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## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A GLANCE AT GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND POLICIES

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She, the river,  
Said to him, the sea:  
All my life  
I've been dissolving myself  
And flowing towards you  
For your sake  
In the end it was I  
Who turned into the sea  
A women's gift  
Is as large as the sky  
But you went on  
Worshipping yourself  
You never thought  
Of becoming a river  
And merging with me  
(Hira Bansode "Woman")

Since time immemorial, women have been battling life challenges and prejudices which are deeply rooted in our socially constructed myths. The road to salvation has often been rocky for them but they have been trudging on ceaselessly, and carving a path for themselves in the mountain of life. Hence women issue is a socially vibrant question because in spite of various and ventable efforts on part of Government, society, media, and agencies dedicated to women; her plight and predicament, her trials and tribulations, her anxieties and agonies have not changed much. They still are in the bottom rung of society with servile and secondary position. Though in present times women's lot has undergone tremendous change yet we have to tread miles before we can herald the celebration time.

Indian constitution has embedded the "principal of Gender Equality" in its fundamental rights, duties, and directive principles, but this is not the sufficient meaning of freedom for any Indian woman. In most of the countries, women are facing discrimination and they are excluded from decision-making at all levels. The reason behind this is the prevalence of a social system in which men are considered to be superior to women. No country, society and family can prosper and grow if women and girls are not respected, free and happy. The Government and our community have well recognised the role of women in development of nation and well-being of society. Women population being 50% of the total population of the world, have every right to be treated at par with men in every sphere of life. Empowerment of women is the most effective tool for development. Women empowerment is not one step action plan; it is a continuous process which tends to increase the ability of women to change paternal thinking and structure. It is a tool through which she can have autonomy, control, and access over the natural, human, intellectual and financial resources. To make women empowerment a success, various stakeholders like Government, society, and families have to coordinate their efforts. Global sustainable development cannot be achieved without the full participation of women.

The western societies granted decision-making roles to women but at a very later stage. In India also women have been granted the various rights like property right and equality in civil rights after a long struggle but majority of women in most parts of India still live with

disadvantages and burdens of discrimination. They lag behind men in all indicators of social and human development. For an Indian woman freedom does not just mean that which is guaranteed under the constitution; it means more jobs, opportunities for entrepreneurship, increased safety, protection of girl child and ease in day to day living. The present paper attempts to study the various schemes and policies initiated by Government of India to improve the lives of women and help them to spread their wings for tangible and positive outcomes.

The Government and public sector has to play a significant role for women welfare. The strategy to empower women is an on-going effort. In the new "National Policy for Women" seven priority areas have been outlined. It includes health, education, economy, employment, governance, and decision-making, violence against women etc. With various initiatives like "me too" and "time's up," violence and discrimination against women gained attention. The Government of India has launched several schemes and programmes to improve the status of women for social, economic and political progress of the country. Some of the welfare schemes initiated in health, employment and safety areas are mentioned below:

### **Health**

Providing quality and affordable healthcare to Indian women particularly the poor and under privileged is the prime task for the Indian Government. Malnutrition is badly affecting the majority of women in India. Every third woman in India is undernourished and every second woman is anaemic. The Government announced world's largest Government funded healthcare scheme in 2018 union budget. Some of the elementary schemes in health sector for women are as follows:

#### **Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)**

The scheme is a conditional transfer scheme, implemented by Ministry of Women and child development in 2017. The scheme basically provides conditions for safe delivery, child care and good nutrition and also provides partial compensation for loss of wages to women during pregnancy period. The pregnant women of 19 years and above are eligible to avail

the scheme. The scheme offers a cash incentive of Rs. 6000 to mothers for the first two live birth which will be paid in two instalments of Rs. 3000 each. The first transfer will be done after the mother register pregnancy at Anganwadi centre within four months of conception and second transfer requires the mother to register the birth. As per the latest data released by centre for digital financial inclusion, the Government has transferred over 1600 crores to eligible mothers. 48.5 lakh women have been benefitted by the scheme.

#### Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)

The programme was launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. The program is aimed to provide assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care to all pregnant women on the ninth of every month free of cost. The rationale behind the scheme is to reduce the maternal and infant mortality. In India MMR has declined to 167/lakh live births as compared to 556/lakh in 1990 but still 44000 women die due to pregnancy related causes and 6.6 lakh infants die within first 28 days of life. It provides a minimum package of antenatal care services to women in their second/third trimesters of pregnancy at designated government health centres in both urban and rural areas. The private sector specialists would be encouraged to provide voluntary services at public health facilities centres. One of the important components of the Abhiyaan will be identification and follow up of the high risk pregnancies. A national portal and a mobile application have been developed to engage people from private and voluntary sector. More than 14500 centres providing PMSMA services have been facilitated. 1.35 crore antenatal check-ups have been conducted till 2019. Around 6.5 lakh pregnancies were identified as high risk pregnancy.

#### Employment and Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurs are a powerful component of Indian startup ecosystem. Today women are seen stepping out of the four walls of their homes and joining the pool of entrepreneurship on India. The major factor is the various schemes introduced by Government and availability of specialized loans for business. Below is the list of some of

Government schemes exclusively for women which aim to promote women entrepreneurship:

#### Mahila E-haat

Mahila E-haat is an initiative taken by Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt. of India under Rashtriya Mahila Kosh. The purpose of the scheme is to fulfil the needs and aspirations of women entrepreneurs. It is an online marketing platform for women where participants can display their products. It provides an opportunity to women entrepreneurs to use technology for showcasing products as well as services provided by them. The scheme requires minimum procedural formalities. The products under 18 categories like clothing, fashion accessories, jewellery and grocery and staples etc. with photographs, description, cost and address of the producer are displayed on the E-haat portal. This online marketing platform is facilitating direct contact between the vendors and buyers. Women entrepreneurs/SHGs NGOs from 31 states/UTs are showcasing over 7000 products and services and impacting over 32000 women entrepreneurs and 7.34 lakh beneficiaries.

#### Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme

The scheme was implemented in 2017-18. The purpose of the scheme was to empower rural women through community participation and to create an environment for realising their full potential. It is one stop convergence support scheme to empower women by skill development, digital literacy, health and nutrition and employment. It provides an avenue to rural women to empower themselves through various training and capacity building programmes. The kendra will work through community engagement through students volunteers in the 115 most backward states with 920 Mahila Shakti Kendra. The scheme is envisaged to work at various levels. At national level these Kendra will provide domain-based knowledge support and at state level it will cater to state resource centres for women that will provide technical support on issues related to women at district and block level centres.

STEP (Support to Training and Employment Programme) for women

The purpose of the programme is to make a significant impact on employability of women by upgrading skills. The target group includes wage labourer, unpaid daily workers, women headed households and families below poverty line. The scheme aims to enhance skills and competencies of women to increase their employability and to enable them to become entrepreneurs. Grants are provided to institutions and organisations to impart training programmes. The maximum financial assistance of 90% of the project cost will be granted by the Government of India. The remaining 10% will have to be provided by the implementing agency. A particular project can be for a duration of up to five years depending upon the nature, kind of activities and the number of beneficiaries to be undertaken. Sectors include Handlooms, Tailoring, Stitching, Embroidery, Zari, Handicrafts, Computer and IT enable services, Soft skills, Skills for workplace such as spoken English, Gems and jewellery, Travel and Tourism etc.

Women constitute around 14% of the total entrepreneurship in India. Although we have to go a long way still the Government's efforts and women's strength are helping in improving the statistics. A study by Mckinsey show that with equal participation of women in economy, India's GDP can rise by 16-60% by 2025. Mentorship is the biggest challenge faced by Indian Women entrepreneurs. Women need to improve the support system and strengthen themselves. Schemes that promote female employment are not enough, childcare services can make a big difference in women's workforce participation like many other countries.

### **Safety and security**

The Government of India is determined to end violence of all kinds against women and girls. Certain legislations have been enacted to support women victims and ensuring that police and other agencies take appropriate action to protect the victims of violence. Some of the legislations to provide a safe environment to women to work and live are mentioned below:

One Stop Centres

Many women who face violent crimes do not know where to go for support. For them OSC have been established all across the country. The scheme was initiated in March 2015 for facilitating access to integrated range of services including Police, Medical, Legal and psychological support and shelter to women. The scheme is funded through Nirbhaya Fund. Usha Mehra commission had recommended for the establishment of a “one stop centre” to help victims of sexual assault and ensure speedy punishment to culprits. 462 OSCs have been set up in the country in the last three years which have offered support to over two lakh women. In India, gender based violence has many manifestations. One stop centres provide support against every form of violence such as domestic and sexual violence. It also includes support against various harmful practices like dowry, honour killing, acid attacks, child sexual abuse etc.

#### Women Helpline

One stop centres are integrated and connected with 181 and other helplines. The scheme of universalization of women helpline is being implemented since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 and is intended to provide 24 hours emergency and non-emergency response to women affected by violence. In 32 states/UTs women helpline have become operational and they have managed more than 20.23 lakh calls of women.

#### Working women's hostel

The Government of India has launched “Working Women Hostel Scheme” to promote the availability of reliable and conveniently located accommodation for the working women. The main objective of the scheme is to promote safety for the working women along with day care facility for their children in urban, semi-urban and rural areas. Government assist projects for the establishment of new hostel buildings, extension of existing hostel buildings and hostel buildings in rented premises. The working women under this scheme will be single, divorced, widowed, married, separated but whose relations does not reside in the same area. The gross income of the women applicant should not exceed 50,000 per month in metropolitan cities and 35000 per month in any other place. Under the scheme more than 900 hostels have been sanctioned and over 66000 women have benefitted from it.

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The sexual harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

The act aims to provide a safe and secured environment for women to work. It covers all women and protects them against sexual harassment at all organized and unorganized workplace. The impact of sexual harassment at the workplace is an injury to the equal right of women. Not only it impacts her but also has a direct bearing on the workplace productivity. The Act lays down certain duties of the employer and District Officer such as creating awareness on sexual harassment at workplace, sensitize the employees, assist the complaints committee in conducting the inquiry and act upon recommendations of the committee. Ministry of Women and child development has developed an online complaint management system. Sexual harassment electronic box (She-Box) for registering complaints related to sexual harassment at workplace. MWCD has created a pool of 223 resource institutions to provide training on the issue of sexual harassment. In year 2018 these institutions organised more than 750 capacity building exercises.

### **Conclusion**

Hence a comprehensive study of different and distinct policies chalked out and implemented for the welfare and upliftment of women make us conclude that women need to have freedom to decide their own destiny, freedom from sex determined role, freedom from society's oppressive restrictions, freedom to express their thoughts fully and convert them freely into action. The need is for destruction and reconstruction of gender roles. Journey of women for autonomy is from ignorance to awareness and awakening is a continuous journey, it is a perennial process so it continues. It also needs accountability on the part of society and this can be managed if we take an objective look and move towards building a constructive, inclusive and just society where both sexes enjoy equal right to think and express independently. We have achieved a commendable progress and owe a great debt to society and Government for the sapling they put into soil has now become an imposing plant in whose shadow women now breathe freely, think freely and speak freely but women have to put in more efforts and society has to be liberal and open-headed before

we can celebrate women's individuality and sexuality. It must be comprehended that for a woman as for a man, the need for self-fulfilment, autonomy and self-actualization is as important as any other need with as serious consequences when it is denied.

The 2015 development agenda with gender perspective is possible only through combined efforts and contribution of all relevant stakeholders including the civil society and the private sector. The world today needs more feminine leadership and it is needed not just in the form of more women leaders, but also in the form of men honouring the feminine within them.

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