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## Challenges and Strategies for Women Empowerment in India: Facts and Realities

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# Challenges and Strategies for Women Empowerment in India: Facts and Realities

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## Abstract:

In today's world women empowerment is an important issue of discussion because in every sector we find women which constitute half of the total population in the world are lacking behind. If about half of the nation's human resources are neglected, the overall progress of the country would obviously be hampered. Women empowerment has become one of the most central concerns and need of the hour but in reality, the situation is not good enough. In the traditional patriarchal society, women have been given a secondary status which is reflected in the economic, social and political spheres. However, women equality and empowerment has always remained a priority area and has been taken utmost care by stake holders. Gender mainstreaming propels progress towards the ultimate goal of attaining gender equality and women empowerment. In this direction policies and programmes at different levels to cover various proportions and strategies of gender development have been framed by the government of India. The paper critically examines women empowerment in India, various challenges, and strategies. The paper discusses constitutional safeguards as well as plans and programmes by the government and their implementation, indicators of women empowerment in India. Finally, this paper is an attempt to examine the status of

women in India and provides some policy suggestions for women empowerment.

**Key Words:** *Women Empowerment, Equality, Implementation, Challenges and Strategies*

## Introduction

Realizing the importance of involving women in various development activities, the government in India and other parts of the world has initiated several affirmative measures to bring them into the mainstream of development. These affirmative measures have brought about some changes in the socio-economic conditions of women. The literacy rate of females, which was 8.86% in 1951 rose to 54.16% in 2001. Women's work participation rate, which was 19.7% in 1981 rose to 25.7% in 2001 (Statistics on Women in India 2010, 2022)<sup>1</sup>. The data also brings out the areas where the progress has been slow. The sex ratio in the 0-6 year's age group dropped from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001, which indicates that society still does not welcome a girl child and the preference rests with sons. Nearly 50% women get married before they attain 18 years of age, and 57.9% pregnant women and 56.2% married women

suffer from anemia (Ahamad, Tiwari, & Bano, 2014)<sup>2</sup>. All these problems have compelled the government to recognize the issue and introduce different schemes and acts to fight the atrocities against the women, for the country's overall development.

### **Women Empowerment in the Present Scenario: An Over View**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world is enthusiastically progressing and taking up the women partake in uplifting the society and economy of the world. Women empowerment is the key to strengthen their participation in the decision-making which is the most important key to socio-economic development. India is a developing country and its economic status is also very bad because of the male dominated country. Women constitute roughly 50% of the nation's population and a majority of them remain economically dependent, without employment<sup>3</sup>. Women empowerment is very necessary to make the bright future of the family, society and country. 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 social-political development endeavours. The past three decades have witnessed a steadily increasing awareness of the need to empower women through measures to increase social, economic and political equity and broader access to fundamental human rights, improvements in nutrition, basic health and education.

In recognition of the importance of establishing gender equality around the world, the United Nations

Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)<sup>4</sup> was established as a separate fund within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1984. At that time, the General Assembly instructed it to "ensure women's involvement with mainstream activities." The Platform of Action resulting from the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women expanded this concept, calling it 'gender mainstreaming' i.e. the application of gender perspectives to all legal and social norms and standards, to all policy development, research, planning, advocacy, development, implementation and monitoring as a mandate for all member states. In this way, the gender factor is no longer to be only a supplement to development but central to the practice of development. As a result of the Beijing conference and the many years of work leading up to it more than 100 countries announced new initiatives to improve the status of women.

### **Global Gender Gap**

According to the World Health Organization, 585,000 women die every year, over 1,600 every day, from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth<sup>5</sup>. The Planned Parenthood Federation of America quotes estimates that of the annual 46 million abortions worldwide, some 20 million are performed unsafely, resulting in the deaths of 80,000 women from complications, accounting for at least 13% of global maternal mortality, and causing a wide range of long term health problems. Most of the women work in agricultural sector either as workers, in household farms or as wagedworkers. Yet it is precisely

livelihood in agriculture that has tended to become more volatile and insecure in recent years and women cultivators have therefore been negatively affected. The government's policies for alleviating poverty have failed to produce any desirable results, as women do not receive appropriate wages for their labour. There is also significant amount of unpaid or non-marketed labour within the household. The increase in gender

disparity in wages in the urban areas is also quite marked as it results from the employment of women in different and lower paying activities. They are exploited at various levels. They should be given appropriate wages and work at standard with men so their status can be raised in society. The below table discuss India's position in global gender gap from 2006 to 2020.

### India's Position in Global Gender Gap

Year	Global Index	Economic Participation and Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Health and Survival	Political Empowerment
2006	98 (0.601)	110 (0.397)	102 (0.819)	103 (0.962)	20 (0.227)
2010	112 (0.6155)	128 (0.4025)	120 (0.8369)	132 (0.9312)	23 (0.2913)
2012	105 (0.6442)	123 (0.4588)	121 (0.8525)	134 (0.9312)	17 (0.3343)
2014	114 (0.6455)	134 (0.4096)	126 (0.8503)	141 (0.9366)	15 (0.3855)
2016	87 (0.683)	136 (0.408)	113 (0.950)	142 (0.942)	9 (0.433)
2018	108 (0.665)	142 (.385)	114 (0.953)	147(0.940)	19 (0.382)
2020	112 (0.668)	149 (0.354)	112 (0.962)	150 (0.944)	18 (0.411)

(Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2006, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020* by World Economic Forum)

### Need for Women Empowerment

The concept of women empowerment wants to help women to achieve equality with men by reducing gender based gaps in society. Empowering women in every society is very much needed due to the following; Women are the chief architect of the family, the first teacher, supplier of labor power and play an important role in the creation of a civilized society. Nature

has given the biological power of reproduction especially to the women (Singh A. P., 2017)<sup>6</sup>. Women constitute half of the total population of the earth. Even then the socio-economic status of women is so poor. In India women are discriminated against and marginalized at every level of the society such as social participation, political participation, economic participation, access

to education and also reproductive health care. In terms of literacy rate also women are lacking behind than men. Along with this women in India are victimized in the cases like rape, dowry harassments, sexual harassment, kidnapping, female infanticides, sex selective abortions, domestic violence and trafficking etc. Many court verdicts go against women because of the non-availability of witnesses and difficulty of proving the incidents etc (Arya, 2019)<sup>7</sup>. Hence she should be strengthened and her status should be improved, she should be physically, mentally, economically, socially, politically and culturally strengthened so that the country can make use of the hidden potential of women in the country's overall development and progress.

### **Women Empowerment is Need of the Hour**

Women and girls are not commodities and must be treated as human being with equal rights to men. Women constitute almost half of the world's population. Globally, more women are now in schools and in work. Yet, the girls are still more likely than boys to be out of school. It is estimated that about 15 millions girls and 10 million boys of primary-school age, are out of school. As for as the property rights are concerned globally 38 percent of employed women are working in agriculture sector, forestry and fisheries, but only 13 per cents of landholders are women. Although the number of women in elected offices has risen, they are still 24 percent of all National Parliamentarians as of February 2019. The data pertaining to domestic violence shows that 35 percent of women and girls aged 15-49 years have

experienced physical violence and sexual violence by an intimate partner in the past 12 months. The prevalence of the child marriage is seen worldwide. Today, there are 650 million women and girls in the world who are married before the age of 18 years. The issue of good health and well being shows that globally nearly, 30 million women died from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth problems in 2017 (U.N,2019)<sup>8</sup>.

The issue of empowering women in India, particularly in rural areas needs to be addressed in a very significant manner. In rural areas, about 66% of the female population is unutilized because of mainly due to existing social norms and customs of the society. In agriculture and animal care women contribute 90% of the total workforce (Shettar,2015)<sup>9</sup>. The existing studies shows that the women are relatively less healthy than men though belong to same class.

As per census 2011, the workforce participation rate for females is 25.51 percent against 53.26 percent males in India. Rural sector has a better females workforce participation rate of 30.02 percent compared with 53.03 percent for males for urban sector (Women & Men, 2018)<sup>10</sup>. For Indian women being equal to their male counterparts is still a far cry, they are not only marginalised as public figures but an average Indian woman seems to be marginalised at home also. In 2012, women occupied only 8 out of 74 ministerial positions in the union council of ministers. There were only 3 women judges out of 31 judges in the Supreme Court and there were only 73 women judges out of 689 judges in various high courts

(Kadam,2012)<sup>11</sup>. As per the electoral statistics book .2017, the percentage of women nominated in Rajya Sabha has been around 11 percent in 2016. Femlae participation in election has been 5.54 per cent in the sixteenth General election in 2014 which is more or less equal to male participation of 67.0 percent (Women & Men,2018)<sup>12</sup>.

According to 2013, UNDP report on Human Development Indicators, all south Asian Countries except Afghanistan, were ranked better for women than India It predicts an Indian girl child aged 1-5 years is 75 percent more likely to die than the boy child. A woman is raped once in every 20 minutes and only10 percent of all crimes is reported. Therefore, women's empowerment and achieving gender equality is essential for our society to ensure the development and progress of the country. Women empowerment is just remaining a slogan in India.

## Women Education in India after Independence

Women education in modern India is traced back to the years after the Indian Independence. University Education Commission (1948-49), Modular Commission (1952-53), Kothari Commission (1964-66), National Policy in Education (1968), National Policy for Education (1986) have recommended for giving important women education.

In the present days, the government of India takes measures to provide education to all Indian women. Women literacy rate seemingly rose in the modern days. Women education in India became a compulsory concern and female literacy has gone higher that male literacy. At present, the Constitution of India grantees free primary school education for both boys and girls up to age 14. After independence various actions are taken to improve women education. The literacy rate percentage in India given in the below table.

### Literacy Rate (%) in India: 1901-2011

Sl. No.	Census Year	Persons	Males	Females	Male-Female gap in literacy rate
1	1901	5.35	9.83	0.60	9.23
2	1911	5.92	10.56	1.05	9.51
3	1921	7.16	12.21	1.81	10.40
4	1931	9.50	15.59	2.93	12.66
5	1941	16.10	24.90	7.30	17.60
6	1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
7	1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
8	1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.99
9	1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
10	1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
11	2001	64.83	75.26	53.67	21.59
12	2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India<sup>13</sup>

According to the report published by the National Survey of India, the Literacy Rate of India in 2022 is 77.7 percent. India's male literacy rate stood at 82.4 percent and female literacy rate stood at 65.8 percent. Though both male and female literacy have risen steadily over the years, the wide gender gap prevails even today.

### **Forms of Empowerment of Women**

Women empowerment means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. The empowerment of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important and in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. If it is to be elucidated beyond the two self-explanatory words, 'Women Empowerment' refers to complete emancipation of women from socio-economic shackles of dependency and deprivations. Women empowerment needs to take a high speed in this country to equalize the value of both genders. To bring empowerment really every woman needs to be aware about her rights from her own end. There are different types of women empowerments. These are given below

#### **Economic Empowerment**

Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial service, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information. Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

### **Political Empowerment**

Establishing mechanisms for women's equal participations and equitable represent action at all levels of the political process and public life in each community and society and enabling women to articulate their concerns and needs and ensure the full and equal participation of women in decision-making process in all spheres of life. Women's reservation Bill or the Constitution (108<sup>th</sup> Amendment)<sup>14</sup> Bill, is a pending Bill in India which propose to reserve 33% of all seats in the Lok Sabha, the Lower House of Parliament of India, and state legislative assemblies. This Bill has been passed by the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of the Parliament in March 2010. It needs to be passed by the Lok Sabha and at least 50% of all state legislative assemblies, before it is put before the president of India for his approval. In India, reform movements before and after independence has helped women to gain some power in politics also. They were among the foremost to take active part in politics.

#### **Educational Empowerment**

Education is considered one of the most important means to empower women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in development process. Education is a key factor for women empowerment prosperity, development and welfare. Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. Education is considered as a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to

the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their lives.

### **Social Empowerment**

Social empowerment it is a process to change the distribution of power in interpersonal relations among different people, cultures, activities of the society. Social empowerment refers to the enabling force that strengthens women's social relations and their position in social structures. Social empowerment addresses the social discriminations existing in the society based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion or gender.

### **Health Empowerment**

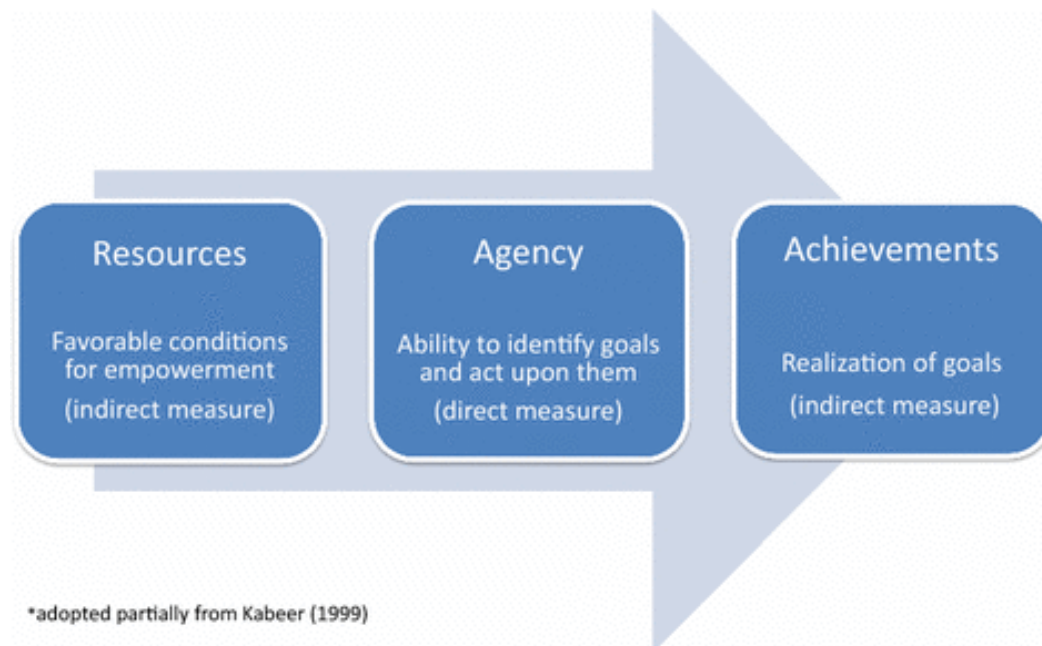
Women's health and safety is another important area. The empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their

health and safety. The health concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country, and are important factors in gauging the empowerment of women in a country.

### **Models of Women Empowerment**

Women empowerment is considered as a process that takes place over time, making women agents who formulate choices, control resources and make strategic life choices (Lee-Rife, 2010)<sup>15</sup>. She emphasised on the strategic life choices (choice of livelihood, marital decision and child bearing decision) which are considered as first-order choices and how these impact second-order choice (inculcating values in children, daily household decision making and managing well being of the family) that are less consequential.

Three Dimensional Model by Kabeer



(Source: Kabeer, 1999)



The researcher emphasised having access to resources (material, human and social in form) is an obligatory pre-condition of empowerment as resources increase the ability to exercise choice (Kabeer, 1999)<sup>16</sup>. Kabeer emphasised that merely having access to resources is not sufficient women must also have the ability to identify and utilise the resources (Malhotra, Schuler and Boender, 2002)<sup>17</sup>. As per Kabeer, empowerment is both an end and a means to end for example one status is attaining education another status is acquiring gainful employment and a further step to it could be control over decision making related to self or family is the outcome of empowerment. Thus attaining education can be an end or it can also be a means to end but the final outcome of empowerment is having the capabilities of achievement.

## **Strategies and Challenges for Women Empowerment**

### **Political Participation**

Women's political participation has been considered a major measure of women's empowerment. In recent years there have been explicit moves to increase women's political participation. The women's reservation policy bill is however a sad story as it is repeatedly being scuttling in parliament. In the Panchayati Raj system, however, women have been given representation as a sign of political empowerment. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. However, their power is restricted, as it the men who wield all the authority. It is crucial to train and give real power to these women leaders so that they can catalyze

change in their villages regarding women. All this shows that the process of gender equality and women's empowerment still has a long way to go and may even have become more difficult in the recent years. The main reason for the contradiction is that, targeted schemes tend to have only limited impact when the basic thrust of development is not reaching an average woman, making her life more fragile and vulnerable. To make a positive change basic infrastructure should be provided in every village and city. To begin with, providing safe drinking water supply and better sanitation not only directly improved the lives and health of women but also reduces their workload in terms of provisioning and ensuring such facilities. An access to affordable cooking fuel reduces the need to travel long distances in search of fuel wood. Improved transport connecting villages with each other and with towns can also directly improve living conditions as well as unpaid labour time spent in transporting household items. It can also lead to access to a wider range of goods and services plus a better access to health facilities. Expenditure on food subsidy and better provisions for public distribution services directly affects the lives of women and girl children in terms of adequate nutrition.

The World Economic Forum (2005)<sup>18</sup>, in its first gender gap study placed India at 5<sup>th</sup> position among 58 nations, which shows a significant gap in male and female achievements. In the same study, the rank of India in terms of political empowerment was 24<sup>th</sup> at both primary and grassroots level. The National Population Policy 2000 specifically

identified the low status of women in India as an important barrier to the achievement of goals towards maternal and child welfare.

The patterns of resource mobilization by government also have significant effects on women that are usually not recognized. When taxes are regressive and fall disproportionately on items of mass consumption, once again these tend to affect women more. This is not only because the consumption of such items may be curtailed but also because the provisioning of such items is frequently considered to be the responsibility of the women of the household. Also credit policies reduce the flow of credit to small scale enterprises, thus reducing the employment opportunities for women<sup>19</sup>. There is a need to have women friendly economic policies that can enhance their social and economic position and make them self-reliant.

Broadly there may be two ways for bringing about gender equality and women empowerment – (a) through inducting women in the mainstream of development and assuring their access to productive assets and (b) through legislation for ensuring they equal social and political status and assuring their participation in political decision making and thus providing them a platform for venting their grievances, integrating their issues into the mainstream of the decision making process and fighting for the cause of female community in general and of the poor and oppressed women in the society in particular<sup>20</sup>. However, in both the strategies providing education is the crucial link which holds the key.

Development strategy for empowerment will mainly be concerned with employment and asset generation coupled with skill oriented education and vocational training. A preconceived development strategy studded with emphasis on employment, education, health, nutrition, sanitation etc, critical elements that contribute to the quality of human life, more so in the rural sector, may prove to be effective in the long run to raise the status of women but in men dominated societies with social and political institutions biased in favour of gender discrimination, may not prove to be effective enough to take them out of the downward gravitational pull. Economic empowerment can be a handy tool in as much as enabling a woman to lead a graceful existence in her family and society but may not prove too potent a weapon in the larger more grim battle against social, political and even economic oppression, which warrants collective strength. In a democratic setup collective strength emanates from political participation<sup>21</sup>. One major therapy prescribed by woman empowerment advocates is empowering women through legislation for ensuring participation in political decision making.

Such an approach provides the women with a constitutional platform to stand up to men, to raise their voice on issues concerning women oppression, subjugation and related issues and thus in effect, providing them with an identity in an orthodox male dominated socio-political set up, in addition to providing a much needed forum to seek redressal of problems directly affecting them: the true essence of empowerment.

## Education

Women's education is extremely important intrinsically as it is their human right and required for the flourishing of many of their capacities. It is, however, noticed that most programmes for education of girls and women in India have reinforced gender roles specially motherhood in curriculum as well as impact evaluation. Empowerment of women is closely related to formal and informal sources of education. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century & 20<sup>th</sup> century reformers advocated women's education as a principal strategy to answer the women's question. In UP, a renewal process of correcting gender stereotyping was initiated in 1998 looking at textbooks and training besides infrastructure and community mobilization. There is marked improvement in girls' enrolment and steady decline in dropout rates. It has been apparent that parental apathy or opposition to girl child education is fast receding even in traditional male dominated states of north Indian<sup>22</sup>. Given the right infrastructure schools located in neighbourhoods, preferably with female teachers parents would allow girls to study 'as long as they would like to'. It may however be noticed as evidenced by researchers, the same families who are willing to see girls in college react violently if the girl decides to choose her partner in marriage or challenge other norms of feminine behaviour.

## Health

2005-06 National Family Health Survey (NFHS -3)<sup>23</sup> conducted through 18 research organizations between 2005 December and August 2006 provides us with several important data based

insights not provided by earlier surveys. There has been a steady increase in institutional delivery percentages from NFHS - 1 to 3 from 26 to 41 the increase in rural from 17 to 31 is more promising than urban from 58 to 69. Overall fertility rate has declined from 3.4 to 2.7. The states of Punjab and Maharashtra have reached the replacement level of fertility, i.e. around 2 children per woman. Women in Chhattisgarh and Odisha are expected to have an average of about 2.5 children at current fertility rates. The urban areas in five states studied by NFHS, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odisha and Punjab have reached below replacement level fertility. There is a difference between the fertility of women with no education and those with 10 or more years of schooling. Trends in antenatal care have remained more or less constant in NFHS - 1 and 2 between rural and urban women but have increased from 65 to 77% total. The five state studies show regional imbalances in post natal care from only 23 percent in Chhattisgarh to 54-59 percent in Maharashtra, Punjab and Gujarat. More than 40% ever married women and about one third men in Odisha and Gujarat are thin for their height, under nutrition is much lower in Punjab (12-14%) obesity is the major problem in Punjab 38% women are overweight. Overweight or obese women percentage has increased in the last 7 years from 16 to 20 per cent in Gujarat from 12 to 17 per cent in Maharashtra and from 4 to 7 percent in Odisha. The extent of overweight is greater in women than men. Overall 14.8% women are obese. Except in Punjab in the other states more than 50 percent of the children of women without any education are

underweight. The percentage of anemia ranges from 38% in Punjab to 63% in Odisha. Anaemia prevalence is alarming among pregnant women 57.9 which are more than last recorded 49.7%. 33% of women still have BMI below normal, which has declined from 36.2. IMR has gone down but gender differences persist. Life expectancy of women however stands a level higher than that of men. From 1961 to 2001 both in total population as well as in the population of 0-6 there has been a decline in sex ratio from 943 to 935 and 976 to 927 respectively. There is a fear that overall reduction of state resources in the welfare sector and especially less than 1% investment in health is going to exacerbate the existing gender bias in society.

### **Ownership of Land**

The legislation of the Central Government, the Hindu succession Amendment Act 2005 has also moved towards women's equality in property rights<sup>24</sup>. It makes Hindu women's inheritance rights in agricultural land legally equal to those of men. All daughters including married daughters' age co-parceners in joint family properly daughters now have the right to claim partition and to become 'Karta'. All daughters, married or unmarried can reside, seek partition of the parental dwelling place. This law of the centre well has the power to displace any conflicting laws of the state which are unequal to women. This is a far reaching message to assure women control over property.

### **Violence**

The questions regarding crimes against women are most entrenched, as

most of them are committed within the family NCRB records that the highest percentage of crime against women is torture (37.7%) followed by Molestation (22.4%), Rape (11.8%), Kidnapping (8.8%) and immoral traffic (3.7%). 4.6 Dowry Death and 6.5% eve teasing were recorded. the further details report that in victims of rape 532 were below 10 and 1090 below 14. 3189 within ages of 30-50. No age is safe for women. In U.P. nearly 32% crimes against women were committed within the family by husbands and relatives. This figure when compounded with 12% dowry deaths makes 45% of crimes domestically located. Incidents of honour killings and battery through not large are often threats to women's functioning and their emotional development is severely blighted<sup>25</sup>.

### **Role of the State in the Empowerment of Women**

Since women are one of the most vulnerable groups in every society, the role of state becomes very much significant in the upliftment of women in society. Governments through various mass campaigns, schemes, policies and programs try to address the issues related to women and to empower them so that they could realize their actual potential in the development and progress of any society. The Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Smt. Smriti Irani stated at the United Nations on the 25th anniversary of the fourth world conference on women that India recognises the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in all sectors of the development agenda. Hence, the government has established multiple schemes for women

to increase awareness and provide assistance to them.

The Indian government has launched a number of schemes for women over the past few years to ensure their economic security and grant them the social respect they deserve. The Indian government has been also taking various such measures for advancement and empowerment of Indian women. These are the different schemes for women launched by the Indian government to support women's empowerment.

### **Swa-Shakti**

The project was jointly founded by IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), World Bank and the government of India. It was launched in October, 1999. The objective of the program was to bring out socio-economic development and empowerment of women through promotion of women SHGs (Self Help Groups), micro credit and income generating activities. This was a centrally sponsored project (PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, 2022).

### **Swayamsiddha**

This was also a scheme for women empowerment through formation of SHGs launched in February, 2001. The aim of the program was empowerment of women through improving access of women to micro credit, economic resources etc. This is a centrally sponsored scheme. The program was implemented in 650 blocks of the country and 67971 women SHGs have been formed benefiting 9, 89,485 beneficiaries (PLANS, POLICIES AND

PROGRAMMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, 2022).

### **Swavalamban Program**

This program was launched in 1982-83 with assistance from the Norwegian Agency for Development Corporation (NORAD). Since 1998 the program has been run with Government of India funds. The objective of the program is to provide training and skill to women to facilitate them to obtain employment or self employment on a sustained basis. The target groups under the scheme are women from weaker sections of the society such as SCs and STs (PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, 2022)

### **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;

- a) To provide primary need of shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women living in difficult circumstances.
- b) To rehabilitate poor women through education, awareness, skill up gradation and personality development. Beneficiaries covered under the schemes are windows deserted by their families, women prisoners released from jail, trafficked women, women victims of terrorist, mentally challenged and women with HIV/AIDS etc (PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOREMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, 2022).

## **Compensation to Rape Victims**

The honourable Supreme Court of India, Domestic Working Women's Forum vs Union of India and other writ petition (CRL) No. 362/93 had directed the National Commission for women to evolve a scheme to wipe out the tears of victims of rape. Accordingly the NCW has drafted a scheme titled "Relief to and Rehabilitation of Rape Victims" (PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, 2022).

## **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme**

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (save girl child, educate girl child) is a Central Government sponsored scheme by the Government of India. The prime goal of this scheme is to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services meant for women. Also, it aims to celebrate the girl child and enable her education. It is one of the most effective schemes for women introduced by the Prime Minister of India. This initiative was launched in Haryana on 22nd January 2015 to guarantee the survival, safety, and education of female children. The initiative intends to tackle the issue of the diminishing sex ratio in recent years, raise social awareness, and improve the effectiveness of welfare benefits for girls.

## **Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)**

The Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) is a maternity benefit scheme introduced in 2010 by the Government of India. This scheme is

for the pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for the first two live births to contribute to a better enabling environment by providing conditional cash transfer for improved health and nutrition. The pregnant women of 19 years of age and above are entitled to a cash incentive of Rs 4000 in three installments for the first time two live births (Indira Gandhi Maternity Support Scheme (I.G.M.S.Y), 2022).

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

This scheme has been implemented since 01-04-2015 by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development. Universalization of Women Helpline is meant to provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence through referral (linking with appropriate authority such as police, One Stop Centre, hospital) and information about women related government schemes/programs across the country through a single uniform number (Universalisation of Women Helpline Scheme, 2016). Toll-free Women Helpline number is 181 (Women Helpline (WHL) Scheme, 2022).

## **One Stop Center (OSC) Scheme**

The One-Stop Center scheme is one of the schemes for women that provide essential medical assistance. Introduced in 2015, it is a government-sponsored scheme for women that receive funding from the Nirbhaya fund. Under this initiative, state governments get complete federal funding to protect women who are victims of gender-based violence in both public and private settings, such as acid assaults, rape, and sexual

harassment. This program provides medical assistance, legal help, and counselling services under one roof to address all types of violence against women. The OSCs will be linked with 181 and other existing help lines (One Stop Centre Scheme, 2017).

### **Working Women Hostel Scheme**

This scheme was initially launched by the government of India in 1972-73 with the primary purpose of providing secure housing and environments for working women as well as giving daycare amenities for their kids. The government offers grant-in-aid through this women's empowerment project to construct new hostel buildings and enlarge an existing structure in rented space.

### **Mahila E-Haat Scheme**

On March 7, 2016, the Ministry of Women and Child Development unveiled the Mahila E-Haat project. It is one of the government schemes for women in India that gives female entrepreneurs the chance to use technology and sell their products on an internet platform. Under this scheme, people can sell clothing, fashion accessories, ceramics, handicrafts, and many other things. It supports women in making economic and financial decisions that will allow them to participate in the "Make in India" and "Stand Up India" programs.

### **Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme**

The Mahila Police Volunteers scheme was introduced in 2016 by the Ministries of Women and Child Development and Home Affairs in all

states and UTs. In order to ensure police outreach on crime cases, this central government-sponsored program strives to establish a connection between police authority and local communities. As part of this strategy, an MPV (Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme) will act as a public-police liaison to combat crimes against women such as dowry harassment, child marriage, domestic abuse, and domestic violence. This plan also encourages women to join the police force by fostering a secure atmosphere.

### **SWADHAR Greh**

It is one of the Indian government schemes for women's empowerment introduced in 2018. This project's primary goals are to ensure social, economic, and health security as well as to offer housing, food, and clothes. This program gives women legal support and empowers them to take the initiative to reintegrate into society.

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

From 1986–1987, the Ministry of Women and Child Development operated the STEP scheme as a "Central Sector Scheme." In December 2014, it underwent revision. It is one of India's most significant schemes for women in India. It was designed to give women work security and training in skill development. This government-sponsored initiative provides institutions and organisations with funding so they may run training programs for women.

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

Mahila Shakti Kendra, an initiative for women's empowerment started in

India in 2017, is one of the well-known schemes for women. It intends to offer women convergent support services at one location so they can grow their talents, find work, and improve their digital literacy. This program is active on a number of levels, including the federal, state, and local levels. By constructing 920 Mahila Shakti Kendras, the government hopes to reach the 115 districts with the highest poverty levels. This program aims to give women access to resources, including quality healthcare, education, work opportunities, and counselling.

### **Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme**

The Indian government has established the National Creche scheme for children of working mothers to provide several amenities. It was introduced in 2006. This initiative offers working mothers with childcare services and promises to enhance their health and nutrition status. Furthermore, this women empowerment yojana supports children's physical, social, and holistic development as well as increases awareness about child's health by educating parents on how to improve childcare procedures or practices.

### **UJJAWAL Scheme**

This program was introduced in December 2007. It is an extensive scheme established by the Indian government to suppress trafficking and retrieve, treat, and reintegrate sexually exploited survivors. The scheme is being implemented mostly through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in order to give direct relief and benefit to victims of human trafficking.

### **Constitutional and other Arrangements for Women Empowerment in India**

Framers of the Indian constitution could successfully understand and recognize problems related to women in India and therefore made some special provisions for improvement of status of women in India. Some important Constitutional and other arrangements for women empowerment in India are as follows;

### **Constitutional Arrangements**

- a) Article 14 of the Indian Constitution says that the State shall not deny to any person equality before the law and the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India (Article 14 in The Constitution Of India 1949, 2022).
- b) Article 15 of the Indian Constitution says that the state cannot discriminate against any citizen on the grounds only of religion, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15, 2022).
- c) Article 23 of the Indian Constitution (amended in 2014) has prohibited traffic in human beings and begging and other similar forms of forced labor and any contravention of this provision shall be an offense punishable in accordance with law (Article 23 of the Constitution, 2014).
- d) Article 24 of the Indian Constitution prohibits employment of any children below the age of fourteen years in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment (Article 24 in The Constitution Of India 1949, 2022).
- e) Article 42 of the Indian Constitution allows the state to make provision for securing just and human conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42, 2022).
- f) Article 51A (e) of the Constitution of India imposes a fundamental duty to every Indian citizen to promote harmony and



the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all people of India and to avoid practices derogatory to the dignity of woman (Article 51A(e) in The Constitution Of India 1949, 2022).

### Other Arrangements

#### i) Section 376 IPC (Indian Penal Code)

Section 376 of the IPC, 1860, deals with the punishment for rape of a woman. The Section prescribes punishment for rape in the form of imprisonment of either description which lasts up to at least 7 years, but may extend to 10 years or life imprisonment (imprisonment till the person dies a natural death in the prison), and the convict is also liable to pay fine (Deb, 2022).

#### ii) Section 509 IPC (Indian Penal Code)

Section 509 of the IPC (Indian Penal Code), deals with the punishment for insulting the modesty of any woman. If anybody is intending to insult the modesty of any woman, utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object, intending that such word or sound shall be heard, or that such gesture or object shall be seen, by such woman, or intrudes upon the privacy of such woman, shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both (Section 509 in The Indian Penal Code, 2022).

#### iii) Some Important Acts of the Government for Women Empowerment

Some important laws in India enacted during the British rule for women empowerment includes the following;

- Prohibition the Practice of Sati Act, 1850
  - Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856
  - Female Infanticide Act, 1870
  - Indian Evidence Act, 1874
  - The Age of Consent Act, 1891
  - The Legal Practitioners (women) Act, 1923
  - The Indian Succession Act, 1925
  - The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929
  - The Hindu Women Right to Property Act, 1937
- Important laws in India enacted in the post-independence period for women empowerment includes the following;
- The Special Marriage Act, 1954
  - The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
  - The Hindu Adaptation and Maintenance Act, 1956.
  - The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956
  - The Hindu Succession Act, 1956
  - The Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act, 1956
  - The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
  - The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
  - The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
  - The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
  - Indecent Representation of Women (prevention) Act, 1986
  - National Commission for Women Act, 1990
  - Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
  - Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (Jain, 2020)<sup>26</sup>.

### Conclusion

Women Empowerment is not merely a slogan but a prerequisite for an optimal capacity for overall development of a family, society, nation and a sustainable world. This is fact that dev

elopment of women has always been the central focus of planning since independence. Empowerment is a major step in this direction but it has to be seen in a relational context. A clear vision is needed to remove the obstacles to the path of women's freedom both from the government and women themselves. Efforts should be directed towards all round development of each and every section of Indian women by giving them their due share. Women need to take a stand on decisions that are hurtful to women, families and communities. It is felt that problems stemming from decisions made by Government need to be challenged. This means showing low tolerance for inequality and changing the political process by bringing to light problems such as the lack of government accountability. One of the key challenges to promoting gender equality is gathering accurate information about women's conditions, responsibilities and needs. This type of information and reporting is often perceived as soft data due to its qualitative nature. A mechanism must be found to value the qualitative information in addition to the quantitative data. Statistical data must be accessible to community based organizations and reflective of women's social and economic reality. We need to develop innovative ways of working with the community to determine what strategies and best practices work for all women and the whole society. It is a fundamental issue to the ability of women to participate in the work force and other roles in the community.

Independent India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said, "To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on

the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves" (Kaur, 2021)<sup>27</sup>. Despite various programs and policies of the government, women have little or no control over household assets or means of production even when these are owned by them formally. Their control over their own incomes is also limited. Despite the passage of Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, dowry continues to remain a compulsory affair in different parts of India. Crimes against women such as dowry-related tortures and honor killing as well as rapes of women, are common. Criminals related to any crime against women often get protection by social and political godfathers. Moreover, women don't have easy access to information on the various projects of the government related to their health, education, economic empowerment and social benefit. It is true that the government of India has adopted many measures, schemes to fight for women empowerment, proper and strict implementation is essential. Unless the Acts, policies, rules, regulations etc. are strictly implemented the idea of women empowerment remains unachieved.

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