



4th National Conference on Advances in Engineering and Applied Science
Organized by : Anjuman College of Engineering and Technology (ACET) Nagpur,
Maharashtra, India, In association with
International Journal of Scientific Research in Science and Technology

Strengthening Women Empowerment through Governmental Policies in India

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment has been one of the most debated issues which called attention from the various sections of the modern world. The paper aims at analyzing whether women empowerment in India will gain momentum through governmental policies. Women empowerment simply means confident and stronger to claim ones right i.e. when it comes to addressing human rights and development. In India governmental policies has been launched to focus on education to women, gender discrimination and discrimination of caste, creed and religion. Today society opinion towards women empowerment depends upon the involvement of women in various fields. The changing attitude of male towards women shows positive growth. India being the largest democratic country in the world needs women empowerment to take its momentum to the global platform. The aim of this paper is to present that what are the various policies implemented by the government to empower women from all sections of the society.

Keywords : Women Empowerment, India, Governmental Policies, Society, Law.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of power is indispensable for conceptualization the empowerment of women. Power may be viewed as an ability to exert influence. But the concept of power and empowerment are two different terms and should be dealt diligently. Today the force of power is a big question dealing with women empowerment in a descriptive method. On the other hand policies have become perspective.

Empowerment is only the procedural concerns when it comes to addressing human rights and development. When it comes to women empowerment in India, there is a need of a strong framework which will be used in order to analyze it. The framework of gain and control over individual assets as well as societal resources, control over political sphere, understanding law and able to redress legal structures and control their income and labour.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Empowerment is a process which relates to the power of an individual to redefine her possibilities and options and to have the ability to act upon them (Eyben et al 2008:5). Kabeer (2001:19) defines empowerment as “the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.” Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) compare women’s autonomy in India and Pakistan, looking at the influence of region and religion. In their study women’s autonomy includes four dimensions: economic decision-making, mobility, freedom from threat from husband and access to and control over resources, to create a summary index of autonomy. Jejeebhoy and Sathar find that there is a large variation in the levels and determinants of women’s autonomy in South Asia. They find that region plays a greater part in shaping women’s autonomy than religion or nationality. Jejeebhoy (2002) studies the convergence and divergence in spouses’ perspectives on women’s autonomy in India and investigates the influence of these perspectives on reproductive outcomes, such as contraception, unmet need, recent fertility and spousal communication. Women’s autonomy is divided up into an index of mobility, an index of decision-making and an index of access to economic resources. She finds only a loose agreement between spouses when it comes to women’s autonomy and that husband’s are more likely to express a relatively liberal picture of their wives’ autonomy. The results show a clear regional divide in the influence of the spouses’ perspectives on reproductive health outcomes. Mohanty (1995) identified that the following factors affecting women empowerment in India are-

1. Patriarchal value system.
2. Social attitudes and practices
3. Power level of political participation of women
4. Lack of legal awareness.

5. Poor economic status.

A brief review of recent literature on women empowerment provides an interesting expose to the diverse ideological strategies followed by the scholars to analyze the women’s issues. These approaches can broadly be classified as-

III. LIBERAL APPROACH

In this approach economic opportunity and property right, participation in decision making both in family and in public sphere, participation in production process, control over productive resources, right to reproductive health, equal access to institutionalized credit, etc. the adverse condition at workplace both in the developed and developing industrial societies have their adverse effects on the women workers (Desai & Krishnaraj 1987, Schuler & Sayed 1991, Kabir, Sen & Caren; Caroline 1996, Banerji, 1991).

RADICAL FEMINIST APPROACH

This approach is based on the belief that, the main cause of women’s subordination is rooted in sexual difference. In India, the concept of reproductive technology has however invited a mixed reaction. But the use of scientific rationality that can serve to generate critical stance for self identities of women in modern times cannot be ruled out (Firestone 1970, M.Manorama and Shah 1996, Gelner 1992).

ANDROGYNOUS APPROACH-

It is posed as an alternative to gender polarity. It is meant to overcome the conventional typecasting of each gender. Though androgyny has cultural roots in Indian (Gokhale, S.1990). This approach however ignores the phenomena of deep rooted gender inequalities.

ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH

This approach has been felt that there can be no possible empowerment of women until dependency relation of the woman is reduced men and women are brought to equal and similar footing.

WELFARE APPROACH

It intends to strengthen primary role of the women in terms of those of child bearing and motherhood. This approach is status-quo and does not challenge the dominant patriarchal culture as it sees the women as housekeepers, wives, mothers alone and as such does not challenge the gender ideology inherent in it.

The process of women empowerment has not followed a logical sequence of thought and action. It needs a deliberate process of organization and mobilization of the women. The role of the state in empowering women through affirmative action is crucial to accelerate the process towards gender equality. The state has a positive role to play in institutionalizing the participation of women. The affirmative action by the state has played a crucial role in drawing into public politics and local administration in Uganda (Firestone, Sulamith 1970). (Mohanty,1995) stated if reservation for women in panchayat raj institutions are to lead their empowerment in real terms the social, economic and political conditions which facilitate and encourage their participation, need to be created. Ghuman et al (2004) also measure women's autonomy according to women and their husbands, however in five Asian countries. They find that there is a difficulty of measuring gender relations, since the level of women's autonomy depends on if the husbands or wives answer the questions. The disagreement in perspectives between men and women differ between countries, which is not easy to explain.

IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present study of women empowerment is descriptive. The objectives are:

1. To know the concept of women empowerment.
2. To analyze the programmes for empowerment of women.
3. To identify factors leading to empowerment of women.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

Data was gathered from literature and documents of the organization as well as through personal discussions. The library study and literature review was extremely helpful to understand and concretize the concept of women empowerment and the major indicators to reflect the change in the status of women.

GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

Within the broad goals laid down by the five year plans, the government consciously fostered an enabling policy environment in which women's concerns are properly reflected, articulated and seriously addressed.

National Perspective Plan for Women (1988) - It was drawn up to facilitate main streaming of women's issues in policies and programme. It aimed at the welfare and development of women, guided by principles and directives to existing development parameters.

Shramshakti-The report of the national commission of self employed women and women in the informal sector (1988) was for the marginalized poor women in both rural and urban areas, to the growth of formal economy.

Report of the National Expert Committee on Women Prisoners (1986)- It studied the condition of women prisoners in the criminal correctional welfare justice system and made a series of recommendation

suggesting legislation, custodial, correctional and prison reforms relating to women prisoners.

The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000) - India is a signatory to the world declaration on the survival, protection and development of children and has drawn up the plan of action implementing it in the 1990s plan of action exclusive for the girl child was prepared in 1992 to take care of her gender specific needs.

Reservation for Women at grass root level in Democratic Institutions (1993) - In 1993 marks historic events in the advancement of Indian women as they ensure 1/3 of total seats for women in all elected bodies in rural and urban areas.

Mahila Samridhi Yojna (MSY) 1993- The major initiative to empower women by raising their economic status. It aims to promote amongst rural women the habit to save and improve their financial assets and control over their household resources.

National Credit Fund for Women- the ultimate objective of the fund is to help and develop a national network of credit services for women in the informal sector to boost self employment, micro enterprises and small businesses. It benefitted 60,000 women.

Socio Economic Programme (SEP) - It was implemented by central social welfare board (CSWB) the programme of training and employment caters to needy women such as widows, deserted wives, economically backward and handicap women's. 70,000 were assisted through the programme.

Condensed Courses of Education and Vocational Training for Adult Women (CCE&VT) - This scheme also started in 1958 to create opportunities for women in employment through continuing education and vocational training for those who are school dropouts.

V. RECENT INITIATIVES BY INDIAN GOVERNMENT

Recently the Indian Government has also recognized women issues and their contribution to the country's economy. Here are some of the women empowerment initiatives available to women in India.

Seven Indian Government schemes for women empowerment-

1. Mahila E- Haat

It is a direct online marketing where women can register themselves at www.mahilaehaat-rmmk.gov.in and leverage technology for showcasing their work to a broader market.

2. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao

It is a special campaign to eradicate female foeticide and raising awareness of welfare services intended for young Indian girls.

3. One Stop Centre Scheme

Popularly known as Sakhi, it is established at various locations in India for providing shelter, police desk, legal, medical and counseling services to victims of violence under one roof integrated with 24 hours helpline.

4. Working Women Hostels

The objective of this scheme is to promote the availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women, day care facility for their children, where employment opportunities for women exist.

5. Swadhar Greh

The scheme was launched for rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances. The scheme provides food, clothing, shelter and care to the marginalized women/girls who are in need. The beneficiaries include widows deserted by their families, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural disasters, victims of terrorist violence, etc.

6. S T E P

The support to training and employment programme for women scheme aims to provide skills that give

employability to women and provide competencies and skills to become self employed. According to the eight five year plan 50,000 women were benefitted.

7. Nari Shakti Puruskars

Nari Shakti Puruskars are national level awards recognizing the efforts made by women and institutions in rendering distinguish services for the cause of women, especially vulnerable and marginalized women.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on several analysis it is found that in India poor level of political participation, lack of legal awareness, poor economic status, patriarchal system, culture and practice which affects women empowerment. In rural areas of India that dowry system still exists in form of bride price. The lowest caste confines women from outdoor activities/work. It is also revealed that after so many efforts by the government women lack access to land and assets which is further curtailed by the male relative with the use of brutal physical force. It might be observed that India has enacted many constitutional and legislative provisions for empowerment of women. Many development schemes especially for women have also been launched for improving their fortune. Such measures have started giving positive outcomes relating to women's problems. But the position of women in our country still leaves much to be desired. Top priority should be given in our developmental plans for improving female literacy and creating skills and capability among women for enabling them to stand on their own feet. Unless the process of development is properly engendered, it shall remain endangered. Therefore, our efforts should be directed towards the all- around development of each and every section of Indian women, not confining the benefit to a particular section of women in society, by giving them their due share. It is a must to protect their chastity, modesty and dignity and ensure their

dignified position in society. It must be accounted that the primary foundation of women empowerment begins at home. Without removing social stigma, enduring progress and development could not be achieved. For this, the governmental and non-governmental organizations including media and masses should come forward and play an active role in creating awareness in society.

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