

Chapter-3

Government Policy and Efforts to Empower Women

3.1 Strategy of the Government Policy to Empower Women

The requirements for women's empowerment were felt in India long back. Mahatma Gandhi had declared at the Second Round Table Conference¹ that his aim was to set up a political society in India in which there would be no distinction between people of high and low classes and in which women would enjoy the equal rights and privileges as men and the millions of Indians would be ensured dignity and justice - social, economic and political. To secure this de jure equality for the women, many policies and programmes were put into action from time to time. Besides, a lot of special legislations have been enacted in favour of women. But there is hardly any programme to address the cultural and traditional discrimination against women that leads to their miserable conditions.

After independence, the Government of India took necessary actions for social and economic transformation of the country. Before independence, nearly 80% of people lived in rural areas and most of them situated below poverty line. Illiteracy, malnutrition, unbearable poverty and backwardness of varied nature were prevailing in both rural and urban areas. Even today, the country is facing many of the major problems which were prevailed during independence.

The government of India has taken various policies and programmes to meet the needs of its poor people. In this direction, in 1952 the Government of India introduced the Community Development Programme (CDP) at first and then several five year plans. All the programmes and policies have been working to remove the poverty since that time.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has been implementing a number of schemes, which strive towards both economic and social empowerment of women. The concept of women's development in the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) was mainly "welfare" oriented². This welfare approach changed in to the "development" approach in the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78). The approach of development marks a further shift to "empowerment" of women in the Eight Five Year Plan (1992- 97) in order to meet both the increasing and challenging needs of women.

Gradually empowerment of women as agents of socio-economic change and development became one of the nine specific objectives of the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-02), which was continued in the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07). The National Policy on Women 2001, which informed the Tenth Five Year Plan, has articulated a series of goals towards women's empowerment.

The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB)

The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was set up in the 1953 with the objective of promoting social welfare activities for the women children and handicapped through voluntary organizations. It was the first social welfare organization in the post independence period for women and children. It was introduced by the Planning Commission of India with a large number of programmes such as providing housing protection to weak and helpless women, fallen

women, helpless widows, creating centres of social education and adult education centres for women, condensed courses of education and vocational training courses for women and girls, awareness generation projects for rural and poor women, family counseling centres, holiday camps for children, welfare extension projects in border areas, opening centres for giving healthy entertainment to the women, giving assistance to crèches and hostels for working women etc. The Board gives financial subsidy to the NGOs which provide good service to the women.

Women Empowerment through Various Schemes

The government of India has been implementing various schemes and programmes for the welfare and empowerment of rural women in the areas of poverty alleviation, skill up gradation, micro credit, development and sustainable income generation, science and technology, education, health services, awareness generation, legal literacy and support services.

Awareness Generation Projects for Rural and Poor Women

The basic aim of this programme is to create awareness among rural and poor women on various social issues. This programme enables women to organize themselves and strengthen their participation in decision making in the family and society.

Condensed Course of Education for Adult Women

This programme was launched in 1958. The basic objective of this scheme is to provide basic education and skills to the needy women, widows and destitutes belonging to the backward classes.

Mahila Mandal Programme (MMP)

This programme was started in 1961 to provide social service to women in rural areas.

Swawalamban Programme

It was launched in 1982-83 with the objective of providing training and skills to women to facilitate to obtain employment on a sustained basis.

Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)

This programme was originated in 1987 to provide updated skills and new knowledge to poor and asset less women in the traditional sectors.

Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)

It was initiated in 1987-88 to provide self employment opportunities to women living below poverty line.

Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)

It was initiated in 1992-93s for economic empowerment of women through the provision of credit to poor and asset less women in the informal sector.

Mahila Samridhhi Yojana (MSY)

This scheme was initiated in 1993 to enable poor women to exercise greater control over household resources to redress gender biases in production.

Swashakti Project

This project was initiated in 1998 which was previously known as rural women's development and empowerment project. It creates an environment for empowerment of women in association with Self Help Group.

Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY)

This programme was initiated in 2000-01 as part of the ICDS programme and addresses the needs of adolescent girls aged between 11 and 18 years old for their self development, nutrition, health status, literacy, numerical skills and vocational skills in India.

Swayamsidha Scheme

It was launched in 2000-01 for women's empowerment based on configuration of women into Self Help Groups aiming at holistic empowerment of women through thrift, awareness generation, skill development and economic empowerment.

The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)

The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) is considered to be a major poverty alleviation programme in the rural area all over the country. The IRDP was launched in 1980. The major objectives of this scheme are to uplift the poor families from poverty level. It was considered that the programme will be able to create assets by income generating activities of the rural poor in a specified period of time. Under this programme, women's participation was ensured by reserving 30% of benefit for them.

Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM)

Under the IRDP programme another scheme called 'Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment' (TRYSEM) was introduced for technical and entrepreneurial skills to rural youth living below poverty line in order to make them enable to take up income generating activities and 30% of the opportunities are reserved for women in this plan. This plan was continued till sixth plan period and additional concentration has been paid to the rural women's access to credit and training under the IRDP and TRYSEM programme.

National Rural Employment Programme (NREP)

National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and the Rural Landless Employment Generation Programme (RLEGP) were launched with the basic target of wage employment to the beneficiaries. Both the programmes share common objectives for creation of extra profitable employment for unwaged and underemployed persons, formation of productive community resources for direct and ongoing benefits to the poverty groups and development in the overall quality of life and nutritional condition in the rural areas. The instructions of these two programmes allocate the preference to the landless labourers. According to the guidelines of these programmes, the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and the poor rural women will get preference in getting employment.

The sixth plan provided the credit facilities to poor women for self employment but women failed to access the facility as they were unable to furnish the requisite guarantee. So, under these programmes women were not viewed as a specific beneficiary. At the same time, both the NREP and RLEGP were discontinuous and uncertain in nature. Besides, the employment provided by these programmes was for a very short duration. These programmes failed to increase the income for the beneficiary households and to uplift the beneficiary households above the poverty line.

According to the seventh five year plan only 7% women got profit under IRDP and it was also found that 15-20 percent cases were the cases of wrong identification of beneficiaries. Although the sixth plan period provided for the training facility for capacity building for women, but in many areas it failed to reach to the target points.

The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY)

The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) is a wage employment programme which actually has given less importance to women. According to the JRY guidelines only 30 percent of the beneficiaries should be women. Similar to JRY, another Employment Assurance Scheme which assures 100 days gainful employment to both men and women during the lean agricultural season is very popular among the rural people during the off seasons.

Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY)

Another popular scheme is Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) which was introduced to provide homes to the homeless people living below the poverty line. In the scheme, priority is given to the women belonging to the SC and ST community especially who are unmarried and widow. A large number of women have been benefited by this scheme.

Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)

For the development of the women section, Govt. of India with the co-operation of United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) introduced a programme known as Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA). The programme intends to empower the women by organizing them in groups. The programme brings awareness among the women and provides them economic and social opportunities.

The programme is directed at raising the income level of the poor women towards economic self-reliance. The primary objectives of the programme are to form the group of poor women at the village level to provide credit, training for skill development and infrastructural support for self employment.

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)

To give rural poor more access to banking and credits, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) was established in 1982. In 1992, NABARD launched the SHG-Bank linkage programme with policy back up of the Reserve Bank of India. They have initiated SHG bank linkage programme in active collaboration with non-governmental organization (NGOs) with an aim for enhancing the coverage of rural poor under institutional credit thereby focusing on poverty alleviation and empowerment.

National Commission for Women (NCW)

The National Commission for Women (NCW) was introduced in 1992 with the objective of protecting women's right and promotion of their interests. The commission carries on pursuing its compulsory activities that is review of the legislations and remedial actions against violence to women. The commission provides highest priority to securing immediate justice to women.

Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY)

Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) was set up in 1995. The plan aims at organizing women at the grass root level for participation in the decision making process and empowerment in 200 Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) blocks. The objectives of the programme were awareness generation among the women of rural areas and urban slums and economic empowerment of women.

3.2 Views of Different Five Year Plans on Women Empowerment³

First Five Year Plan (1951-56)

The notion of women's development in the First Five year Plan was mainly welfare oriented and the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was set up in 1953 to promote welfare measures through the voluntary sectors.

Second Five Year Plan (1956-61)

In the Second Five Year Plan women were organized into Mahila Mandals to work at the grassroots levels for women development. During this period equal pay for equal work policy were initiated.

Third, Fourth and Interim or Annual plans (1961-74)

The Third, Fourth and other Interim Plans accorded a high priority to the education of women. During this period some measures like to improve maternal and child health services, supplementary feeding for children and nursing and nutritional care of expectant mothers were introduced.

Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78)

A major shift took place in this plan that was from the approach of 'welfare' to 'development'. This plan focused on socio-economic development of women, both for women from low income families and needy women with dependent children.

Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85)

The Sixth Five Year Plan was the landmark in the history of women's development as it received a separate economic agenda. This plan took a multi-disciplinary approach for women's development with a thrust on health, education and employment.

Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90)

The Seventh Five Year Plan continued an integrated multi-disciplinary approach covering employment, education, health, nutrition, application of science and technology, and other related aspects of women to bring them into the mainstream of national development. The establishment of Women Development Corporations during this plan period aimed at to provide better employment avenues for women so that they can become economically independent and self-reliant.

Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97)

The Eighth Five Year Plan marked a further shift in the approach from 'development' to 'empowerment'. This plan emphasized to provide benefits to women education, employment and health as the central issue in determining the status of women. As the Eighth Plan stressed on women empowerment, the 73rd and 74th amendment of Indian Constitution in 1993 has provided the one-third reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Municipalities. This amendments enabled women for their participation in the decision making process at local levels.

Ninth Five Year plan (1997-02)

'Empowerment of Women' as an agent of socio-economic change and development of women became one of the strategic objectives of the Ninth Five Year Plan. The plan emphasized on:

- i. The 1/3rd reservation of seats for women in the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies.
- ii. At least 30% of funds or benefits from all development sectors flow to women.
- iii. Organizing women into Self Help Groups as a major process of women empowerment.
- iv. Universalizing the feeding programme.
- v. Equal access to education for women.
- vi. Elimination of gender discrimination.
- vii. Free education for girls.
- viii. Promoting skill development programme among women.

During this plan period, some special initiatives including National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) were introduced has been discussed later.

Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07)

The objectives of the Ninth plan were continued in the Tenth Plan as major agents of empowerment of women and social change.

Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-11)

During this plan period the Planning Commission constituted a Steering Committee on women empowerment and development of children. Gender empowerment and gender equity was the prominent measures of this plan period. The plan focused on four aspects of women empowerment namely Violence Against Women (VAW), Economic Empowerment, Political Empowerment and Social Empowerment.

3.3 Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)⁴

The Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India has replaced all the self-employment and income generation programmes and has introduced 'Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana' (SGSY) in April, 1999 by restructuring the following schemes namely:

- I. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)
- II. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM)
- III. Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)
- IV. Supply of Improved Toolkits to Rural Artisans (SITRA)
- V. Ganga Kalyan Yojana (GKY)
- VI. Million Wells Scheme (MWS)

Now, the SGSY scheme is the major ongoing programme for self-employment of the rural poor and it mainly focuses on group (Self Help Group) approach. The scheme is operating from 1st April 1999 in rural areas of the country. The basic objective of the SGSY is to bring poor families (Swarozgaris)¹ above the poverty line through mobilization of rural poor in to Self Help Groups (SHGs) providing them with capacity building, skill up gradation training, assistance for taking up different economic activities, credit linkage, infrastructure build up, technology and marketing support.

The scheme is funded by the financial institutions, Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs), Non Government Organizations (NGOs), Technical

¹ Swarozgaris denotes poor families. The swarozgaris can be either individuals or groups.

institutions in the district. NGOs may help in the formation and nurturing of the Self Help Groups for the progress of the Swarozgaris by providing technology support, quality control of the products and as monitors cum facilitators. The Swarozgaris will be eligible for banking assistance under SGSY when they possess minimum skill requirement.

The scheme aims at organizing a large number of micro enterprises in the rural areas for the households of Below Poverty Line (BPL) identified through BPL census duly approved by the Gram Sabhaⁱⁱ. The objective of the SGSY is to bring the BPL families Above Poverty Line (APL) within three years by providing them income generating assets with the help of bank credits and government subsidies. The scheme focuses on vulnerable section of rural society comprises of at least 50% SC/ST, 40% women and 3% disabled persons for assistance. Besides rural poor such as land or landless labour, unemployed rural artisans and disabled people are also covered under this scheme.

The programme has been conceived as a holistic programme for self-employment. The programme focuses on organization of the poor of grassroots level through a process of social mobilization for poverty eradication. Social mobilization enables the poor to build their own organization (SHG) in which they fully and directly participate and take decisions on all issues that will help them to develop their socio-economic condition.

The Self Help Groups are organized by Swarozgaris drawn from the BPL list of the village. Group activities are given preference on allocation of majority of the funding and half of the groups formed at block level should be exclusively women groups. SGSY promoted SHG may consist of 10 to 20 persons belonging to BPL families but in case of minor irrigation areas and in

ⁱⁱ Gram Sabha means half yearly or yearly general meeting of the people living in the rural areas.

case of disabled persons, this number may be minimum of 5 persons. The group does not include more than one member of a family and a person cannot be a member of more than one group. SHG may be an informal group or registered group under the Societies Act, State Co-operative Act or as partnership firm. The assistance that is loan and subsidy may be provided to the individuals or to all the members of the group for taking up income generating activities.

Salient features of Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)

- i. Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) aims at establishing a large number of micro-enterprises in rural areas. It is believed that the rural poor can be successful producers of valuable goods and services.
- ii. The assisted families (Swarozgaries) may be individual or Self Help Groups (SHGs) and emphasis will be given on the group approach.
- iii. SGSY is a holistic programme of micro-enterprises covering all aspects of SHGs and their capacity building, infrastructure build up, technology, credit and marketing.
- iv. SGSY emphasizes to establish micro-enterprises by following the cluster approach.
- v. SGSY adopts the project approach for each key activities prepared by banks and other financial institutions.
- vi. SGSY focuses on group approach and efforts to involve women members in each SHGs.
- vii. The Gram Sabha will decide the list of BPL families identified in the BPL Census.
- viii. SGSY is a credit-cum-subsidy programme. It envisages the greater involvement of banks. They prepare projects, identification of activity clusters, infrastructure planning, capacity building, choice of activity of SHGs, pre and post credit monitoring including loan recovery.

- ix. SGSY may promote multiple credits to the Swarozgaries on the basis of credit requirement. It encourages the Swarozgaries for increasing credit intake over the years.
- x. SGSY emphasizes on skill development through well-designed training courses and loans are sanctioned after proving the necessary training.
- xi. The SGSY provides necessary technology in the identified areas on the basis of local material resources.
- xii. SGSY helps the Swarozgaries for marketing of the goods produced by them.
- xiii. Subsidy under SGSY is 30% of the project cost but in respect of SC and STs it is 50%.
- xiv. SGSY focuses on the vulnerable sections of the rural poor that is 50% of the Swarozgaries are SC and STs, 40% of women and 3% of disabled categories.
- xv. SGSY are implemented by the DRDAs through the Panchayat Samiti
- xvi. The funds under SGSY are funded by Central and State Governments in the ratio of 75:25.

3.4 National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)

The important policies which have vital implications for the women are National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001). The policy mainly has given importance on health, nutrition, education, political liberty of thought, agriculture, industry, forest, water, housing, science, technology and media etc. can be broadly categorized into three aspects namely social, economic and political aspect.

The principle of gender equality is preserved in the preamble of Indian Constitution. Fundamental Rights, Duties, and Directives Principles have been articulated from time to time to protect and promote the welfare of women with an aim to improve their socio-economic status.

The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the States to take necessary programmes and measures in favour of women. Apart from constitutional provisions, a large number of laws have been enacted to protect the Human Rights of Women. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act, 1956, The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983, The Family Court Act, 1984 and The Domestic Violence Act, 2005 etc. protect the interests of women.

In this way, our country has introduced several programmes and policies for women's development in different times. The 5th five year plan has introduced a marked shift in the women's programme from welfare to development approach. The National Commission for Women (NCW) was set up in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements for women. The 73rd and 74th amendments in 1993 of Indian Constitution have reserved seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women in order to ensure their representation in the decision making process. However, there is a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans and programmes on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other hand. This has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India.

Goal and Objectives of the Policy

The goal and objectives of the Policy is to bring advancement, development and empowerment for women in India. The objectives of this policy are as follows:

- i. Creating an environment through positive socio-economic policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.

- ii. The women have to enjoy the de-jure and de-facto facilities of all human rights and fundamental freedom on equal basis with men in all spheres that are economic, political, social, cultural and civil.
- iii. Women have to equal access to participation and decision making in social, economic and political life of the nation.
- iv. Women have to equal access to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety and social security etc.
- v. Strengthening the legal systems to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.
- vi. Changing societal attitudes and community practices towards women by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- vii. Gender perspective in the development process has to be taken as mainstreaming.
- viii. To eliminate all discrimination and violence against women and girl child.
- ix. To build the strengthening partnership with civil society, particularly with women's organizations.

Policy Prescription

According to the National Policy for Women Empowerment, the legal and judicial system will make for gender development especially in case of domestic violence and personal assault. The policy would encourage the changes in the personal laws such as those related to marriage, divorce, maintenance and guardianship so as to eliminate discrimination against women. The inheritance and property right laws would be made equally for men and women. The policy has prescribed for women empowerment in three sectors that is economic empowerment, social empowerment and political empowerment of women.

Economic Empowerment of Women

The policy has prescribed to eradicate the poverty among women as women comprise majority of the population below poverty line. So, macro-economic policies and poverty eradication programmes have to be improved to meet the women needs. Women will be offered economic and social options along with necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities.

The credit facilities should be enhanced so that the poor women can access to credit for consumption and production. For this purpose, the micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institutions have to be established to enhance the credit programme. All supportive measures will be taken to ensure adequate flow of credit through the financial institutions and banks so that all the poor women live below poverty line have easy access to credit. Women's contribution to socio-economic development as producers and workers will be recognized in the formal and informal sectors including home based workers. Hence reinterpretation and redefinition of conventional concept of work have to be included in the Census records so that women can show their contribution as producers and workers.

Department of Women and Child Development suggested that there is a need for re-framing policies for access to employment and the quality of employment. Global economy makes wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, and gender inequality by creating lower working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal sector and rural areas. So, the programme and policies will be designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower them to overcome the negative social and economic impacts.

Proportional benefits of training, extension and various programmes will be ensured to the women in the agriculture and allied sectors.

Now a days various supportive services for women like child care facilities, including crèches at work places, educational institutions, homes for the aged of the disabled etc. which help to improve the social, political and economic lives of women. Women friendly personal policies will also be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the development process.

Social Empowerment of Women

Equal access to education for women and girls have to be ensured by taking special measures to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and improve the quality of education. The policy will give emphasis to reduce gender gap in secondary and higher education.

The policy includes a holistic approach to women's health which includes both nutrition and health services for women and girl. The social emphasis will be given on to reduce infant mortality and maternal mortality. Registration of births, deaths and marriage is made compulsory.

The malnutrition of women in different stages would be removed. This programme will meet the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and intra-household discrimination in nutritional matters. Besides, special attention will be given to the women of the provision of safe drinking water, sewage disposal, toilet facilities and sanitation especially in rural and urban slums.

Women will be involved in the environmental policies and programmes to ensure environmental conservation. Majority number of women still depends on the locally available non-commercial sources of energy such as animal dung, crop waste and fuel wood. The

provision will be given the women to use these energies efficiently in the environment friendly manner. The policy will give emphasis to promote the non-conventional energy resources. Solar energy, bio-gas, smokeless chulahs have to be provided to women and this will be helpful for bringing changes in the lifestyles of rural women.

The policy ensures to provide the greater involvement of women in science and technology. Special measures will be provided to the women for their training in areas where they have special skills like communication and information technology. The programmes will be undertaken to provide women in difficult situations specially disadvantaged group, women in extreme poverty, destitute women, women in conflict situations, women affected by natural calamities, women in less developed regions, the disabled widows, elderly women, single women in difficult circumstances, women heading households, those displaced from employment, migrants, women who are victims of marital violence, deserted women and prostitutes etc.

Violence against women like physical, mental, domestic and societal would be prevented by forming institutions and schemes including sexual harassment at work place and dowry. Besides a special emphasis will be laid on to prevent trafficking women and girls.

Discrimination against girl child and violation would be eliminated by undertaking strong measures both preventive and punitive within and out of family. Pre natal sex selection and practice of female foeticide, female infanticide, child marriage, child abuse and child prostitution would include in this programme. A special emphasis will be laid on the needs of girl child in the areas relating to food and nutrition, health, education and in vocational education. The programme focuses on for eliminating girl child labour. Media net works will be involved at all

levels to ensure equal access for women particularly in the areas of information and communication technology.

Action plans

All Central and State Ministries will draw up Action Plans with Centre or State Departments of Women and Child Development and National or State Commissions for Women.

The plans include the following goals specifically.

- i. Measureable goals to be achieved by 2010.
- ii. Identification and commitment of resources.
- iii. Responsibilities for implementation of action points.
- iv. Structures and mechanisms to ensure efficient monitoring, review and gender impact assessment of action points and policies.
- v. Introduction of budget by gender perspective.

Institutional Mechanisms

Institutional mechanisms are strengthened to encourage the advancement of women in Central and State levels. National and State Councils are formed to monitor the operationalization of the policy on a regular basis. These Councils are headed by Prime Minister and Chief Ministers respectively and having representatives from the concerned Departments, Ministries, National and State Commissions for Women, Social Welfare Boards, Representatives of Non-Governments Organizations, Women's Organizations, Corporate Sector, Trade Unions, Financing Institutions, Academics, Experts and Social Activists etc. These bodies will assess the progress made in implementing the policy twice a year.

National and State Resource Centres on women are established with mandates for collection and dissemination of information, undertaking research work, conducting surveys, implementing training and awareness generation programme. These Centres are connected with Women's Studies Centres and other research and academic institutions through suitable information networking systems.

While institutions at the district level are strengthened, at the grass-roots level, women are helped by Government through its programmes to organize and strengthen into Self Help Groups (SHGs). The women's groups are helped to institutionalize themselves into registered societies to implement social and economic programme.

3.5 Constitutional Provisions for Women

The constitution of India provides the special care for the women to enable them to exercise their rights with men equally for National Development. Few definite articles which provide special provisions for women are cited here in the following way.

Article 15 assures prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, class, creed, sex and place of birth or region. This Article permits the state to take special provision for women and children.

Article 16 assures equality of opportunity in the matters of Government employment. No discrimination will be made by the State against its citizens including women while providing jobs to them.

Article 39 (a) assures to provide the minimum necessities of life to the citizen without discrimination between men and women. Without discrimination women will get “equal remuneration for equal work”

Article 42 assures to provide maternity benefits to the women employees. The State shall make provision for securing just and humanitarian conditions of work and for maternity relief.

Article 243 assures 1/3 reservation for women of the total number of seats in the Panchayats including the women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes where direct elections are held. These reserved seats in the range of the Panchayats are to be kept on rotation basis.

Empowerment of Women and Constitution Amendment Act, 1993

The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993)⁵ to the Indian Constitution have served as an instrument towards ensuring equal access and bigger participation in political power structure for women. The act gives some special powers in all three tiers of Panchayati Raj. The rationale behind this amendment was that the social and economic status of women could not be improved without political power. By this act they have been given share in the decision making process. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) play a vital role in the process of enhancing women’s participation in public life.

Legislative Measures for Women Empowerment

The Constitution of India guaranteed social, economic and political equality to the women and directs the government to take special care of the women. The women constitute nearly 50% of the total population. But in reality women suffer in all spheres of socio-economic

life due to ignorance of their rights and proper utilization of power. So, special legislative measures have been enacted to improve the condition of women.

The preamble of Indian constitution promises to secure for all its citizens Justice, liberty and equality of status and opportunity. The fundamental rights and directive principles of the constitution are expected to take care of the achievement of justice, liberty and equality. Various legislations were accepted to provide special safeguard to women and also to provide them equal status to men. All such acts were passed with an aim to bring about women's emancipations from their underprivileged positions.

As a result, the Government of India decided to take three measures i.e. constitutional and legislative measures, planned development based on economy and welfare measures directed for bringing social change among the women.

Social Legislation

The Constitution of India came into force on January 26, 1950 provided social rights to women. Legal actions have been enunciated in India from time to time to protect and support the welfare of women, leading to a development in their status. The women specific laws implement different aspects i.e. social, economic and political aspects that emancipate them from their vulnerable situation. The two aspects i.e. economic and political aspects have already been discussed in this chapter and social aspects relating to social issues and social legislation i.e. family, marriage, inheritance, dowry, divorce, adoption, abortion, maintenance and above all the legislations that protect women from violence and atrocities are being discussed here.

All the above mentioned social issues and problems are supposed to be solved by the enactment of the following legislative measures.

- i. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 which prohibits polygyny, polyandry and child marriage and establish the principle of monogamy and concedes equal rights women to divorce and to remarry.
- ii. The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 provides for women the equal ownership right to parental property.
- iii. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 provides the right for childless women to adopt a child and to claim maintenance by her husband even if she is divorced by him.
- iv. The Special Marriage Act, 1954 which provides the rights to women for intercaste marriage, love marriage and registered marriage. The Act has also fixed the minimum age of marriage at 21 for male and 18 for female.
- v. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 which declares the taking of dowry is an unlawful activity and thereby protects women from exploitation.
- vi. The Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act, 1956 which provides protection to women from being kidnapped and compelled to become prostitutes.
- vii. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 which legalizes abortion of women on the ground of physical and mental health.

- viii. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983 which provides to stop various types of crimes against women.
- ix. The Family Court Act, 1984 which establish Family Court to provide speedy justice to women who get involved in the matrimonial disputes.
- x. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 provides maternity benefits to the married women worker for six months leave with full salary.
- xi. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 which remove wage discrimination between male and female workers.

These are some important legislative measures introduced in the Indian social structure affecting women's status and role and thus improve the social status of women and empowering them.

3.6 Review of the Policy

The Indian constitution grants equality to women providing special facilities to women in urban and rural areas. The sad reality remains that such provision are unable to provide solid foundations for legal equality between man and women. In India poor, middle and lower middle class women prefer to remain at home and attend to household chores and look after their children to work. Patriarchal ideology confined women within household from where they do not wish to come out.

In general the women empowerment and development programs are classified into three categories, such as developmental programmes, welfare programmes and income generating programmes. Here is an attempt to make an assessment of the entire women related development programme.

The developmental programmes that are the formation of Mahila Mandals, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Rural Sanitation Programme, Family Programme, Bio-gas plant, Integrated Rural Energy Programme etc assist in enhancing the infrastructure facilities for the women which in turn provide welfare or income generation along with increasing awareness and improvement in the quality of life.

The welfare programmes that is old age pension, provisions for the handicapped, widow pension, hostels for girls in schools, colleges and universities etc. provides welfare measures to women.

The income generation programmes such as IRDP, TRYSEM, DWCRA, JRY, MSY etc. aims at to provide the facilities for enhancing the income levels of women.

Numerous antipoverty programmes have been introduced for rural poor women and innovative approaches have been adopted in the programmes such as savings, credit and asset creation for the poor women in order to strengthen their ability to survive, meeting their basic social requirements, enabling them to enter into income generating activities. But the programmes have failed to bring the fruitful result. There can be seen a huge distance between the programmes and the actual performance.

The inadequate training, knowledge, skills, attitude and lack of sufficient resources hamper the implementation of the programme. Lack of gender related knowledge of the

concerned officials makes a problem to success of the programme. More often the women of rural area find difficult to interact with the male officers. The lacuna between the programme implementers and the beneficiaries hinder the success rate of the programme. Besides there is hardly any evaluation system of the work done of the programme which suffer lack of sincerity to success the programme.

Criticism of Measures

- i. As the female literacy is very poor in the rural India, female members in the different tiers of Panchayat Raj are not able to assert themselves. They are forced to work or to take decision according to the wishes of the male counterpart.
- ii. It is very difficult to find out sufficient number of females to work as members of Panchayat Raj Committee. The Committee has to make a negotiation with less qualified and totally ignorant women.
- iii. It is difficult to equate the women as men in patriarchal society. Since the patriarchal value is not changed, the women are not able to emancipate themselves from their marginalized position. Patriarchal values and culture should be reformed at first regarding women empowerment. Otherwise, it is very difficult for the women to work and to achieve progress.
- iv. The act focuses its attention to empower women politically. But it was occupied by the better off and elite people of that society. Actually they are enjoying the benefit of the act. Besides the corrupted and selfish political leaders are using it in favor of them. As a result weakest of the weak and poorest of the poor are remained in their darkness condition.

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