

## **Women Empowerment'**

refers to complete emancipation of women from socio-economic shackles of dependency and deprivations. Often made synonymous to gender equality, the term women empowerment encompasses a much larger set of principles that needs whole-hearted attention. The concept of empowerment flows from the word power. Empowerment of women would mean encouraging women to be self-reliant, economically independent, have positive self-esteem, generate confidence to face any difficult situation and incite active participation in various socio-political development endeavors. The growing conscience is to accept women as individuals capable of making rational and educated decisions about them as well as the society, increasing and improving the economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right as men, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for their families and communities.

### **Why Women Empowerment is Important ?**

A strong patriarchal society with deep-rooted socio-cultural values continues to affect the progress of women's empowerment in the country. The need of the hour is an egalitarian society, where there should be no place for gender superiority. Aim of Government policies should be to identify and eliminate forces that are directed towards keeping the tradition of male dominance over its female counterpart alive.

Women constitute roughly 50% of the nation's population and a majority of them remain economically dependent, without employment. Many of them are even unaware of the fact that they are eligible for positions that men enjoy. The result is that the economy of the country is skewed due to underutilization of available human resources. Women are generally considered less competent, both intellectually as well as physically as compared with men. As a result the opportunities extended towards them become biased and obtrusive without actual evaluation of their competencies. While scientific data proclaims women to be more adept at multi-tasking than men, they still remain the second choice for employers in the country.

In major parts of India as well as the world, women are still denied basic education and are never allowed to pursue higher education despite possessing the acumen needed. This colossal waste of talent is definitely holding economies backward.

Women empowerment in its actuality is synonymous with complete development of the society. An educated woman, with knowledge about health, hygiene, cleanliness is capable of creating a better disease-free environment for her family. A self-employed woman is capable of contributing not only to her family's finances, but also contributes towards increment of the country's overall GDP. A shared source of income is much more likely to uplift the quality of life than a single income household and more often than not helps the family come out of poverty trap. Women aware of their legal rights are less likely to be victims of domestic violence or other forms of exploitations. Their inherent aptitude towards organization and well-rounded maintenance of home makes them uniquely suited for political and civil leadership roles. The 73rd & 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided some special powers to women – reservation of seats(33%) and the ‘New Panchayati Raj’ – to empower women at least at the village level, is a prime example of the point in discussion. Participation of women in political and social positions of power has seen marked reduction in corruption in those specific areas which adds another advantageous point in favor of women empowerment.

Women empowerment is currently a burning issue on the minds of nation's policymakers as it commands a lot of media attention and international focus lately. It is a fact that women are built different than men by nature yet this difference cannot be translated to mean inferiority. In the few last decades, India has witnessed some changes in the status and role of women in our society. There has been shift in policy approaches – what was focused on ‘welfare’ in the seventies, ‘development’ in the eighties and ‘growth’ in

the nineties, has now been tagged with the contemporary term of 'empowerment'. Empowering women socially, economically, educationally, politically and legally is going to be a Herculean task. It will not be easy changing the deep-rooted perception that women are inferior, dependent and dispensable, resulting in a culture of disregard for women in Indian society. But it does not mean that change is implausible. Time is needed to eradicate the perception. But with the push towards the right direction and a lot of effort directed, this task might just be achievable. All we need is an organized approach from the Government and law enforcement agencies of the country focused in the right direction that would rest only with the liberation of women from all forms of evil.

### **National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001**

The goal of the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, passed in the year 2001, is to bring about advancement, development and empowerment of women and specifically includes:

- (i) Creating an Environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- (ii) (ii) The de jure and de facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres-political, economic, social, cultural and civil.
- (iii) (iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
- (iv) (iv) 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 office, etc.
- (v) (v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
- (vi) (vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
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- (viii) (viii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- (ix) (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organization.

The policy prescriptions include making the judicial-legal system more responsive and gender sensitive to women's needs, bring about greater equality in power sharing and participation in decision making at every level. Mainstream gender perspective into the development process, bringing about economic (poverty eradication programmes specific to women, strengthening of micro credit, specific programmes for women in agricultural industry), and social empowerment of women (equal access to education, holistic approach to women's health and nutrition, inclusion of women's perspective in housing policies and provisions of safe and adequate housing, provision of safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities, women's perspectives in environment protection and development be included in policies). The policy would also deal effectively with violence against women and specifically protect rights of the girl child. All the ministries at the central and state level are required as per the policy to draw up action bound plans for its implementation and strengthen the institutional mechanism at their respective levels. The policy also calls for a review of the existing legislation to eliminate all gender discriminatory elements.

### **Women Empowerment schemes/programmes of the Ministry of Women and Child Development.**

**Swayamsidha** which is the flagship scheme of the ministry for the holistic empowerment of women through SHGs.

**Rashtriya Mahila Kosh or the National Credit Fund for Women**, an autonomous organization under the Ministry that provides micro finance services through SHGs essentially for very poor women especially from the unorganized sector example, the maternity benefits for women mine workers as stated under the different labour related laws have no link to the Ministry of Women and Child Development or Ministry of Health. Hence, it is important to review this schematic approach to addressing women's problems without proper supportive legal safeguards and monitoring mechanism. to develop an integrated approach to the Gender Budgeting Cells set up under different departments and Ministries of the government to coordinate gender budgeting exercise for them and to facilitate gender budgeting analysis

**Swadhar scheme** for women in difficult circumstances-widows, destitute and deserted women, women ex-prisoners, victims of sexual abuse and crimes ,including those trafficked and rescued from brothels, migrant or refugee women who have been rendered homeless due to natural calamities, mentally challenged women and women victims of violence. The scheme aims to provide primary need of shelter,food ,clothing,emotional support and counceling and rehabilitation support.

**Supporting to Training Employment Programme(STEP)** for mobilizing women into small viable groups and make facilities available to them through access of credit, training for skill upgradation, taking up employment-cum-income generation programmes and support services for further improving training and employment conditions for women. The target group include wage labour, unpaid daily workers, female-headed households,migrant labour and, tribal and disposed groups.

**Kishori Shakti Yojna scheme** to empower adolescent girls improve the nutritional, health and development status,promote awareness of health, hygiene, nutrition and family care,provide opportunities for learning life skills,going back back to school, helping them gain a better understanding of their social environment and taking initiatives to become productive member of the society.

#### **Construction of hostel and short stay homes for working women and girls.**

There are thus a whole range of schemes available for women at the national and state level and across different departments of the government. But sadly, very little of these benefits any of the women mine workers. There is a severe lack of awareness about the scheme not only among the people, but even among local organisations working for the benefit of women. The schemes under the Ministry of Women and Child Development are more programmatic and scattered in nature. Hence, like most other government programmes, interventions do not address the causes but merely provide cosmetic incentives for different sections for women and are heavily dependent on the lower end department staff, their motivation, corruption, apathy included, in selection of beneficiaries and in the processing of these schemes. Women mine workers do not receive direct benefits or attention inspite of the serious problems they face. Nor is there a coordinated effort through the ministry to inter-link the various laws and schemes applicable through other ministries to effectively administer or govern the concerns of the women. For example, the maternity benefits for women mine workers as stated under the different labour related laws have no link to the Ministry of Women and Child Development or Ministry of Health. Hence, it is important to review this schematic approach to addressing women's problems without proper supportive legal safeguards and monitoring mechanism.

#### **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao**

This is a social campaign aimed at eradication of female foeticide and raising awareness on welfare services intended for young Indian girls. The "Save the Girl Child" movement was launched on 22 January 2015, it is a joint initiative run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Human Resource Development.Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao - The scheme was launched with an initial funding of Rs 100 crores.

**One Stop Centre Scheme Popularly known as 'Sakhi,'** it was implemented on 1st April 2015 with the 'Nirbhaya' fund. The One Stop Centres are established at various locations in India for providing shelter, police desk, legal, medical and counselling services to victims of violence under one roof integrated with a 24-hour Helpline. The toll-free helpline number is 181. Here is a list of Sakhi centres across the country. These centres can be contacted for: Emergency Response and Rescue Services Medical assistance Assistance in lodging FIR /NCR/DIR Psycho - social support/ counselling Legal aid and counselling Shelter Video Conferencing Facility to record statement for police/ courts

**Nari Shakti Puruskars** The Nari Shakti Puruskars are national level awards recognizing the efforts made by women and institutions in rendering distinguished services for the cause of women, especially vulnerable and marginalized women. The awards are presented by the President of India every year on 8 March, International Women's Day at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi.

**Mahila E-haat** It is a direct online marketing platform launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to support women entrepreneurs, Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Non- Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to showcase products made and services rendered by them. This is a part of the 'Digital India' initiative. Women can register themselves at [www.mahilaehaat-rmk.gov.in](http://www.mahilaehaat-rmk.gov.in) and leverage technology for showcasing their work to a broader market

## **National Council for Women's Education**

The National Council on Women's Education set up in 1958 under the chairmanship of **Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh** recommended certain specific steps to expand and improve the education of women in the country.

### **Important Recommendations are as follows:**

- (a) "Education of women should be regarded as a major special problem" and should receive "the highest priority" so that funds required for the purpose be "considered to be the first charge on the sums set aside for the development of education".
- (b) A national council for women's education and state councils for the same be created. They should be special units in the Indian Ministry of Education and the state directorates of education"
- (c) In place of the matching grants for women education, the Government of India should undertake to give 100% grants to the states for the development of education of women.
- (d) To secure women teachers, particularly, in rural areas, condensed courses for adult women should be instituted. Urban women should be given special inducements like quarters a rural allowance to work in those areas.