

## **HOW SENSITIVE IS THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT TOWARDS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA?**

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**Abstract.** Women empowerment is prerequisite for the development of a nation. India has made a considerable progress since Independence, but still Indian women have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male-dominated society. Therefore the paper highlights the Government policies and their role in empowering women i.e. Social empowerment, Economic empowerment, Educational empowerment and Political Empowerment. The paper is based on the reported information from The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Planning Commission, Ministry of Human Resource Development and Government of India. The study will bring new insight towards empowerment of women and in policy making worldwide.

**Keywords** - Women Development, Government Programmes and Policies, Social empowerment, Economic empowerment, Educational empowerment and Political empowerment

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## Introduction

India is seventh largest and fastest growing economy in the world. India's economic success in recent years has contributed a lot in South Asia's fastest-growth in the world but at the same time it faces significant challenges alongside its opportunities for further growth. India is having around 1.34 billion people – 18% of the world's population among which the percentage of youth is much higher. However the other facet of India reflects that it is also a complex country . In India there are various types of customs, traditions and practices which are good as well as bad and are inseparable from the society's consciousness. On one side we worship female goddesses, give great importance to our mothers, daughters, sisters, wives and other female relatives or friends and on other side Indian people are also famous for badly treating their women. India is composed of various cultures and religions which teaches us to treat women with respect and dignity. But still the society has so developed that various types of ill practices, both physical and mental, against women have become a norm and custom since ages. For example sati pratha, dowry system, parda system, female infanticide, burning of wife, sexual violence and harassment at work place, domestic violence and other different kinds of discriminatory and unfair practices which leads to physical and mental torture.. Despite of so many efforts made by Indian Government still the society has not accepted women as being equal to men and crimes or abuses against women are still on the rising trend. In order to change, the society's age-old deep-rooted mind set a rigorous social conditioning and sensitization programmes are needed.

No doubt the women empowerment became the priority of Indian Government and is always one of the major goal of government development policies and plan. Empowerment not only focuses on providing women strength and skills but also to improve their vulnerable and miserable situation. It also stresses on the need to educate men regarding women issues and inculcating a sense of respect towards women and treat them as equal citizens. Women empowerment basically focuses on the miserable and deprived women in order to make them socially and economically empowered so that they can find their rightful place in the society.

In annual Women Empowerment Principles (WEPs) event will be held on 15 March 2018 The United Nations have put down following principles for the empowerment of women:

1. To establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality

2. Treat all women and men fairly at work - respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality

Thus it focuses on economic empowerment, social empowerment and educational empowerment of the women.

According to 2011 Census the sex ratio for India is 943 to per 1000 males which is lowest in the world. The percentage of female literacy is 65.50 (2011 Census) against male literacy of 82.10 per cent. There is only 12% women representation in Parliament in India. Whereas the global average for Women in Parliament stands at 22.4%, India is at the 103rd place out of 140 countries with a mere. Within Asia, India is at the 13th position out of 18 countries. Countries like South Sudan, Saudi Arabia have better than India. Most of the working women remain outside the organized sector. Mere 2.3 per cent of women are administrators and managers, 20.5 percent professional and the technical workers all of whom collectively earn 25 per cent of the shared income. Violence against women is on the rise. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women.

It is well recognized fact that societies which discriminate by gender tend to experience less rapid economic growth and poverty reduction than societies which treat men and women more equally. Women Empowerment and would, thus, need to be a core development goal and major part of development policies. Some calculated and conscious policy steps are critical to achieve gender equality and women empowerment in India by the government. Gender assessments have to be undertaken continuously to reveal gaps and monitor progress towards gender equality.

Women Empowerment is essentially the vehicle of change to achieve gender equality that is meaningful and sustainable.

### **Social Empowerment of Women**

The Social Empowerment policies especially relating to women's rights have had a positive growth in the past few decades. The central government is formulating various progressive measures to advance gender equality in social, economic, and political arenas. The Government of India (GoI) has two main bodies to advance gender equality: the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the National Commission for Women, which is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Women and Child Development

The Constitution of India provides equal rights and opportunities to women. In reality the right to social and economic justice envisaged in the Preamble and elongated in the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of the Constitution. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but it also empowers the State to adopt various measures of positive discrimination in favor of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. The major constitutional privileges are as listed below.

- (i) Equality before law for women (Article 14)
- (ii) The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 )
- (iii) The State to make any special provision in favor of women and children (Article 15 (3))
- (iv) Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16)
- (v) The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d))
- (vi) To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A)
- (vii) The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42)

(viii) The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46)

(ix) To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e))

(x) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat (Article 243 D(3))

(xi) Not less than one- third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women (Article 243 D (4))

(xii) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality (Article 243 T (3))

#### Initiatives for Women by the Indian Government

(i) National Commission for Women: In January 1992, the Government set-up this statutory body with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.

(ii) Women Reservation in Local Self-Government: The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas.

(iii) The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000): It ensures survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child. National Policy for Children-2013 was adopted by the Government of India on 26th April 2013

(iv) The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women- 2001: The Department of Women & Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared a “National Policy for the Empowerment of Women” in the year 2001. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women..

## Government Programmes for Social Empowerment of Women

Empowerment of women is a socio-political ideal, encompassing notions of dignity and equality, envisioned in relation to the wider framework of women's rights. It is a process of gaining control over self, over resources and over existing societal perceptions and attitudes. Some of the major government social empowerment programmes are listed below-

- (i) **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)** - The Union Government has announced **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)** programme in India. The initial focus of BBBP was limited to districts which were either below national average or were worse in their own states in terms of absolute values of child sex ratio. The specific objectives of scheme are prevention of gender biased sex selective elimination, ensuring survival & protection of the girl child and ensuring education and participation of the girl child
- (ii) **Women Helpline (WHL)** – It is **One Stop Centre Scheme (OSC)** under which one OSC shall be established in every State/UT to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof. Women affected by violence and in need of redressal services will be referred to OSC through WHL. The Scheme of Universalisation of Women Helpline is intended to provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence through referral (linking with appropriate authority such as police, One Stop Centre, hospital) and information about women related government schemes programs across the country through a single uniform number.
- (iii) **Ujjawala** – It is a comprehensive scheme for prevention of trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration of victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. The new scheme has been conceived primarily for the purpose of preventing trafficking on the one hand and rescue and rehabilitation of victims on the other.
- (iv) **Swadhar Greh**- A Scheme that caters to primary needs of women in difficult circumstances. A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances was launched by the Department of Women and Child Development in 2001- 02. The scheme through the provisions of shelter, food, clothing, counseling, training, clinical and legal aid aims to rehabilitate such women in difficult circumstance

(v) Family Counseling Centres- The Family Counseling Centre programme was introduced in 1983 due to increasing violence against women specially dowry related cases. The centres provide counseling, referral and rehabilitative services to women and girls who are victims of atrocities, family maladjustments and social ostracism.

(vi) Short Stay home Programme- The objective of the Short Stay Homes programme is to rehabilitate women and girls who are facing social, economical and emotional setback due to family problem, exploitations, violence or being forced into prostitution. Under Short Stay Home programme, temporary shelter to women and girls, medical care, counseling, occupational therapy, education and vocational training is provided according to the requirements of the inmates. The period of stay normally extends from six months to three years.

(vii) Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (Sabla)- A comprehensive scheme for the holistic development of adolescent girls called 'Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls' (RGSEAG) Sabla is a centrally sponsored program of Government of India initiated on April 1, 2011 under Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD). Sabla aims at an all-round development of adolescent girls (AGs) of 11–18 years by making them self reliant by facilitating access to learning, health and nutrition through various interventions such as health, education, vocational training .

(viii) Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC): It is a comprehensive programme to ensure sanitation facilities in rural areas with the broader goal to eradicate the practice of open defecation. The key intervention areas are Individual Household Latrines (IHL), School Sanitation and Hygiene Education (SSHE), Community Sanitary Complex, Anganwadi toilets supported by Rural Sanitary Marts (RSMs) and Production Centers (PCs)

### **Economic Empowerment of Women**

The participation of women in the economy is the reflection of economic empowerment of women. Economic empowerment is basically the capacity of women and men to participate in the economy and contribute to and benefit from growth processes. Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information. As

per Census 2011, the workforce participation rate for females is 25.51% against 53.26% for males. A Pilot Time Use Survey conducted by the Central Statistical Organization came out with the startling revelation that 51% of the works of women which qualify for inclusion in GDP are not recognized and remain unpaid. Traditionally women have been discriminated in her access to the productive resources. She has been denied coparcenaries rights over the ancestral property. She has been denied ownership of land, cattle, trees, harvest and shelter. She has been discriminated in accessing credit and marketing facilities for her economic activities. Major interventions at the macro economic and social policy levels are required to eliminate these age-old discriminations against women. Some of the major government economic empowerment programmes are listed below-

- (i) Swayamsidha Program- It is an integrated scheme for the empowerment of women at a total cost of Rs. 116.30 Crores. It is implemented by ministry for women and child development. Crux of this program will be the establishment of women's self-help groups which will empower women to have increased access to all kinds of resources that they are denied, in addition to increasing their awareness and skills.
- (ii) The Support to Training & Employment Programme for Women (STEP) - The Scheme was launched as a Central Sector Scheme in 1986-87. The scheme aims to make a significant impact on women by upgrading skills for employment on a self-sustainable basis and income generation for marginalized and asset-less rural and urban women especially those in SC/ST households and families below poverty line. The key strategies include training for skill development, mobilizing women in viable groups, arranging for marketing linkages and access to credit. The scheme also provides for enabling support services in the form of health checkups, child-care, legal & health literacy, elementary education and gender sensitization
- (iii) The Working Women's Hostel (WWH) Scheme – It envisages provision of safe and affordable hostel accommodation to working, single working woman, women working at places away from their hometown and for women being trained for employment.
- (iv) Mahila E-Haat- This is a unique direct online marketing platform leveraging technology for supporting women entrepreneurs/Self Help Groups (SHGs)/ Non Government Organizations(NGOs) for showcasing the products / services which are made/manufactured/ undertaken by them. It is an initiative for meeting aspirations and needs of women. This was



done keeping in mind that technology is a critical component for business efficiency and to make it available to the majority of Indian women entrepreneurs / SHGs / NGOs.

(v) Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD)- The scheme envisaged economic empowerment exclusively of women through trade related training, information and counseling extension activities related to trades, products, services etc. The Scheme has provided for financial loans through Non Government Organizations (NGOs) who were also provided Government of India grant for capacity building. This Assistance was to be provided for self-employment ventures by women for pursuing any kind of non-farm activity. The focal point of the scheme is to provide grant assistance to the nodal NGO which has been sanctioned bank loan for passing through the same to eligible women for taking up non-farm activities.

(vi) Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises – Development Institutes (MSME-DIs), Entrepreneurship Development Institutes (EDIs) and NGOs conducting training programmes for empowerment of women beneficiaries identified under the scheme would be provided a grant up to maximum limit of Rs. 1.00 lakh per programme provided such institutions also bring their share to the extent of minimum 25% of the Government grant.

(vii) Development Of Women And Children In Rural Areas (DWCRA)- The scheme - DWCRA was aimed to improve the socio-economic status of the poor women in the rural areas through creation of groups of women for income-generating activities on a self-sustaining basis. The main strategy adopted under the programme was to facilitate access for poor women to employment, skill up gradation, training credit and other support services so that the DWCRA women as a group could take up income-generating activities for supplementing their incomes. It sought to encourage collective action in the form of group activities which were known to work better and were more sustainable than the individual effort

(viii) The Mahila Samridhi Yojana- It is a centrally sponsored scheme, which was launched on 2-10-1993. Through MSY, every rural woman aged 18 and above can open an MSY account of money she can save The department of Women and Child Development under the ministry of Human Resource Development gets the scheme implemented through the network of 1.32 lakh post offices of the Department of Posts functioning in the rural areas. An important aspect of the programme is that of involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at all levels. NGOs will hold awareness generation camps in villages through which they would mobilize

women to take up savings as a conscious choice. The Mahila Samridhi Yojana is a centrally sponsored scheme, which was launched in 1993. Through MSY, every rural woman aged 18 and above can open an MSY account of money she can save.

(ix) Indira Mahila Yojana- It is another women development programme initiated by the Government, which was launched in August 1995 in more than 200 blocks of the country. The main objective of this programme is to give a forward thrust to the women education, awareness income-generation capacities and the empowerment of women. The platforms for the forward thrust are to be the self help groups at the grass-root level. Under this scheme women are to be constituted into Mahila Block Societies (MBS) at the Anganwadi level. At the grass-root level under every Anganwadi there should be women's self-help groups. The Mahila Groups will be encouraged to take up some thrift activity also. The fund so collected over a period can be revolved amongst the members for financial support to the expansion of their income generation activities or also for starting of a new activity.

(x) The Rashtriya Mahila Kosh – It was established by the Department of Women and Child Development, under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, for the purpose of delivery of credit through women's development corporations/non-governmental organizations and self-help groups to 2 lakh poor women from both rural and urban areas whose family income does not exceed Rs. 11,000/- per annum in rural areas and Rs. 11,800/- per annum in urban areas. The interest charged is 12% per annum to the ultimate borrower women and 8% to the NGOs and the corporations.

(xi) Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS): MNREGS heralded a new beginning in addressing the unemployment crisis. This nationwide employment programme guarantees 100 days of unskilled work for every household in the rural area in every year. While providing employment, it seeks to ensure that at least one-third of the beneficiaries are women. The Act sensitive to working conditions of women workers as it advocates providing accessible worksite (within 5 kms of workers' residence), crèches for women with children below six and, above all, gender parity of wages. Being a nationwide programme it can be further engendered to pay large dividends towards empowerment of women

## **Educational Empowerment of Women in India**

Education is a key intrusion in sustaining processes of empowerment of women. A quality education can help women and marginalized communities to improve their status and enable them to have greater access to information and resources and to challenge various forms of discrimination. Not only has this education also helps to strengthen democratic processes as it allows for greater and more equitable participation. Being educated or literate leads to greater self-confidence and self-esteem. It enables engagement with development processes and institutions of governance from a position of strength. Poor women of India especially from socially disadvantaged communities are generally illiterate and hence they find themselves at a disadvantage when participating in development processes. Indian government have taken various steps in the field of educational empowerment such as according to 93rd Constitution Amendment Act in 2005 which makes Education for all children aged 6-14 a fundamental right. At international platforms, the Indian government ratified education for all (EFA) goals as one of the major developmental policy apart from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) . Based on the EFA commitments, the government has devised specific policies like the National Action Plan, National Literacy Mission (NLM) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The expansion of education among girls and women has been an integral part of almost all the educational policies and programmes. The National Policy on Education 1986 (as modified in 1992) lays emphasis on education of girls/women through empowerment programmes. Some of the major government economic empowerment programmes are listed below-

(i) “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao”-Under this newly announced programme Rs.5.00 crore has been made available for strengthening girls’ education in 100 specified districts on the basis of Child Sex Ratio which works out to Rs.5.00 lakh per district, for instituting district level awards to be given to 5 schools in each district every year

(ii) National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE) – It provides Rs.3000.00 which is deposited in the name of eligible unmarried girls below 16 years as fixed deposit, who are entitled to withdraw it along with interest thereon on reaching 18 years of age and after passing class X. The objective of the scheme is to establish an enabling environment to reduce the drop outs and to promote the enrolment of girls children in secondary schools. The

scheme covers (i) all girls belonging to SC/ST communities, who pass class 8 and (ii) all girls who pass class 8 from KGBVs and enroll in class IX in Government, Government-aided and Local Body Schools. The funds under the scheme are not allocated State-wise. Funds are sanctioned to States/UTs based on the proposals received from the State Government and availability of funds under the scheme during the financial year.

(iii) Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)-It has targeted interventions for girls which include opening of schools in the neighborhood to make access easier for girls, appointment of additional teachers including women teachers, free textbooks, free uniforms, separate toilets for girls, teachers' sensitization programmes to promote girls participation, gender-sensitive teaching materials including textbooks. In addition, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBV) has been opened in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) where the female rural literacy is below the national average to provide for residential upper primary schools for girls.

(iv) Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)-It envisages enhancing the quality of education by providing a secondary school within a reasonable distance of every habitation, improving quality of education imparted at secondary level, removal of gender, socio-economic and disability barriers. It Includes construction of new secondary schools, provision of toilets blocks in existing schools with separate toilets for girls, construction of teachers quarters, construction of Girls Hostels in Educational Backward Blocks (EBB) special teaching for learning enhancement, self defense training, guidance and counseling facilities, conduct of adolescent education programmes, organization of empowerment/awareness camps are taken up to improve the education of girls at the secondary stage.

(v) Higher Education sector- University Grants Commission (UGC) has allocated special grants for construction of Women hostels in the Universities. UGC has provided financial assistance for construction of 535 (39 in universities + 496 in colleges) Women hostels in the last five years, UGC has undertaken a number of measures for the improvement of education of Women. Some of them are Single Girl Child Scheme, Post-Doctoral Fellowship for Women, UGC funding to Women's University which are set up exclusively for women, Udaan to provide

free online resources to girl students of Class XI and Class XII for preparation of admission test for the premier engineering colleges in the country.

(vi) All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has launched a scheme to provide assistance for Advancement of Girls participation in Technical Education. This is an attempt to give every young woman the opportunity to further her education and prepare for a successful future by empowering women through technical education. The scheme envisages to grant 4000 scholarships per annum. This includes tuition fee of Rs. 30000/- or at actual, whichever is less and Rs. 2000/- per month for 10 months as incidentals each year.

(vii) Saakshar Bharat –It is National Literacy Mission was recast with its new variant, Saakshar Bharat launched in 2009. It aims to accelerate adult education, especially for women in the age group of 15 years and above. It targets to raise literacy rate to 80% by 2012 and reduce the gap to half by the same period. The Mission envisages setting up of well-equipped multi-functional Lok Shiksha Kendras at the Gram Panchayat level to provide institutional, managerial and resource support to literacy and lifelong education at grass root level. At least one Lok Shiksha Kendra is to be established in each Gram Panchayat in the districts covered under the Programme. The Mission primarily focuses on women, SCs, STs, minorities, other disadvantaged groups and adolescents in rural areas in low literacy States.

### **Political Empowerment of Women in India**

India is one of the largest democratic country in which almost half of the population is women. The Indian Constitution gives equal political rights to women in India. India has fared moderately in a global ranking of countries as per the percentage of women appointed in ministerial positions, but was at a bleak position in another list on number of women parliamentarians. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women launched the ‘Women in Politics 2017 Map’, a visual representation of women’s political empowerment in which India ranked 88th out of 186 countries in the list with 18.5 per cent of women appointed in ministerial positions as of January 1, 2017. Countries like Rwanda, Kenya, Mozambique and South Sudan are far better than India in the ranking. Although Amendments to the Indian Constitution were made in 1992 and 1993, which provided for 33 per cent reservation for women in panchayats and

urban local bodies in India. These amendments served as an affirmative action and a major breakthrough towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in political power structures. Since Independence we had so far 15 women chief ministers and 23 women governors. Apart from this only one woman so far served as President of India and we had no woman as Vice-President and Chief Justice of India. There was only one woman who got the opportunity to serve as Chief Election Commissioner. The Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010, took a 'historic and giant step' by voting (191 for and 1 against) to amend the Constitution, providing one-third reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies for women. Till today bill is not passed by the Lok Sabha and ratified by one-half of the states before it comes into effect.

Although Political parties have increased outreach among women voters as India's party system has become more competitive. This has included the creation of women's wings in the largest parties. Women's participation in political parties still remained low. Although Indian women have taken the initiative to form their own political parties, and in 2007, the United Women Front party was created, and has advocated for increasing the reservation of seats for women in parliament to 50%. Women only govern four of India's political parties. From 1980-1970, 4.3% of candidates and 70% of electoral races had no women candidates at all. As of 2013, it has been reported of the members of parliament 11% were women in Lok Sabha and 10.6% in Rajya Sabha

Women get one-third reservation in Gram Panchayats (meaning Village Assembly, which is a form of local village government) and Municipal elections. There is a long-term plan to extend this reservation to Parliament and State Legislative assemblies. The Women's Reservation Bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha on 9 March 2010 by a majority vote of 186 members in favour and 1 against. It will now go to the Lok Sabha, and if passed there, would be implemented. With the reservation already increased to 50 percent in several states, e.g., Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Rajasthan and a Constitutional amendment to this effect in the process, the Panchayats will have great potential for women's empowerment and their contribution to gender sensitive good governance. Women face social, economic and various other forms of institutional barriers to entering Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and even in performing their duties as elected representatives. Important limitations to women's participation include the

terms of inclusion, the rules of decentralization, gender-based division of labor, the policy of rotation of seats etc. Social barriers such as lack of education, oppressive patriarchal and caste structures, lack of respect of women in PRIs, physical violence in public and domestic spheres, local politics based on caste/class/religious dynamics also affects the participation of women adversely. Further, uneven and limited devolution of powers and resources in the States, with no untied funds also adds to the constraints. Thus, although the number of women in elected local bodies in India has gone up significantly, the extent and quality of their participation in PRIs remains an issue of major concern.

### **Conclusion**

The position and status of women has risen worldwide incredibly especially in the 20th century. We found that the status of women was very low in 18th and 19th centuries in India and elsewhere when they were treated like ‘objects’ rather as an equal human being, that can be bought and sold. Since long women in India remained within the four walls of their household and they were solely dependent on the men of the house. A very long struggle over a century has brought women in the ambit of some equal rights such as property rights, educational rights, political rights, an equality in civil rights before the law in matters of marriage and employment. There was a time when women’s education was not a priority even among the elite social class. But now slowly and gradually the things are shifting in favor of women empowerment in India too.

The last quarter of the 20th century and more so after the opening up of economy i.e. post-1991 reform , a growing number of women have been entering into the economic field, seeking paid work (remunerative jobs) outside the family. Women are playing bigger and bigger role in economic field: as workers, consumers, entrepreneurs, managers and investors.

In spite of their increasing number in every field, women still remain perhaps the world’s most underutilized resources. Many are still excluded from paid work and many do not make best use of their skills. Similarly it is found that in the society the acceptance of unequal gender norms by women themselves are still prevailing. There is a huge gender gap in literacy and participation of girls at all stages of education. Not only this almost 50% of women are employed and a

significant portion of them are not paid for their work. However, having access to employment does not mean that women have full control over their earnings. Fewer women have final say on how to spend their earnings.

Although Government of India is implementing a number of programmes, for improving access to employment, education, health, infrastructure development, urban development, etc. Some of these are flagship programmes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Integrated Child Development Scheme, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan and National Rural Health Mission. Further, in recognition of the role played by infrastructure in poverty removal, the Government also launched a time-bound plan under Bharat Nirman in 2005. In order to ensure that women are equal beneficiaries in all programmes, their needs and concerns are incorporated. Many of these, especially the infrastructure delivery programmes, although seemingly gender neutral, often have a differential impact on women in view of their different life experiences, requirements, socio-cultural drivers and priorities. These constraints also need to be identified and addressed. Unless the attitude towards the acceptance of unequal gender role by the society and even the women themselves changed women cannot grab the opportunity provided to them through constitutional provision and law.(Pursottam Nayak and Bidsha Mohanty,2009) Although government have taken various initiative regarding empowerment of women but still there are grey areas both at functional and operational level

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