give you a heroic race.” Thus, to educate the girl child various constitutional and legal rights have been implemented by the Government of India. The National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education is one of these schemes. This is a scheme launched by Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Under this scheme once a qualifying girl has been chosen, Rs. 3000/- will be deposited as a fixed deposit by the Government on her behalf, which can be withdrawn after she has qualified the class 10<sup>th</sup> exam and reached the age of 18 years. Following are the eligibility conditions to avail this scheme:

- All SC/ST girls who have passed the 8<sup>th</sup> standard examination;
- Girls who belong to other social group are also eligible if they passed 8<sup>th</sup> standard through Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas;
- She must be under 16 years of age.

#### **8. Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme (MPVS)**

It is well known that a woman who is victim of violence may not find it easy to approach the police or other authorities for getting help. So, in order to increase focused community outreach The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) in collaboration with the Home Affairs has launched the scheme of Mahila Police Volunteers in the different states and UTs of the country. The Mahila Police Volunteers will act as a link between police and community and facilitate the women in distress. To fight crime against women the MPVs will serve as a public-police interface. They will act as a role model for the community. The scheme has to be implemented in phased manner on pilot basis across the country. In first phase it is to be implanted in one or two districts of each state. In Haryana it was launched in Karnal and Mahendragarh district as a pilot project in December 2016.

#### **9. Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK)**

The Government has approved Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK) Scheme in 2017-18. Under this scheme the Govt. has announced to set-up the 'Mahila Shakti Kendras' in 14 lakh ICDS Anganwadi Centres at village level. This scheme has been started by MWCD under the umbrella scheme of Mission for Protection and Empowerment for Women. Under this scheme a rural women can approach to the government for empowering them through training and capacity building. The opportunities for skill development, digital literacy, health and nutrition will be provided for empowering the rural women.



#### **10. National Creche Scheme**

In the past few decades there is a rapid increase in education and employment of women which has led to increase in nuclear families and breaking up of joint family system in the country. Thus, the children of these women are now in need of day care services. Effective day care system has become necessary to provide support to mothers and children. Thus, the government has started National Creche Scheme for the children of working women. Under this scheme the day-care facilities are provided to the children of working women to improve their health. Further, this scheme promotes physical, social and holistic development of children. Following are the objective of this empowerment scheme:

- To provide day-care facilities to children (6 months to 6 years) of working women;
- To improve nutrition and health status of children;
- To promote holistic development of children

#### **11. Working Women Hostel**

Due to increased employment opportunities in big cities for women, they are leaving their homes. While leaving their homes they are facing a major problem of safety and conveniently located accommodation. Thus, to provide a safe and conveniently located accommodation to working women the Government of India has introduced Working Women Hostel Scheme in 1972-73. Under this scheme the government provides hostel facility to those women who are working, provided that their gross income does not exceed Rs. 50,000/- p.m. in metropolitan cities and Rs. 35,000/- p.m. in case of any other city. This scheme is available in cities, smaller towns and even in rural areas where employment opportunities are available for women. The children of working women may be accommodated in such hostels with their mothers.

#### **12. Swadhar Greh Scheme**

To prevent the women from exploitation and to support their survival and rehabilitation, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has launched the Swadhar Greh Scheme. The main aim of this scheme of women empowerment is to provide shelter, clothing, food and healthy security to women so that they can readjust in the society. Under this scheme the Government provide temporary accommodation, maintenance and rehabilitative services to those women and girls who have become homeless due to a range of difficult circumstances e.g. family discord, crime, violence and mental stress etc. The government has set-up

Swadhar Greh in every district with a capacity of 30 women with the following objective:

- To provide the primary need of shelter, food and care of women in distress;
- To enable them to regain their emotional strength;
- To provide them legal aid and guidance to take steps for their readjustment in society;
- To act as a support system that meets various requirements of women in distress;
- To enable them to start their life with dignity.

### **Suggestions for ensuring the higher level of women empowerment in India**

Besides the various schemes launched by the Government of India, there is still a wide gap between men and women in the society. Empowerment of women can be achieved only by adopting some of the following suggestions:

- The girl child education is the grass-root problem in India. So special attention should be given to girl-child education;
- For those women who belongs to the weaker section of the society, some awareness programs need to be organised for creating awareness among them;
- Proper arrangements should be done for enough safety and support to women;
- Work at par with men and proper wages should be provided to them so that their status can be improved in the society;
- Some schemes related to women entrepreneurship should be started by the government;
- To curb the mal-practices in the society, strict compliance of various empowerment schemes and acts should be there.

### **Conclusion**

Empowering the women is one of the most important concerns of present times. We have seen that society is now accepting the women's empowerment for the development of the society and country. Various NGOs and GOI are trying to empower women by providing financial assistance to promote their sustainable development. The introduction of various women empowerment schemes in India has benefited women in a number of ways. The social security of the women has improved. Due to the efforts of Central and State Government the involvement of women is increasing in all the sectors like politics,

social, business etc. The most positive development we have seen is the growing involvement of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The role of women in politics is also increasing. At present approx. 41% women members are there in Gram Panchayats all over India. We have seen women Chief Ministers, Leaders of different Political Parties like Mamta Banarji, Sonia Gandhi, Nazma Heptulla etc. Indira Nuye, Divya Gokulnath, Falguni Nayar, Khushboo Jain, Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Radhika Aggarwal are the best examples of well-established business-women. Women are also working on human development issues of child rearing, education, health and gender equality.

To sum up, although the women are getting benefited by different schemes of empowerment started by the government but still being discriminated and marginalized at every level of society. Women are not able to avail the benefit of different schemes due to unawareness about schemes, illiteracy etc. Thus, empowerment of women is not possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves.

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