

REDEFINING POWER: NAVIGATING POLICY INITIATIVES TO EMPOWER WOMEN IN INDIA

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Abstract

Gender inequality remains a pervasive challenge globally, with women often facing systemic barriers that impede their full participation and advancement in various spheres of life. In India, despite significant strides in economic development and social progress, gender disparities persist, reflecting deep-rooted cultural norms and structural inequalities. Recognizing the imperative to address these disparities, policymakers have implemented a range of initiatives aimed at empowering women and promoting gender equality. "Redefining Power: Navigating Policy Initiatives to Empower Women in India" explores the complex landscape of women's empowerment within the Indian context, focusing on the role of policy interventions in reshaping power dynamics and fostering inclusivity. This research paper seeks to critically examine the efficacy of existing policy frameworks, identify key challenges and opportunities, and propose strategies for enhancing women's empowerment efforts in India. By interrogating the intersections of gender, policy, and power, this research paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding women's empowerment in India. Through a nuanced exploration of policy initiatives and their implications for gender equality, it seeks to inform evidence-based policy making and advocacy efforts aimed at creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Keywords- Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality, Policy Initiatives, Social Justice.

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment initiatives in India represent a concerted effort to address gender disparities and foster the full participation and inclusion of women in all spheres of life. With a rich tapestry of historical struggles and contemporary challenges, these initiatives aim to dismantle barriers and create an environment where women can realize their rights, fulfill their potential, and contribute meaningfully to society. India's commitment to women's empowerment is reflected in its legislative framework, policy interventions, and grassroots initiatives. Since independence, the country has made significant strides in promoting gender equality through various measures. The Constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights and prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender. Additionally, landmark legislation such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act and the Maternity Benefit Act provide legal protections and support for women's rights in areas such as violence prevention and maternity benefits.

Furthermore, the government has launched numerous flagship programs and schemes specifically targeted at women's empowerment. These initiatives span a wide range of areas, including education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and political participation. For example, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) campaign aims to address gender-biased sex selection and promote girls' education. Similarly, the Mahila Shakti Kendra initiative focuses on women's skill development, entrepreneurship, and leadership training. At the grassroots level, civil society organizations and community-based initiatives play a crucial role in empowering women and advancing gender equality. These efforts often involve awareness-raising campaigns, capacity-building programs, and advocacy initiatives to challenge patriarchal norms and promote women's rights.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women empowerment initiatives in India are significant for fostering inclusive development, promoting gender equality, and driving socio-economic progress. By providing women with access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, these initiatives empower them to fulfill their potential and contribute meaningfully to society. Empowered women are more likely to make informed decisions about their health, education, and finances, leading to improved well-being for themselves and their families. Moreover, women's participation in the workforce enhances productivity and drives economic growth. Political empowerment of women ensures that their voices are heard in decision-making processes, leading to more inclusive policies and legislation that address women's needs and concerns. Furthermore, women empowerment initiatives

challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, fostering a cultural shift towards more egalitarian values. Overall, these initiatives are essential for building a more just, equitable, and prosperous society in India, where every individual, regardless of gender, has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to nation-building.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality. (Shobha Rani2021,)

The census 2011, counts women population @ 48.5% of the total population in India, In the changing dynamics of the society women empowerment is much relevant and very important. Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji has also spoken for women empowerment on 82nd edition of Mann Ki Baat. Education plays an important role in building self-confidence among women it also enables to change she/her status in the society. Education enables and builds confidence to take decisions in a better way. Skilling and Micro Finance can get women financially stable and therefore she is no longer dependent upon on others in the society. Giving education to women means giving education to the whole family.(Niti Ayog.2022)

Women's participation in political decision-making has been shown to be a critical factor in promoting gender equality and advancing women's rights. According to a study by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1997), women's political participation can lead to greater representation of women's interests in the policy-making process and can also increase the visibility and legitimacy of women's issues.

It is significant to note that women are less aware about their social rights relating to marriage, family, reproductivity, health and education. Social backwardness of women places them in a disadvantageous position by delimiting their chances and depriving them of freedom in different fields. The factors responsible for their social backwardness are traditional caste system, religious rigidity, and clutches of joint family and dominant nature of patriarchal values. Eradication of women's social backwardness and plight is not a difficult task. If men try to change their social, cultural and behavior pattern, it can be easily made possible. Till such change takes place, women continue to suffer. In this context an effort is made in the present study to assess and analyze the respondents' level of awareness of accessing the social rights and its impact on their empowerment. (Shakuntal Shettar,2008)

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the existing women empowerment initiatives in India
- To identify the strength and weakness of the existing policy initiatives

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study titled 'Redefining Power: Navigating Policy Initiatives to Empower Women in India' is purely descriptive approach based on secondary data. Secondary data we collected from reliable government sources, research papers from prominent researchers, websites, journals, etc.

DATA ANALYSIS

Women empowerment initiatives in India

India has implemented several policy initiatives aimed at empowering women across various domains. Here are some key policy initiatives focused on women's empowerment in India:

National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001):

This policy provides a comprehensive framework for promoting gender equality and empowering women across multiple sectors. It outlines strategies for enhancing women's education, health, economic empowerment, political participation, and protection from violence and discrimination.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter):

Launched in 2015, this initiative aims to address gender-biased sex selection and promote the education and welfare of girls. It focuses on improving the sex ratio at birth, ensuring the survival and education of girls, and preventing gender-based discrimination.

Mahila Shakti Kendra (Women's Empowerment Center):

This initiative, launched in 2017, aims to empower rural women through skill development, entrepreneurship training, awareness programs, and support services. It seeks to enhance women's economic participation and leadership roles in local communities.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):

Introduced in 2017, PMMVY provides financial assistance to pregnant and lactating women to support their nutritional needs and healthcare during pregnancy and childbirth. It aims to improve maternal and child health outcomes and reduce maternal mortality rates.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013:

This legislation mandates the prevention and redressal of sexual harassment at workplaces. It requires employers to establish internal complaints committees and provides mechanisms for victims to seek redressal and justice.

National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM):

NRLM includes a specific focus on women's empowerment through self-help groups (SHGs) and livelihood support. It aims to mobilize women into SHGs, provide them with access to credit, training, and livelihood opportunities, and strengthen their social and economic empowerment.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana: Launched in 2016, this scheme aims to provide free LPG connections to women from below-poverty-line households, thereby promoting clean cooking fuel, reducing indoor air pollution, and enhancing women's health and safety.

One-Stop Centers (OSCs) for Women:

These centers, established under the Nirbhaya Fund, provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, including medical, legal, psychological, and counseling services. They aim to ensure timely and comprehensive support to survivors of gender-based violence.

Strengths of Policy Initiatives:

India has a robust legal framework for women's rights, including laws addressing gender-based violence, discrimination, and harassment. These laws provide a foundation for promoting and protecting women's rights. Various government schemes and programs specifically target women's empowerment, addressing areas such as education, healthcare, economic participation, and political representation. These targeted interventions aim to address the unique challenges faced by women in different spheres of life. There is growing awareness and advocacy around women's issues in India, driven by civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and media campaigns. This increased awareness has helped mobilize support for women's empowerment and encouraged public discourse on gender equality. Reservation of seats for women in local governance bodies has increased women's participation in decision-making processes at the grassroots level. This has empowered women to take leadership roles and advocate for their communities' needs. Initiatives promoting financial inclusion, such as microfinance programs and self-help groups, have empowered women economically by providing access to credit, training, and entrepreneurship opportunities. These initiatives have contributed to women's financial independence and autonomy.

Weaknesses of Policy Initiatives

Despite the existence of policies and programs, implementation remains a significant challenge due to issues such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and lack of accountability. This often results in limited access to services and resources for women, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Many women empowerment programs suffer from inadequate funding, limiting their reach and impact. Budgetary constraints often lead to under investment in critical areas such as education, healthcare, and social welfare,

hindering progress towards gender equality. Deep-rooted patriarchal norms and cultural attitudes continue to pose barriers to women's empowerment in India. Practices such as child marriage, dowry, and gender-based violence persist despite legal prohibitions, undermining efforts to promote gender equality. Limited availability of reliable data and inadequate monitoring mechanisms make it challenging to assess the effectiveness of women empowerment policies and programs. Without accurate data and robust monitoring systems, policymakers struggle to identify gaps and prioritize interventions. Women from marginalized groups, such as Dalits, tribal communities, and religious minorities, face compounded discrimination and exclusion. Many empowerment programs fail to adequately address the intersecting inequalities faced by these women, perpetuating systemic marginalization.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The journey towards empowering women in India necessitates a comprehensive reevaluation of policy initiatives and societal norms. While strides have been made, systemic challenges persist, hindering the realization of women's rights and potential. It is imperative to adopt a holistic approach, addressing not only economic disparities but also social, political, and cultural barriers. Collaboration among stakeholders is paramount, leveraging collective resources and expertise to drive meaningful change. Moreover, policies must be dynamic, responsive to evolving contexts and inclusive of diverse perspectives, particularly those of marginalized women. Research and evidence-based strategies are essential for informed decision-making and effective implementation. Ultimately, women's empowerment is not merely a goal but an ongoing process, requiring sustained commitment, innovation, and resilience. By redefining power dynamics and navigating policy initiatives with purpose and determination, we can create a future where every woman in India can thrive, contributing her talents and perspectives to building a more equitable and just society.

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