

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND MAJOR INITIATIVE
IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The hypothetical base of Social justice promises an individual to guard against any oppression discrimination and deprivation of Social, Economic and Political liberty. Its Social sphere argues for equality in terms of expression of ideas, belief, faith, worship etc. It also facilities the opportunity to promote the dignity of individual and respectful life. Social justice in terms of Economic activities provide an equal opportunity for participation in Economic activities to all without any discrimination and believe on the equal distribution of income an wealth, accessibility to basic necessities to all, provision of housing health and sanitation facilities as well as other social safety nets. In its Political perspectives of all citizens in Political affairs. No one should deny from participation in Political activities on the basis of caste, clan, gender, race etc.

Key words: Empowerment, Social justice, Discrimination, Measures.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Social Justice is as old the human civilization though its dimensions have been changed with the rolling of time. The revolutionary aspect of social justice gives a significant meaning to the democratic way of life and perfects the rules of Law. The concept of Social justice acknowledges a sense of participation in all spheres of human activities Social, Economic and Political in the mind of masses. It therefore, guaranties the quality among natives of a defined area with respect to all dimensions of human life.

The present paper is a theoretical paper divided in to two parts. In Part-I. The concept has three aspects of social justice and Part-II gives picture on the empowerment and status of women in India the measures undertaken by Indian Govt. and major initiatives for improving the status of women in India. Finally the author tried to present the conclusions above the study.

The hypothetical base of Social justice promises an individual to guard against any oppression discrimination and deprivation of Social, Economic and Political liberty. Its Social sphere argues for equality in terms of expression of ideas, belief, faith, worship etc. It also facilities the opportunity to promote the dignity of individual and respectful life. Social justice in terms of Economic activities provide an equal opportunity for participation in Economic activities to all without any discrimination and believe on the equal distribution of income an wealth, accessibility to basic necessities to all, provision of housing health and sanitation facilities as well as other social safety nets. In its Political Perspectives of al citizens in Political affairs. No one should denied from participation in Political activities on the basis of caste, clan, gender, race etc.

These all three aspect of social justice are equally important and no one can be weighted as inferior to other, however economic aspect may be regarded as the axis of social justice since it affects the other two aspects of social justice in some way or the other.

The Indian Constitution not only grants equality for women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. From the Fifth

Five Year Plan (1947-78) onwards there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as a central issue in determining the status of women. The Act of Parliament in 1990 safeguards the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayaths and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision-making at the local levels. The women's movement and a widespread network of non-Government Organizations that have strong grassroots presence and deep insight into women's concerns have contributed to inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women.

1.1 Goal and Objectives of the National Policy:

The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement development and empowerment of women. The objectives of the policy include.

1. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women for enabling them to realize their full potential;
2. Enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres--- political, economic, social cultural and civil;
3. Equal access to participation and decision-making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation;
4. Equal access to women to health care, \quality education at all levels, career and vocational health and safety, social security and public, etc;
5. Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
6. Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women;
7. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
8. Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
9. Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society particularly women's organizations.

National policy for the Empowerment of women (2001) – A Review

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1.2 Measures undertaken by Indian Government: Economic Empowerment of Women:

- a) Poverty Education- There will be improved implementation of programmes which are already women-oriented with special targets for women. Steps will be taken to offer them economical and social options with necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities.
- b) Micro- Credit- Establishment of new and strengthening of existing micro- credit mechanisms and micro- finance institutions will be undertaken so that the out reach of credit is enhanced. Other supportive measures would be taken to ensure adequate flow of credit through extent financial institutions and banks, so that all women below poverty line have easy access to credit.
- c) Women and Agriculture- The programmes include training women in soil conservation, social forestry, dairy development and other occupations allied to agriculture like horticulture, livestock including small animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries, etc. will be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector.
- d) Women and Industry- The important role played by women in electronics, information technology and food processing, agro- industry and textiles have been crucial to the development of these sectors. Women cannot work in night shifts even if they wish to. Suitable measures will be taken to enable women to work in night shift in factories and also providing support services for security, transportation, etc.

1.3 Social Empowerment of Women:

- a) Education- Equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured. Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender- sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/ vocation/ technical skills by women, with a special

focus on girls and women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the Scheduled Cates/ Scheduled Tribes/ other Backward Classes/ Minorities.

b) Health- Measures will be adopted to take into account the reproductive rights of women, their vulnerability to sexual and health problems together with endemic, infectious and communicable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis (TB) and water borne diseases. The social, development and health consequences of HIV/aids and other sexually transmitted diseases will be tackled from a gender perspective.

c) Nutrition- In view of the high risk of the malnutrition and disease that women face at all the three critical stages viz., infancy and childhood, adolescent and reproductive phase, focused attention would be paid to meeting the nutritional needs of women at all stage of the life cycle. This is also important in view of critical link between the health of adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women with the health of infant and young children. Special efforts will be made to tackle the problem of macro micro nutrient deficiencies especially amongst pregnant and lactation women as it leads to various diseases and disabilities. Intra- household discrimination in nutrition matter of girls and women sorted out through appropriate strategies. Widespread use of nutrition education would be made to address the issues of intra- household imbalances in nutrition and the special needs of pregnant and lactating women. Women's participation will also be ensured in the planning, superintendence and evlivery of the system.

d) Drinking Water and Sanitation- Special attention will be given to the needs of women in the provision of safe drinking water, sewage disposal, toilet facilities and sanitation within accessible reach of households, especially in rural areas and urban slums. Women's participation will be ensured in the planning delivery and maintenance of such services.

e) Housing and Shelter- Women's perspectives will be included in housing policies, planning of the housing colonies and provision of shelter both in rural and urban areas. Special attention will be given for providing adequate and safe housing and accommodation for women including single women, heads of households, working women, students, apprentices and trainees.

f) Environment- Women will be involved in spreading the use of solar energy, biogas, smokeless "chulhas" (stoves) and other rural application so as to have a visible

impact of these measures in influencing ecosystem and in changing lifestyles of rural women.

g) Science and Technology- Measures to motivate girls to take up science and technology for higher education and for training in areas where they have special skills like communication and information technology. Efforts to develop appropriate technologies suited to women's needs as well as to reduce their drudgery will be given a special focus.

h) Women in difficult circumstances- Measures to provide special assistance to 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.

i) Violence against Women- All forms of violence against women, physical and mental, whether at domestic or societal level, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices shall be dealt with effectively with a view to eliminate its incidence. Institutions and mechanisms/ schemes for assistance will be created and strengthened for prevention of such violence, including sexual harassment at workplace and customs like dowry for the rehabilitation of victims of violence and for taking actions against perpetrators of such violence. Special measures will be taken to deal with trafficking in women and girls.

j) Rights of the Girl Child- All forms of discrimination against the girl child and violation of her right: against prenatal sex, practices of female foeticide, female infanticide, child marriage, child abuse and child prostitution, etc., will be prevented. Special emphasis relating to food and nutrition, health and education, vocational education and eliminating child labour will be a special focus on girl children.

1.4 Political empowerment of Women:

- 1) Political equality is granted to women under the Indian constitution, guaranteed through instrument of adult franchise and by Article 15 which prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex. But the constitution as sanction is enjoyed only to a limited extent by women in reality.

- 2) More and more women are now actively participating in the political process but only a few women hold elected positions, fewer still are so placed as to be able to influence political thinking.
- 3) There is a greater awareness among women of power that the right of franchise has given to them, but the extent of awareness varies significantly between different groups and different religions.
- 4) The level of literacy and urbanization gave an impact on the awareness, but the political parties have generally been indifferent towards women and treating them more as appendices to men.
- 5) For up gradation of women's status, now they join in cooperative effort and organize themselves major key is to realize their women institution like Mahila- Mandals and other women service organizations should be encouraged to provide a common platform for joint action. Now the time has come that women have to prove, that they are not only useful but also indispensable members of society.
- 6) Although government has made education free for women up to the secondary level and also set-up a separate department of women studies and women cells for women's welfare. In fact, investment in women's education and female literacy (i.e. girl education) would be forceful instrument for economic growth and women empowerment. But this is not sufficient for women empowerment and political socialization of women force. There is a dire need to change the outlook of women as well as society.

1.5 Major Initiatives in India:

There are a number of programmes underway which supplement general development efforts for improving the status of women.

1. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) launched in 1995-96 and retitled as "Swayamsiddha" in 2001 to empower women through awareness generation, achievement of economic strength through micro- level income generating activities and establish convergence of various services such as literacy, health, rural development, etc.
2. The Rural Women's Development and Empowerment Project (RWDEP)- now called "Swashakti" Project was sanctioned in 1998 as a centrally sponsored Project for a period of 5 years with an estimated outlay of Rs.186 crore.

3. Programme for Support of Training and Employment (STEP) for encouraging employment and income- generation.
4. Women's Economic Programme (WEP), (1982-83) with assistance from Norwegian Agencies for Development Corporation (NORAD) for extending financial assistance to Women's Development Corporations, autonomous bodies and Public Sectors to train poor women and to ensure their employment.
5. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) (The National credit fund for Women) was created by the Government of India in 1993. Its purpose is to provide lower income Women with access to loans to begin small business.
6. Hotels for Working Women (HWW) aims to promote greater mobility for women in the employment market through cheap and safe accommodation for working women in low- income groups.
7. Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) through its nation – wide networking have more than 6,00,000 “anganwadi” (child-care) centers and crèches/day-care centers for working/ailing mothers are also being taken up.
8. Short Stay Homes (SSH) for women and girls under implementation since 1969 to protect and rehabilitate women and girls in social and moral danger due to exploitation.
9. A special intervention for improving the well-being of adolescent girls using ICDS infrastructure is Kishori Shakti Yojana -- (KSY). The Scheme aims at –breaking the inter-generational cycle of nutritional and gender disadvantage and providing supportive environment for self-development of the girl child in the group of 11-18 years.
10. UDISHA- the ongoing ICDS Training Programme is being strengthened into a dynamic training-cum-human resource development programme; with World Bank assistance to the extent of Rs. 6 crore has been committed.
11. Another national level programme launched in 1997 to improve the status of the girl belonging to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) groups is the “Balika Samridhi Yojana” (BSY). This Scheme has been reformulated in 1999 to extend. (i) post-delivery grant of Rs. 500. (ii) Annual scholarship ranging from Rs. 300 to Rs. 1000 between classes I to X. These amounts can be deposited in Post Office or Bank with interest bearing account in the name of the girl child and be paid to the girl child in lump sum on attaining the age of 18 years.

12. Three National Plans of Action for children, “The National Policy for Children (1974)”, “National Charter for Children (1992)”, and “National Commission for Children (1992)” are major initiatives which are in process which have brought about a positive change in crucial indicators like infant and child mortality rates, school enrolment and levels of malnutrition in children with special concentration on the girl child.

13. Mother and Child Tracking System (MCTS) is launched in 2009, helps monitor the health care system to ensure that all mothers and their children have access to a range of services, including pregnancy care, medical care during delivery and immunization. The system consists of a database of all pregnancies registered at health care facilities since 1st December 2009 and all births since 1st December 2009.

14. The Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahayog Yojana (IGMSY) conditional maternity benefits (CMV) is a scheme sponsored by the national Government for pregnant and lactating Women age 19 and over for their first two live births. The programme, which began in October 2010, provides money to help ensure the good health nutrition of the recipients. As of March 2013 the programme is being offered in 53 Districts around the country.

15. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme For Empowerment of Adolescent Girls - Sabla – is an initiative launched in 2012 that targets adolescent girls. The Scheme offers a package of benefits to at risk girls between the ages of 10 to 19. It is being offered initially as a pilot programme in 200 districts. The programme offers a variety of services to help young women become self-reliant, including nutritional supplement and education, health education and services and life skills and vocational training.

16. Priyadarshini was initiated in April 2011; is a programme that offers women in seven districts access to self-help groups.

17. Indiramma Amrutha Hastham (IAH) which involves sport feeding of (1) One full meal (2) For pregnant lactating women at the Anganwadi Centre along with administration of Iron & Folic Acid (IFA) Tablet. The programme was started on 01-01-2013 in ICDS projects with most adverse health and nutrition indicators. During 2013-14 it was extended to some other ICDS projects and now covers about 40% of the ICDS projects and 40% of the pregnant and lactating women in the state.]

18. Bangaru Talli is a welfare scheme for girls launched by Government of Andhrapradesh. The scheme supports the family of girl from her birth till her graduation.

All the below poverty line (white card) holders are eligible for the scheme. It was launched on May 1st 2013. The supporting legislative Assembly.

1.6 Conclusion

Women's empowerment might be considered as an important aspect social justice because ignoring them will be a mistake and may paved the way for unjust society since women constitute 48 percentage of the total population. For the uplift of women, changes in the value system are required they should be made aware of their political and legal rights basic attitudes of both men and women are needed to change. A series and deliberate and planned efforts are essential to enhance the status of women. Various studies have revealed that Indian women work more than men, bearing the double burden of supplementing the family income and managing the household work. The number of obstacles a women faces throughout her life is innumerable poverty, lack of personal freedom, unhappy relationships, discrimination and ignorance, yet struggle to turn all adversity into advantages.

As we celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, it is time to address discrimination against women, ensure them the power to make decisions, to earn a living and protection from violence, abuse and exploitation.

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