

RECENT WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME IN INDIA

Abstract

The discourse surrounding women's empowerment initiated several decades ago in India. This topic is a commonly employed phrase among policymakers, politicians, social activists, and scholars. Despite the continued discussions and efforts, the condition of women still reflects a distressing state. India, classified as a developing country, aspires to transform into a well-developed nation. Despite launching initiatives like Start-up India and Make in India to advance the nation, numerous obstacles continue to hinder the progress of women in India. Despite these challenges, women have achieved significant exposure and are now active in various sectors such as defense, agriculture, engineering, and medicine. However, to ensure the comprehensive development of all women across the nation, the concept of Women Empowerment becomes pivotal. Women Empowerment revolves around providing every woman in the country with the means to achieve independence across all societal domains. This entails raising awareness about their rights, enhancing their overall capabilities, and ensuring their physical security. The primary objective of this paper is to elucidate the Women Empowerment schemes in India.

Keywords: empowerment, women, start-up, schemes.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is regarded as creating a social setting where individuals can independently or jointly make decisions, fostering personal growth through the acquisition of knowledge, authority, and experience. This process enables active individual and collective choices, driving societal transformation. (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996).

In another study by Alsop & Heinsohn (2005), Empowerment is the state in which individuals can convert their choices into desired actions and outcomes, signifying the ability to make effective decisions. It's also recognized as multi-dimensional, characterized by an expansion in the ability to make choices and decisions across different life aspects—such as social, economic, and political realms—in order to shape one's own life, Chattopadhyaya (2005). It means one has control over one's resources and decisions. It is the process of not only gaining control over one's own life but also supporting and facilitating others' control over their lives (Aspy & Sandhu, 1999).

Women are the architects of this world. To nurture this gift and bring happiness to the world, their protection is of paramount importance. Women face numerous challenges such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, dowry-related issues, and even heinous crimes like rape. Despite these adversities, many women have risen above and achieved remarkable success.

Several trailblazers have paved the way for Women Empowerment, demonstrating exceptional achievements. Notable figures include Sushmita Sen, the first Indian to win the Miss Universe title, and Sarojini Naidu, India's first female governor. Vijayalakshmi Pandit holds the distinction of being the inaugural Indian woman president of the United Nations General Assembly, while Mother Teresa stands as the first Indian Nobel Prize laureate. These women, along with a host of others, have shattered barriers in fields like literature, aviation, sports, and governance, proving that diligence, self-assurance, and persistence are key factors in their triumphs.

The essence of Women Empowerment encompasses various dimensions: ensuring women's autonomy in voting, property rights, employment opportunities, decision-making process, and control over familial resources. This perspective aligns with the sentiment articulated by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, emphasizing that the education of a woman fosters the education of an entire family. Before considering motherhood, women should ascertain their capability to independently nurture and raise their children. Early marriage often stems from financial constraints within families, which subsequently affects the nutrition and well-being of children.

By empowering women, we can tackle societal issues more effectively. Empowered women are more likely to make informed life choices, such as marrying at an appropriate age, which has the potential to alleviate challenges like malnutrition. This, in turn, echoes the sentiment of PT. Jawaharlal Nehru, underscoring that the education and empowerment of women positively influence families and communities at large.

II. RECENT WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES IN INDIA

1. Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP): The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) serves as an integrated gateway that unites women entrepreneurs hailing from

diverse regions of India, spanning various economic backgrounds, to fulfill their entrepreneurial dreams. The inception of this platform was initially proposed by Shri Amitabh Kant, CEO of NITI Aayog. This concept was announced during the culmination of the 8th Global Entrepreneurship Summit (GES) held in Hyderabad in 2017. The aim was to establish the Women Entrepreneurship Platform within NITI Aayog.

This initiative is designed with the goal of establishing a conducive environment for women across India to actualize their entrepreneurial ambitions, amplify innovative projects, and devise sustainable, enduring strategies for their businesses.

The platform's overarching objective is to substantially augment the count of women entrepreneurs, thereby catalyzing the growth of a vibrant New India. These aspirations are encapsulated within the three core pillars that form the foundation of WEP:

- **Ichha Shakti (Power of Aspiration):** By igniting the aspirations of budding entrepreneurs, WEP encourages them to embark on their entrepreneurial journey.
- **Gyaan Shakti (Power of Knowledge):** Through the provision of knowledge and ecosystem support, WEP empowers women entrepreneurs with the tools needed to foster entrepreneurship.
- **Karma Shakti (Power of Action):** WEP extends practical assistance to entrepreneurs in establishing and expanding their enterprises.

Addressing challenges faced by both emerging and established women entrepreneurs, WEP harmonizes information encompassing governmental and private sector schemes and initiatives.

2. **SWADHAR Greh:** Enacted in 2018, the SWADHAR Greh initiative is a cornerstone of women's empowerment by guaranteeing social, economic, and health security, which targets the women victims of difficult circumstances. The scheme encompasses shelter, sustenance, and attire. Additionally, it equips women with legal aid and the empowerment needed to reintegrate into society confidently.

- **The scheme aims to achieve the following objectives:**
 - Provide essential provisions such as shelter, sustenance, clothing, medical care, and nurturing for women facing challenging circumstances and lacking support systems.
 - Aid these women in regaining their emotional strength, which may have been diminished due to their unfortunate experiences.
 - Offer legal assistance and guidance to empower them to take necessary actions for reintegrating into their families and society.
 - Promote their economic and emotional rehabilitation, enabling them to rebuild their lives with dignity.
 - Establish a supportive network attuned to the diverse requirements of women in distress.
 - Facilitate a fresh start for these women, fostering a sense of self-worth and determination as they embark on a new phase of life.

- 3. Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK):** Launched in 2017, the Mahila Shakti Kendra initiative is a notable women's empowerment scheme in India. Its goal is to provide comprehensive support services for women at a single location, facilitating skill development, employment opportunities, and digital literacy. This initiative operates at various administrative levels, from federal to local, with plans to establish 920 Mahila Shakti Kendras. These centers aim to reach the most impoverished districts, offering resources like healthcare, education, job prospects, and counseling to empower women.

Components of Mahila shakti kendras

- At the national level, experts in specific domains support the implementation of women-centric government schemes. This strengthens the foundation of such initiatives by integrating them with various ministries and state administrations.
 - At the state level, State Resource Centres for Women (SRCWs) under state governments' Department of Women and Child Development or Social Welfare provide technical assistance for effective coordination and implementation of women-focused programs, laws, and schemes within states and union territories.
 - At the district level, District Level Centres for Women (DLCWs) gather information about government programs and services aimed at women's empowerment. They act as intermediaries between local communities and state-level authorities, linking initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, One Stop Centre, Women Helpline, and more.
 - At the block level, activities under the Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) are carried out through centers at the Gram Panchayat level, facilitated by Block/Taluk-level centers known as MSK-Block Level.
- 4. Mahila E-Haat:** Mahila E-Haat serves as a platform to fulfill the aspirations and requirements of women entrepreneurs. Operating as an online marketing avenue, it allows women to showcase their merchandise. This endeavor is a significant element of the 'Digital India' and 'Stand Up India' initiatives, reaching out to women entrepreneurs throughout the nation. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, has established this platform under the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK).

Mission : To act as a catalyst by providing a web based marketing platform to the women entrepreneurs to directly sell to the buyers.

Unique features of platform:

- Empowers women entrepreneurs to harness technology in showcasing their creations, products, and services. Beyond goods, women can spotlight their imaginative capabilities, such as tailoring services.
- E-Haat streamlines operations, requiring only a mobile number, as producers can efficiently manage their entire E-Haat business via mobile devices.
- To enhance interaction between buyers and sellers, the E-Haat portal displays products along with images, descriptions, costs, and the producer's mobile number/address.

- Buyers have the flexibility to approach sellers through physical visits, phone calls, emails, or other preferred methods. E-Haat establishes a direct interface, encouraging direct interaction between buyers and sellers, thereby facilitating the marketing of products created by women entrepreneurs and self-help groups (SHGs).

5. The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) : Under nutrition remains a persistent issue affecting a significant portion of women in India. Within the country, one in every three women faces undernourishment, and one in every two women experiences anemia. An undernourished mother typically gives birth to a baby with low birth weight. When inadequate nutrition originates during the prenatal phase, its impact reverberates across the entire lifecycle, as these alterations tend to be mostly irreversible. Due to economic and social hardships, many women continue working to support their families even during the final stages of pregnancy. Moreover, they often return to work shortly after childbirth, despite potential physical limitations. This dual strain prevents their bodies from recuperating fully and hinders their ability to exclusively breastfeed their infants during the initial six months.

The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a Maternity Benefit Programme that operates across all districts in accordance with the provisions outlined in the National Food Security Act of 2013.

- **Objectives:**
 - Offer partial compensation in the form of cash incentives, enabling women to take essential rest both before and after giving birth to their first living child.
 - The provision of cash incentives is anticipated to encourage pregnant women and lactating mothers (PW&LM) to adopt improved health-seeking behaviors.

6. Nari Shakti Puraskar : The Nari Shakti Puraskar is an annual accolade bestowed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. It recognizes the efforts of individuals or institutions committed to advancing the cause of women empowerment. Regarded as the highest civilian distinction for women in India, this award is presented by the President of India on International Women's Day (March 8) at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. Instituted in 1999 under the original name "Stree Shakti Puraskar," the award was restructured and renamed in 2015.

The Nari Shakti Puraskar comprises six institutional categories and two individual categories. Recipients in the institutional categories receive a cash prize of 200,000 rupees, while those in the individual categories are awarded 100,000 rupees.

- **The Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar Award** is presented to recognize the most outstanding private sector organization or public sector undertaking that actively contributes to the enhancement of women's well-being and welfare. The accolade derives its name from Ahilyabai Holkar, an influential ruler of the Malwa kingdom during the 18th century.
- **The Kannagi Devi Award** is bestowed upon the state that has made commendable strides in improving the Child Sex Ratio (CSR). This award is named after Kannagi, the central character of the Tamil epic "Silapathikaram."

- **The Mata Jijabai Award** is dedicated to the most commendable urban local body that offers exceptional services and facilities catering to women's needs. It is named in honor of Mata Jijabai, the mother of Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha Empire in the 17th century.
 - **The Rani Gaidinliu Zeliang Award** is conferred upon a civil society organization (CSO) that stands out for its exceptional work in the realm of women's welfare and well-being. The award is named after Rani Gaidinliu, a prominent 20th-century Naga spiritual and political leader.
 - **The Rani Lakshmi Bai Award** is granted to the institution that demonstrates outstanding research and development endeavors in the domain of women's empowerment. The award draws its name from Lakshmibai, a notable figure of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and a queen of Jhansi.
 - **The Rani Rudramma Devi Awards** are presented to two District Panchayats and two Gram Panchayats that exhibit remarkable contributions in the field of women's welfare, particularly in relation to the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana. The awards are named in honor of Rudrama Devi, a prominent 13th-century ruler of the Deccan Plateau.
7. **Women Helpline Scheme:** Launched in April 2015, the Women Helpline scheme's core objective is to provide round-the-clock emergency assistance to women facing abuse, regardless of whether it occurs in public or private settings.

The Women Helpline offers a toll-free, round-the-clock telephone service to women in need of assistance and information. This service links them to the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) for urgent services such as police, fire, and ambulance. It also connects them to One Stop Centres. Moreover, the Women Helpline serves as a source of information about government schemes and facilities. It plays a role in connecting women to legal officers, like those responsible for enforcing laws against dowry and child marriage, as well as protection officers, as needed. This assistance is provided within the woman's local area of residence or employment.

8. **Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme:** Introduced in 2016 by the Ministries of Women and Child Development and Home Affairs across states and union territories, the Mahila Police Volunteers scheme aims to bridge the gap between local communities and law enforcement. It empowers Mahila Police Volunteers to act as liaisons in combating crimes against women like dowry harassment, child marriage, domestic abuse, and domestic violence. The scheme also encourages a secure environment, encouraging women's participation in the police force.

- **Objectives of the Scheme :**
 - The aim is to enhance the reporting and swift response to crime cases, particularly those targeting women, and to combat crimes against women effectively.

- The focus is on reporting instances of violence against women, encompassing issues like domestic violence, dowry harassment, child marriage, and violence encountered by women in public spaces.
- Encouraging women to step forward with complaints of violence is pivotal. Additionally, offering guidance on available remedies and procedures to approach law enforcement authorities is part of the effort.
- Creating an environment that is accommodating to women is a core objective, both within law enforcement agencies and in broader society.
- Providing a streamlined and effective avenue for seeking assistance and aid in cases of violence and discrimination is a key aspect of the initiative.
- To encourage the representation of women in the police force, the Government has extended an initiative to reserve 33% of positions for women across police departments in Union Territories. This strategy is being expanded to encompass various states as well.

9. Ujjwala Scheme: Launched in 2016, The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana was initiated with the goal of offering clean fuel to women who fall below the poverty line. The utilization of dirty cooking fuels poses health risks to individuals. The key objectives of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana include:

- **Empowering Women and Safeguarding Health:** The scheme seeks to empower women by providing them with access to clean cooking fuel. This not only enhances their quality of life but also contributes to their overall well-being.
- **Mitigating Health Hazards:** By discouraging the use of unclean fossil fuels and other hazardous cooking fuels, the scheme aims to reduce health problems that arise from exposure to harmful emissions during cooking.
- **Reducing Indoor Pollution:** The use of fossil fuels in cooking can lead to indoor air pollution, which can cause respiratory issues among household members. The Ujjwala Yojana intends to alleviate such concerns by promoting cleaner fuel alternatives.
- **Environmental Preservation:** The widespread use of unclean cooking fuels contributes to environmental degradation. This scheme aims to protect the environment by promoting cleaner fuels and reducing pollution caused by the burning of fossil fuels for cooking purposes.

10. One Stop Centre Scheme : Gender-based violence (GBV) is a universal concern that spans across geographical, societal, and cultural boundaries, impacting all corners of the globe regardless of class, age, religion, or race. It stands as a complex issue that intertwines health, human rights, and development, affecting communities and countries worldwide. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence (1993) in Article 1, articulates the concept of gender-based abuse as encompassing any action of violence with gender as its basis. This includes acts that lead to or have the potential to cause physical, psychological, or sexual harm or suffering to women. Such actions encompass threats, coercion, and unwarranted deprivation of freedom, whether transpiring in public or private spheres.

Within India, gender-based violence manifests in various ways, ranging from prevalent forms like domestic and sexual violence, including rape, to detrimental practices such as dowry-related issues, honor killings, acid attacks, witch-hunting, sexual

harassment, child sexual abuse, human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, child marriage, sex-selective abortion, and sati.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has designed a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aimed at establishing One Stop Centers. This sub-scheme operates under the larger umbrella of the National Mission for Empowerment of Women, which includes the Indira Gandhi MatritavSahyog Yojana. Famously referred to as "Sakhi," this scheme has been in operation since April 1, 2015.

- **The goals of the Scheme include:**

- Offering comprehensive and unified aid to women impacted by violence, regardless of whether it occurs in private or public settings, all within a single facility.
- Streamlining the process of accessing a wide array of services, encompassing medical, legal, psychological, and counseling assistance, both for urgent and routine needs. This consolidated approach aims to combat all forms of violence against women effectively.

- **Services offered in OSC's**

- **Emergency Response and Rescue Services** - The One Stop Centre (OSC) will extend prompt rescue and referral services to women who have experienced violence.
- **Medical Assistance** – Women affected by violence will be directed to the nearest hospital for medical assistance or examination. These medical procedures will be conducted in accordance with guidelines established by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- **Assistance to Women in Lodging FIR /NCR/DIR** - The OSC will aid women in lodging First Information Reports (FIRs), Non-Cognizable Reports (NCRs), or Domestic Incident Reports (DIRs) as necessary.
- **Psycho - Social Support/ Counseling**- A trained counselor will be available on-call to provide psycho-social counseling services, ensuring emotional support for those in need.
- **Legal Aid and Counselling** - To ensure justice is accessible for women impacted by violence, the OSC will offer legal aid and counseling through qualified lawyers or in collaboration with National/State/District Legal Service Authorities.
- **Shelter** - The OSC will furnish temporary shelter options for affected individuals seeking refuge.
- **Video Conferencing Facility** - The OSC will facilitate expedited and smooth police and court proceedings by offering video conferencing facilities.

11. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) : The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) serves as the flagship initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), executed in collaboration with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). The fundamental purpose of this Skill Certification scheme is to empower the youth of India by offering industry-relevant skill

training opportunities. The ultimate goal is to equip them with valuable skills that enhance their employability and enable them to secure improved livelihoods.

The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) has several key components aimed at enhancing skill development and employability:

- **Short Term Training:** This offers short-duration training to Indian nationals who are school/college dropouts or unemployed. Training, aligned with national skill standards, includes Soft Skills, Entrepreneurship, and more. Upon completion, candidates receive placement assistance. The government covers training costs.
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** People with prior skills can get assessed and certified under RPL. It aligns their competencies with national skill standards. Different types of RPL projects can be implemented by designated agencies.
- **Special Projects:** This component allows for training in unique areas or job roles not covered by existing qualifications. Stakeholders like government bodies or corporates can propose these projects.
- **Kaushal and Rozgar Mela:** Community engagement is vital. TPs organize melas every six months for interaction, transparency, and showcasing skills. They also participate in national career service events.
- **Placement Guidelines:** PMKVY aims to connect skilled individuals with job opportunities. TCs strive to offer placements and entrepreneurship support to certified candidates.
- **Monitoring Guidelines:** Quality is upheld through self-audits, inspections, surprise visits, and technology-driven monitoring by NSDC and Inspection Agencies.

12. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme : The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme was introduced on January 22, 2015, in Haryana by the Prime Minister of India, with the primary aim of ensuring the well-being, safety, and education of girls. The initiative is designed to address the concerning issue of imbalanced gender ratios, enhance public consciousness, and enhance the efficiency of welfare measures targeted at girls.

- **Objective of the Scheme :**
 - **Prevention of Female Infanticide and Sex-Selective Elimination:** One of the main focuses of the scheme is to address the issue of sex-selective abortion and the cultural preference for male children over female children. This is achieved through awareness campaigns and stricter enforcement of laws against gender-based discrimination.
 - **Safeguarding the Survival and Protection of the Girl Child:** The scheme aims to ensure the survival and well-being of girl children by improving access to healthcare services and creating an environment where their rights and dignity are protected.
 - **Promoting Education and Active Involvement:** Another key objective is to encourage and promote the education of girl children. The scheme seeks to increase enrollment and retention of girls in schools and ensure that they have access to quality education.

Overall, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme seeks to bring about a positive change in society's attitude towards the girl child, ensuring her equal rights and opportunities for growth and development. It involves collaboration between various government departments, local communities, and non-governmental organizations to effectively address the challenges faced by girls in India.

13. Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme: Introduced in 2006, the National Creche scheme focuses on aiding working mothers. It offers childcare services while enhancing maternal health and nutrition. In addition to providing childcare, this women's empowerment initiative supports the overall growth and well-being of children, fostering physical, social, and holistic development. The scheme also educates parents about effective childcare practices.

- **The Objectives Encompass:**

- Establishing day-care provisions catering to children (6 months to 6 years) of employed mothers residing within the community.
- Enhancing the health and nutritional well-being of children through targeted interventions.
- Cultivating comprehensive growth in children by fostering their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional advancement, emphasizing a holistic developmental approach.
- Educating and empowering parents/caregivers to enhance their childcare capabilities, contributing to an improved quality of childcare provision.

14. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP): The Government of India has undertaken an ambitious plan to train 500 million individuals by the year 2022, equating to 42 million people annually. To achieve this goal, the country's vocational training infrastructure must be expanded to cater to the diverse skill requirements of its population. In recent times, there has been growing concern about the declining participation of women in India's workforce. Simultaneously, women have shown increased aspirations and readiness to contribute significantly to the economy.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) addresses the unique challenges faced by economically disadvantaged women and those residing in remote areas who are unable to relocate for formal skill training. The STEP (Support to Training and Employment Program for Women) is a 100% Central Sector Scheme that has been in operation since 1986-87. It offers training to marginalized women in traditional trades, which predominantly exist in the informal sector. The program aims to capitalize on women's traditional knowledge, transforming it into sustainable livelihood opportunities.

To select the most appropriate proposals, a meticulous evaluation process was conducted, scrutinizing numerous submissions following the 2014 Guidelines. This evaluation also aligned with the Gazette notification issued by the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, along with NITI Aayog's Guidelines for implementing Centrally Sponsored Schemes/Central Sector Schemes through non-governmental

organizations (NGOs). A dedicated section has been incorporated to provide guidance to applicant organizations.

- **The Scheme Encompasses Dual Objectives:**

- Equipping women with skills that enhance their employability.
- Cultivating competencies and skills that empower women to establish themselves as self-employed individuals or entrepreneurs.

15. Working Women Hostel Scheme: The Working Women Hostel Scheme has been introduced by the central government of India to address the housing needs of women who are employed and need accommodation away from their homes. This initiative aims to offer a secure living environment for working women or those in vulnerable situations who lack suitable housing arrangements. The scheme also accommodates children under specific circumstances. Its primary goal is to empower women by providing them with safe and supportive living spaces while they pursue their professional or personal endeavors.

- **The Objectives of the Scheme are as Follows:**

- **Safety and Accommodation:** The scheme aims to enhance the safety and provide suitable lodging for working women. Additionally, it seeks to incorporate daycare facilities for their children, whenever feasible.
- **Geographical Coverage:** The scheme aims to extend its services to urban, semi-urban, and even rural areas where employment opportunities for women are available.
- **Infrastructure Expansion:** The scheme intends to support projects for various aspects, including the establishment of new hostel buildings, extensions to existing hostel structures, and the setup of hostels in rented premises.
- **Inclusivity:** The scheme is designed to ensure equal access to all working women, without any form of discrimination.
- **Training Support:** The scheme also considers women who are undergoing training for employment, subject to specific conditions outlined within the scheme.

III. CONCLUSION

Women's empowerment is a critical need in today's world. For far too long, women have been marginalized and denied equal opportunities. By empowering women, we strive to rectify these historical injustices and pave the way for a more just and equitable society. Empowerment ensures that women have the autonomy to make choices about their lives, from education and careers to health and family planning. It's not just about individual progress, it's about collective advancement. When women are empowered, they contribute significantly to social and economic development, spurring economic growth and fostering healthy communities. Education becomes a catalyst for change, breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and equipping women to make informed decisions. Moreover, empowered women become agents of change, participating in political processes, challenging harmful cultural norms, and leading the way towards a more inclusive and tolerant society.

By empowering women, we're not just addressing gender disparities, we're laying the foundation for a better, more sustainable future for everyone.

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