



Role of government on women empowerment in India

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Abstract

Indian women are struggling for equality and the acceptance in a society which still hails men at the pinnacle of social hierarchy. A negative sex ratio and lesser work participation and literacy rate as reported in census data are the confirmation of the gender discrimination which both actively and passively influences the demography. Government of India has taken enough initiative to promote women empowerment by introducing different schemes and policies, which not only improves the social status of the female population, but also as a solution of different social plights like maternal mortality, female infanticides, female foeticide. Apart from government schemes, different bill and acts from both pre and post-Independence period.

Keywords: sex ratio, work participation, literacy rate, gender discrimination, women empowerment, maternal mortality, female infanticide, female foeticide, government schemes

Introduction

The progressive contemporary society is profoundly backed by the government. Both central and state governments of India, vehemently aspires for a society which is forward-looking, biasfree and radical thinking. Every authority yearns to have a reformist vision. A revolutionary enterprise is expected with a tolerant perspective. Thus different programs and schemes are lunched by the government to pacify the society from the fiery discord that recoil the progress towards any unexpected social catastrophe. The government operating both in pre independence and post independent phases has also taken necessary steps to introduce new regulations that reduce the social hostilities towards women. Social issues like inequality in sex ratio and lower literacy rate are prioritised. These inequalities have compelled the government to recognise the issue related to women and introduced different schemes and acts to fight with the atrocities against the women and uplift their spirit greater opportunity for contribution in country's economy and development.

Acts in colonial age

The influx of colonial era was not smooth as the primary intention of the colonists was to expand trade. This made them initially nonchalant towards the crisis of the female demography. They rather decided not to intrude unnecessarily into the domestic affairs of the native people. However, this mindset was eventually revised with enlargement of purpose and plan of the colonial government and also humanitarian reason and pressure from the Indian social reformists were enough to provoke the westerners to introduce radical conception into the age old orthodox society. Reformists' ideologies were imposed through the laws which reconstituted the social norms favouring the female demography. Some of the important laws enacted during the British rule includes: -

- a) Prohibition the Practice of Sati Act, 1850
- b) Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856

- c) Female Infanticide Act, 1870
- d) Indian Evidence Act, 1872
- e) The Married Women Property Act, 1874
- f) The Age of Consent Act, 1891
- g) The Legal Practitioners (Women) Act, 1923
- h) The Indian Succession Act, 1925
- i) The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929
- j) The Hindu Women Right to Property Act, 1937

The contribution of the modern social reformists like Mahatma Gandhi, Dr B. R Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru emancipated women from the shackle of buttoned-down predisposition. They realised that the lack of modern education, cast system, religious dogma was collectively responsible for the nation turning to the rear and a progressive generation of educated women would be a real benediction.

Post Independence acts

Mahatma Gandhi, Dr B. R Ambedkar, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar directly opposed the doctrines ascribed in Manusmriti. B. R Ambedkar who considered the text to be the source of the evil caste system disposed the book in a bonfire on December 25, 1947. Though Gandhi opposed the burning of the book, but recommended not to read the entire text but only the parts which only transmit the message of Ahimsa. However, it was obvious that the wasted social credo was falling apart and institution of leading age decrees and charters would open a new dimension of social system. Some of the acts that ensured special provision and preserve the interest of women belonging to different casts, from immediate post independent to recent days include: -

- a) The Special Marriage Act, 1954
- b) The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- c) The Hindu Adaptation and Maintenance Act, 1956
- d) The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956
- e) The Hindu Succession Act, 1956
- f) The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956

- g) The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- h) The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
- i) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- j) The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
- k) Indecent Representation of Women (Prevention) Act, 1986
- l) National Commission for Women Act, 1990
- m) Prohibition of Child marriage Act, 2006
- n) Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

All these provisions were successful not only in uplifting the status and position of women but also improve the social and economic circumstances of the country. This was the episode of awaking of a nation from the slumber of darkness. Yet the scourge of low sex ratio and poor women literacy rate still hunted the democracy and this trend kept increasing with time. From 1951 to 2001 the male-female gap in literacy rate leapt from 18.30 to 21.70 percentages. Differences in academic enrolment in school and colleges were also noteworthy and work participation was negligible. Social horrors and barbarities like rape, molestation, kidnapping, eve-teasing, dowry deaths and abetment to suicide became loose. These calamities sooner or later curbed the female population demarking a profound contrast with male demography.

Indian judiciary against sexual and domestic violence

A vicious cycle has formed in the society that restricts a woman's independence. One of the nodes of this cycle is the social violence. Families and communities more or less constrict a girl's outdoor activities in the intention of safeguarding them from the atrocities that has devoured the country. Very recently a study the Thomson Reuters Foundation — the philanthropic arm of Reuters Media Company — released a study that ranked India as the most dangerous place because of its high incidence of sexual violence, lack of access of justice to rape cases and human trafficking. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2013, about 24923 women were sexually abused in whole year duration of 2012. The North Indian states have the higher report of sexual assaults. The average rate of reported rape cases in India is 6.3 per 100,000 of the population. States and Union Territories like Uttar Pradesh and Delhi has more cases of reported rapes compared to states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. But the fact must also be considered that many assaults go unreported. The reported cases have increased to 26% in 2013 and other atrocities on women also saw an increase of 26% in 2016.

Other than sexual harassments there are horrifying incidents of acid attacks in India. Acid attacks or acid throwing is a violent assault of throwing acid or corrosive substance onto the body of others, most commonly a female victim. The states having a strict patriarchal society and low sex ratio shows most reported case of acid attack like Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, and Haryana. There was a total 57 case with 65 victims in 2010 which jumped to the figure of 85 cases and 101 victims in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana. In fact, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Bihar together accounted for 53% of total victim in India within a span of 2010 to 2012. Between 2015 and 2017 higher number of such cases has been reported from Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. However, Uttar Pradesh tops in the chart with 29 attacks and 42 victims in 2016.

Domestic violence on women is another social drawback that hunts India since time immemorial. According to National Family Health Survey every 3rd women since the age of 15 faces gender based violence in India. However, the rate of domestic violence is lower in India compared to other countries like U.S.A. According to the 2012 report of National Crime Records Bureau, India states a domestic crime rate of 46 per 100,000, rape rate of 2 per 100,000 and dowry homicide rate of 5.9 per 100,000. The legislature and the Judiciary are working actively to abolish such acuteness from the society. Laws such as Protection of Domestic Violence Act, 2005, The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 and the section 498 and 498(A) protects women from any domestic struggle and cruelty. There are also laws related to act of sexual violence that are covered by Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC)

- Sexual Harassment is defined under Section 354A which includes physical contact, advancement, request and demand for sexual favor, showing pornography etc.
- Assault or use of criminal forces on women with intent to disrobe is mentioned under Section 354B.
- Section 354C criminalizes voyeurism which defines men watching or capturing images of women engaged in private activity.
- Section 354D of IPC criminalizes stalking of woman by a man.
- Section 370 of IPC illegalizes human trafficking.
- Section 375 of IPC considers rape and sexual activity against will of a woman as a criminal act.

A person accused of rape can have imprisonment of 10 years to life time along with fine. In many cases death sentences were also given.

The Indian constitution has always been supportive towards women. The Supreme Court of India had been amending outdated articles and replenishing with new lenient code and acts that makes a better nation with biasfree radical society.

Different government schemes supporting women empowerment

The progressive contemporary society is profoundly backed by the government. Both central and state governments of India, vehemently aspires for a society which is forward-looking, biasfree and radical thinking. Every authority yearns to have a reformist vision. A revolutionary enterprise is expected with a tolerant perspective. Thus different programs and schemes are lunched by the government to pacify the society from the fiery discord that recoil the progress towards any unexpected social catastrophe.

The government has recognized the issue related to women and introduced different schemes to fight with the atrocities against the women and uplift their spirit greater opportunity for contribution in country's economy and development.

The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme lunched on 22nd January 2015 aims to generative awareness and improve the effectivity of the welfare services meant for the girls. The initial funding for this scheme was 100 crore INR. The objective of this scheme aims to prevent the sex- selective abortion. It also aims to ensure survival and protection for the girl child and assure education for them.

Lunched in 2017 the Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme aims to promote community participation through involvement of Student Volunteers for empowerment of the rural women. The main objective of this initiative is to

enhance the quality of life of the women. The scheme involves saving of girl child and providing them with primary as well as secondary education and upgrade overall quality of life.

Women Helpline Scheme is another important initiative that aims to provide immediate emergency response to woman affected by violence with a helpline of 24 hours service. It was launched in 1st April 2015. The scheme promises to provide toll free 24 hours telecom service to women being victim of violence. It initiates in crisis and non crisis intervention through referral to appropriate agencies like police, hospitals, ambulance service, District Legal Service Authority or Protection Officer.

The Nand Ghar Yojna launched in June 2015 is a scheme introduced to enhance the learning environment through e-learning module and also enhance skill. The scheme includes initiatives such as to make Anganwadi as a community center for children and mothers. Other objectives include providing of solar power system for educational and other purposes. It also aims in providing nutrition to children of 0-6 age group and also to pregnant or lactating mother to fight malnutrition

Rajiv Gandhi Nation Creche Scheme lunched in 2012 and revamped in 2016 is a scheme that concerns working mother and their children. This scheme has a two way objectives. Firstly, it provides nursery where babies and young children are cared during the work hour with quality care and protection. Secondly through this scheme the Government encourages the working and economic participation for the women with greater sense of independence.

The One Stop Centre Scheme is a wise endeavor to provide support and assistance to the women, who are victim of violence in public and private space. The scheme is to be funded by the Nirbhaya Fund. The Nirbhaya fund is the 10 billion corpus announced by government of India in 2013 Union Budget. The fund is expected to support the initiatives by the government and NGOs working to protect dignity and ensure social safety for the women. However, the objectives of One Stop Centre Scheme include providing integrated support and assistance to the women affected by violence in both public and private space. The scheme also initiates to facilitate immediate access to range of services like medical, legal, psychological and counseling support to fight against any form of violence.

Working Women's Hostel (WWH) is a scheme that envisages providing safe and affordable hostel for women. The primary aim of this scheme is to accommodate a convenient housing and facility for women who are working in rural or urban area. It also promises for day care facility for the children of the working women. Thus through this scheme the Government of India promotes women participation in nation's economic progress.

Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) for Women is a scheme that guarantees up gradation of skills of women who are marginalized. This includes asset less rural and poor urban women specifically the unpaid daily workers, wage laborers, unpaid daily workers, women headed family and household below poverty line. It objectifies to mobilize women in small viable groups and makes facilities available through training and access to credit. It also aims to provide training for skill up gradation, enabling women to take employment and income generation programs. It also supports for further training and employment condition for women.

Pradhan Mantri Mantru Vandana Yojna was first launched in 2010 as Indira Gandhi Matriva Sahyog Yojna (IGMSY). It was then renames as Matriva Sahyog Yojna in 2014 and finally Pradhan Mantri Mantru Vandana Yojna (PMMVY) in 2017. It aims to ensure safe delivery and good nutrition for mothers having their first child. Its objectives include promoting appropriate practice and institutional service utilization during pregnancy, delivery and lactation. It also ensures of providing incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and lactating mother.

The SWADHAR Greh Scheme lunched in 2001 aims to provide temporary accommodation and rehabilitative service to homeless girls and women, who are left alone due to family discord, crime, violence and affected by mental stress, social ostracism etc. It caters to the primary need which includes food, shelter, clothing, medical treatment and care. It also promises to help with regain emotional strength for the women who are without any social and economic support. It also aims in providing legal aid and guidance for the initiative of readjustment with the family or society. In other words, the scheme helps these women to start a fresh new life.

The Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) lunched un 1993 objectifies to provide micro-credit to poor women to maintain livelihood through income generation through different economic and productive activities at concessional terms in client-friendly procedure to upgrade their socio-economic condition. It also aims in demonstrating and replicating participatory approaches in the women groups for effective utilization of credit resources leading to self reliance. It also promotes and supports entrepreneur skills among women.

The Mahila e-Haat aims to strengthen financial inclusion of Women Entrepreneurs in the economy by providing sustenance and support for their creativity. It is a noble initiative to meet the need of the women entrepreneur. They can showcase their creative potential here. This unique e-platform will eventually strengthen and the support the socioeconomic development of the women and most importantly it works as a catalyst by providing a web-based marketing platform to the women entrepreneur to sell their products and also supporting the 'Make in India' through online marketing platform.

The scheme of Mahila Police Volunteers aims to increase the number of women police force and ensuring the safety and security of citizens in general and women in particular. The objectives MPV include serving as a public-police interface to fight crime against women. The work of MPV also includes reporting of incidents such as crime and violence against women such as child marriage, taking dowry, domestic violence etc.

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) is a scheme launched by Government of India to empower women holistically. It features include ensuring economic empowerment for women. It also concerns with progressive elimination of violence against women and confirming social empowerment of women with emphasis on health and education. It also initiates to strengthen the conceptual and programmatic basis of women-centric schemes being implemented.

The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna is launched in 2016. It promises to provide LPG fuel to the women who are below poverty line. Its main objective includes protecting the health of women and empowering them. It also aims in

curbing health issues from using unclean fuel usage, especially respiratory issues and reducing other casualties that occurs due to indoor pollution.

The Maternity Benefit Program is launched to provide partial compensation for wage loss to women during pregnancy. The program promotes providing institutional service utilization during the period of pregnancy

To encourage parent of having a girl child, and order to create fund for her future education the scheme of Sukanya Samridhi Yojna was launched in January 2015. The scheme ensures financial independence of women through investment and savings scheme to fulfill her long time goal and ambition like higher studies and financial stability.

The eSamvad Portal launched in 2018 aims to provide platform and opportunity for the NGOs and civilians to interact with the Ministry on relevant subjects. It acts as a portal of interaction between the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development and the NGOs for suggestions, advices and other purposes.

NARI Web Portal also launched in 2018 aims to provide information regarding schemes and benefits provided by the government. Its objective includes access to information on different programs offered by both central and state government. The portal carries details of different schemes which are updated time to time.

The She-Box Portal aims to provide a speedier remedy to women facing sexual harassment at workplace. The disposal of complain on the She-Box directly goes to the central and state authority concerned of having jurisdiction to take action in that very matter.

The draft of National Educational Policy of 2019 also aims to address the diverse need of women through identifying the priority areas. This draft policy identifies priority areas such as education, health, food security, nutrition, employment etc.

Some of the other central government scheme includes Mahila Shakti Kendras (MKS), Nari Shakti Puraskar, Mother Child Tracking System, Priyadarshini etc.

Other than these there are many schemes initiated by State Government for women and girl child welfare, such as Girl Child Protection Scheme of Andhra Pradesh. This scheme promotes enrolment of the girl child in school, encourages to get married after 18 years, protecting rights, eliminating negative cultural attitudes etc.

Shivagami Ammaiyar Memorial Girl Child Protection Scheme of Tamil Nadu aims in promoting family planning and eradicating female infanticide.

The Ladli Laxmi Yojna initiated by Madhya Pradesh State Government targets in improving the health and educational status and health of the girls.

The Ladli Scheme of Haryana aims in improving the status of girl child in a family and society.

MAMTA Scheme for Girl Child of Goa aims to improve the Child Sex Ratio of the state.

The Sarswati Bicycle Scheme Chhattisgarh launched in 2004-2005 aims to promote girl educational enrolment and reduce dropout in the age group of 14-18 at Secondary and Higher Secondary Level.

The Kanyashree Prakalpa and the Rupashree Prakalpa of the West Bengal are two schemes launched for the welfare of the girls. Especially the Kanyashree, that even caught the international attention. This scheme promotes education and social wellbeing of the girls through Conditional Cash Transfer. The Rupashree Scheme aims at mitigating the

difficulties that poor families face in getting the expenditure of daughter's marriage.

The Bhagyalaxmi Scheme of Karnataka aims in promoting the birth of girl child in the family below poverty line and also rise the status of girls in the society.

Thus the Government had tried the level best to fight away the social issues related to women. The democratic government of a progressive nation is very particular regarding uplifting of women and empowering them for better future aligning with the developmental trend of the nation.

Conclusion

India where women are identified as mother goddess indeed shows a paradoxical nature about how a woman is socially treated. Owing to the references of beliefs and practices from ancient scriptures, a default patriarchal social system has literally suffocated the women liberty. However the government and authorities of modern times do understand the necessity of alteration of the age old practices. The ancient beliefs advocating inequality are now literally featured as social dogmas and prejudice that bars the socio-economical progress.

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