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Empowerment of Women in India-A Study of Select Government Initiatives

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ABSTRACT:

Corporate Social Responsibility is a nomenclature which is widely used for improving the image of a corporate entity. It is generally believed that businesses never thrive in vacuum. Corporate social responsibility has to do with an organization going out of his way to initiate actions that will impact positively on its host community, its environment and the people generally. CSR in Education so far in India has mostly involved steps to promote education among local communities or society at large by building schools (built by a company free of cost or at a minimal cost to the company or society), scholarships (offered to underprivileged/meritorious students at various levels of education, for primary or higher studies), sponsorships (helping schools run efficiently by providing teaching aids, books, uniform, shoes, and bags), increasing access to education (supporting/building secondary schools in localities that do not have one; encouraging children to go to school by spreading awareness, helping or training teachers, providing infrastructure for the school; free transport facility) and higher education (setting up or supporting higher or technical educational institutes like vocational training centers, engineering colleges, schools offering training in other fields such as management. The Government of India thus introduced a number of schemes for the welfare of the marginalized people and more specifically for the women and girls. At present, the Government of India has over 37 schemes for women empowerment operated by different departments and ministries. This Paper seeks to bring light on various initiatives taken by government in the direction of welfare of women in India.

KEYWORDS: Corporate Social Responsibility, environment, business, skill upgradation.

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INTRODUCTION:

According to Brigham Young (1801-1877), “If you educate a man; you educate a man. You educate women; you educate a generation”. Education is that which demonstrates the difference between what is good and what is evil. Education means modification of behavior in every aspect, such as mentality, outlook, attitude etc. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Moreover, educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population.^{1,2}

Education is the most important lever for social, economic and political transformation. A well-educated population, equipped with the relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills is essential for economic and social development in the twenty-first century. Education is the most potent tool for socio-economic mobility and a key instrument for building an equitable and just society. Education provides skills and competencies for economic well-being. Education strengthens democracy by imparting the citizens with the tools needed to fully participate in the governance process. Education also acts as an integrative force in society, imparting values that foster social cohesion and national identity^{3,4,50,51}.

EDUCATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Education is a milestone for women empowerment as only the educated women can play a very dominant role in the economic development of our country as well as in becoming informed citizens, parents, and family members. The growth of women’s education in rural areas is very slow implying that still large women folk of our country are illiterate, weak, backward and exploited⁵. Therefore, educating the women is the most powerful tool that can bring change in the position of women in society through bringing reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. Education implies not only gaining knowledge but also transforming that knowledge into application through vocational training and skill development^{5,52,53}.

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Empowerment enables women to acquire knowledge, skills and techniques which will help them in their personal and social growth as well as foster in them sensitivity towards problems in the society. Special efforts are required to be taken for education, health and employment of women. Economic empowerment is essential for the improvement of female sex ratio but economic empowerment is possible only when women are educated and aware^{6,5,54,55}.

Education is the catalyst that helps to form creativity, attitude, capacity, value and confers status. Women are integral part of every economy. All-round development and harmonious growth of a nation would be possible only when women are considered equal partners in progress with men. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation^{6,7,8,55,56}. Women empowerment enables autonomy and control over their lives. The empowered women become agents of their own development, able to exercise choices to set their own agenda and be strong enough to challenge their subordinate position in the society⁹. Rural women have been confined to the four walls of the household, over-burdened with domestic works and controlled of their mobility and personal freedoms by the men of the household since time immemorial. So, they have lagged behind in the fields of education, skill development, employment and as a result, their work is greatly undervalued in economic terms^{6,7,52}.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:

Empowerment enables women to acquire knowledge, skills and techniques which will help them in their personal and social growth as well as foster in them sensitivity towards problems in the society. Special efforts are required to be taken for education, health and employment of women. Economic empowerment is essential for improvement of female sex ratio but economic empowerment is possible only when women are educated⁵.

The empowerment of women include creating awareness and consciousness about situations of women, discrimination of women, rights of women, opportunities to the women and importance of gender equality, organizing a group collectively, group identity and group pressure; capacity building and skill development, ability to plan, to decide, to organize, ability to manage, ability to carry-out activities, ability to deal with people and institutions in the world around them; participation in decision making at home, in the community and in the society, and access and control over resources, over means of productivity and over distribution^{6,10}.

The need for empowering women to participate in the economic activities is essential to build a stronger economy. Economic empowerment of women through participation in the economic activities has led to women's empowerment in aspects such as socio-economic opportunities, representation in the

local and national politics, social equality, legal rights, and community development leading to the national development^{52,57}. Women's economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women's rights and enabling women to have control over their lives and exert influence on society¹¹. Gender equality and empowered women are catalysts for multiplying development efforts. Investments in gender equality yield the highest returns of all development investments⁵⁸. Economic empowerment is central to the overall empowerment of women, and financial inclusion is an important part of this. In recent years, Government has played a significant role in bringing about this transition. Right from recognizing the need to protect the girl child in the womb to protecting career women in their work place, a number of initiatives have been taken¹².

Government of India implemented various poverty alleviation and rural development programs. These programs have special components for women empowerment. At present, the Government of India has over 37 schemes for women operated by different department and ministries. The implementation of these programs/schemes is monitored specifically with reference to coverage of women. Government of India took so many initiatives to empower the women in India^{59,60}. But women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare^{6,13}. For empowerment of women and all round development of women, the ministries of Government of India has come up with various schemes from time to time^{26,31,60,61}. The Government of India thus introduced a number of schemes for the welfare of the people and more specifically for the women and girls. But the schemes also do not reach the appropriate group of people because of lack of awareness and corruption along with a number of other reasons^{14,15,16,52}. But a large number of adolescent girls are yet to be included in the scheme. Most of the people are unaware of the scheme^{17,28}. Thus, it is necessary to educate the people at the grass root level and circulate the schemes among people as many as possible. Funds should be utilized properly so that the purpose of the scheme must be served. Some of the central welfare schemes for women are listed below^{14,18,52}.

WELFARE SCHEMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA:

SWASHAKTI:-

One of the special initiatives taken during the ninth plan included launching of an externally aided scheme of Swashakti (1998) for socio-economic empowerment of women through self-reliant self-help groups^{19,52,61,62,63}. Empowerment Project (RWDEP) was an externally aided centrally sponsored

scheme (CSS) funded by the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)^{23,52,60}. It was also a Self-Help Group (SHG) based scheme for socio-economic empowerment of women with a multi-dimensional and participatory approach for poverty alleviation in a subsidy free manner. Though the project was effective for a period of five years from April' 1999 up to June' 2004 but subsequently it was extended up to June' 2005. The Project was under implementation in 57 districts (335 blocks) of 9 States viz; Bihar, Chhatisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal. A total of 17,647 women SHGs were mobilized under the project covering about 2,44,000 women. A large number of SHGs have been linked to the banks and are engaged in income generating activities^{19,20}.

SWAYAMSIDDHA:-

Swayamsidha, a centrally sponsored scheme was launched in 2001 for a period of 6 years. The scheme covered 650 Blocks in 32 States/Union Territories (UTs). The main objective of Swayamsidha was an all-round empowerment of women, especially social and economic empowerment by ensuring their direct access to and control over resources through a process of mobilization and convergence of all the on-going sectoral programs¹⁹. It promoted Self-Help Groups (SHGs). A total of 68,575 SHGs have been formed under the scheme against the target of 65,000. The scheme was ended in March' 2008. The Govt. of India has desired that the State Government should hand hold the Self Help Groups formed under the Swayamsidha scheme till the launch of the second phase of the program^{19,20}.

SWADHAR:-

Swadhar—A Scheme for Women in difficult circumstances was initiated by the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India in 2001-02 with a flexible and innovative approach to extend rehabilitation services for women in difficult circumstances like shelter, food, clothing and care to marginalized women and girls living in difficult circumstances^{21,13}. It includes women without any social and economic support like destitute widows, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural calamities, trafficked women and women victims of violence who do not have family support. A major objective of this scheme is to provide help line to women in distress. Shelter homes in each district are need of the times. This scheme provides shelter, food, clothing, counseling, training, clinical and legal aid aims to rehabilitate women in difficult circumstances.^{22,19}.

SUPPORT FOR TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (STEP):-

The Support for Training and Employment Program (STEP), a central sector scheme under implementation since 1987 is for providing skills and new knowledge to the poor and asset-less women in trades in traditional sector. Under the scheme, women beneficiaries are organized into viable and cohesive groups or co-operatives⁶⁰. A comprehensive package of services including health care, crèche facilities, market linkages etc. are provided access to credits⁶⁴. Skill development is provided in ten traditional activities to women. The target during 10th Plan period was to provide skill development training to 2.50 lakh women^{22,23,19}.

SVAVLAMBAN:-

Svavlamban, previously known as NORAD's women's economic program was launched in 1982-83 with the assistance from the Norwegian Agency for Development Corporation (NORAD). From 1996-97, however, the program was funded by the Government of India. The objective of the program is to provide training and skills to poor and needy women, women from weaker sections of the society such as SCs and STs etc., to facilitate them to obtain employment and self-employment on a sustainable basis. The program, however, has been transferred to the state government with effect from April' 2006 in order to ensure more effective implementation and for better monitoring and evaluation of the program^{23,24}.

STREE SHAKTI PURASKAR:-

As a measure of recognition of achievements of individual women in the field of social development, the Government of India has decided to institute five national awards which are to be called 'Stree Shakti Puraskar'^{52,65}. These awards will be in the name of the following eminent women personalities in the Indian history, who are famous for their personal courage and integrity: - Devi Ahilya Bai, Kanngi, Mata Jijabai, and Rani Lakshmi Bai²⁵.

PRADHAN MANTRI KAUSHAL VIKAS YOJANA (PMKVY):-

It is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE). The objective of this Skill Certification Scheme is to enable a large number of Indian youth to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood. Individuals with prior learning experience or skills will also be assessed and certified under Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Under this scheme, training and assessment fees are completely paid by the Government^{26,52,66}.

MAHILA SAMRIDHI YOJANA:-

In October 1993, the Government of India launched a scheme called Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY). This is a central sector plan scheme implemented through the network of post offices in rural areas. The Department of Women and Child Development is the nodal institution for implementing this scheme^{27,19}. Mahila Samridhi Yojana encourages every rural adult woman to open an MSY account in her village post-office in which she may deposit her savings. For an amount upto Rs. 300 per year, with a one year lock-in period, government contributes 25 per cent^{28,19,29}.

RAJIV GANDHI SCHEME FOR EMPOWERMENT OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS (RGSEAG):-

Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG), a centrally sponsored scheme has been approved by the Government on 16th August, 2010. The scheme is being implemented in 200 districts across the country on a pilot basis^{27,19}. In the remaining districts, Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) continues to be operational as before. However, Sabla has completely replaced Nutrition Program for Adolescent Girls (NPAG) as all districts of NPAG are now part of the Sabla⁵⁷. The scheme aims at vocational training for girls above 16 years of age for their economic empowerment. Sabla is being implemented through the state governments / UTs with 100 per cent financial assistance from the Central Government for all inputs other than nutrition provision for which 50 per cent central assistance to states is provided^{19,30,57}. Anganwadi Centre is the focal point for the delivery of the services. The basic objectives of Sabla are to provide life skill education and accessing public services to women, vocational training for girls aged 16 and above under National Skill Development Program (NSDP). The successful implementation of Sabla requires convergence with development activities/schemes of other departments such as health, education, youth affairs, labour, PRIs etc. Nearly, 100 lakh adolescent girls per annum are expected to be benefitted under the scheme. Against the allocation of Rs. 350 crore for the year 2010-11, a sum of Rs. 330 crore (approximately) has been released to States / UTs^{19,30,57}.

RASHTRIYA MAHILA KOSH (NATIONAL CREDIT FUND FOR WOMEN):-

The Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (National Credit Fund for Women) was set up in 1993 with a corpus of Rs. 31 crore, against the backdrop of socio-economic constraints faced by poor women to access micro-credit from the formal financial system in the country, especially those in the rural and in unorganized sectors^{31,30,57}. The principal corpus was increased to Rs.100.00 crore during 2009-10. The main objective of setting up of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) under the Department of Women and Child Development (now Ministry) is to provide micro-credit to poor women for various livelihood

support and income generating activities at concessional terms in a client-friendly procedure to bring about their socioeconomic development^{19,57}. The RMK is now being restructured as a NBFC with a corpus of Rs.500.00 crore. There would be a quantum jump in the business volume of the organization through this restructuring. Further, RMK extends loan up to maximum of 18 per cent interest per annum to SHGs / beneficiaries^{19,30,57}.

RAJIV GANDHI NATIONAL CRÈCHES/ DAY CARE CENTRE FOR THE CHILDREN OF WORKING AND AILING MOTHER:-

Named after the former Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, National Creche Scheme was launched on 01 January 2006 to provide day-care facilities to children of working women and other deserving women based on their net annual income. Children aged between 6 months to 6 years are nurtured here. The central sector scheme was later revised and made a centrally sponsored scheme called National Creche Scheme in 2017. The scheme now falls under the umbrella of Integrated Child Development Services under the Ministry of Women and Child Development^{22,32}.

ONE STOP CENTRE (OSCS):-

It is meant to support women affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace. Women facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of age, class, caste, education status, marital status, race, and culture will be facilitated with support and redressal. Aggrieved women facing any kind of violence due to attempted sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, honour-related crimes, acid attacks or witch-hunting who have reached out or been referred to the OSC will be provided with specialized services^{33,52}. OSC are set up in each State/UT. This scheme facilitates access to an integrated range of services including medical, legal, and psychological support. The OSC will be integrated with helpline no. 181 and other existing helplines. Women affected by violence and in need of redressal services could be referred to OSC through these helplines^{22,13,52}.

WOMEN HELPLINE:-

Scheme for universalization of women helpline is meant to provide 24-hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence. This scheme is being implemented from 01-04-2015 by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development^{13,34}. The Scheme of universalization of women helpline is meant 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 number⁶⁷. Women Helpline (WHL) is working with the One Stop Centre Scheme (OSC) under which one OSC will be set up in every State/UT to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof^{13,33}. Women affected by violence and in need of redressal services will be referred to OSC through WHL. Under this Scheme, the States/UTs will utilize or augment their existing women helplines through a dedicated single national number. Department of Telecommunication, Government of India has allocated short code 181 to all States/UTs which is being used by some States/UTs such as Delhi, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh as Women Helpline^{22,32,33}.

UJJAWALA SCHEME:-

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India during the year 2007-2008 introduced a comprehensive scheme for prevention of trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration of victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation (UJJAWALA). The basic objectives of the schemes are to prevent trafficking of women and children, to facilitate rescue of victims, to provide rehabilitation, to facilitate re-integration and to facilitate repatriation of cross-border victims. The Commissioner of Social Defence is designated as Nodal Officer for scrutinizing, inspecting, recommending and forwarding the proposals received from NGOs to Government of India^{19,35,36}.

KISHORI SHAKTI YOJNA:-

Ministry of Women & Child Development is implementing Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) for addressing the needs of self-development, nutrition and health status, literacy and numerical skills, vocational skills of adolescent girls in the age group of 11 to 18 years^{19,68}. The scheme is being implemented through the infrastructure of ICDS. Under KSY, various programmatic options are available to the States/UTs to selectively intervene for the development of the adolescent girls on the basis of specific needs of the area¹⁷. This scheme also seeks convergence with schemes of the health department in order to improve the nutritional and health status of the adolescent girls. Grant-in-aid of Rs. 1.10 lakh per block per annum is released to the States/UTs for the implementation of the scheme^{37,38,68}.

MAHILA E-HAAT:-

Mahila E-Haat is a government initiative to promote women entrepreneurship program by creating a direct online digital market platform for women who are linked to NGO through SHG and other women entrepreneurs that helps them to sell and display their self-made products and services on this platform. It is a Make-in-India initiative that can help to increase women participation in the economy and create a financially inclusive program of women entrepreneurs. The objective of this scheme is to empower and strengthen financial inclusion of women entrepreneurs. This e-platform strives to strengthen the socio-economic empowerment of women by mobilizing and providing better avenues to them. It is expected to benefit more than 10000 Self Help Groups (SHGs) and 1.25 Lakh women. The e-Haat may also bring paradigm shift in socio-economic conditions of women by facilitating them to exercise control over their finances^{33,29}.

DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN RURAL AREAS (DWCRA):-

It is 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^{21,55}. DWCRA envisages that once women improve their economic and social status, they would be a vehicle for delivery of the health and education benefits to the family particularly children²¹. DWCRA is different from other government program as it is specially intended for poor women and children in rural areas with emphasis and stimulation for self-help and self-reliance. It is based on awareness and stimulation for self-help and oriented towards voluntary group efforts. Other government schemes and program are individual or family oriented, and concerned with the entire population and highly dependent on institutional and outside support^{39,40,55,60}.

KASTURBA

BALIKA

VIDYALAYA:-

Launched in 2004, the KGBV scheme aims at setting up residential schools for girls belonging to minority communities at the upper primary level. This scheme is mainly implemented in the parts of the country where girls aren't enrolled in school⁶⁹. This scheme provides reservation of 25 percent to girls from families below the poverty line and the rest 75 percent to the girls belonging to ST, SC, OBC, and other minority communities. The main idea behind this scheme is that by setting-up residential schools, girls from disadvantaged groups of the society can access quality education⁴¹. KGBV has been opened in educationally backward blocks (EBBs) where the female rural literacy is below the national average for residential upper primary schools for girls. 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 year^{41,70,71}.

DHANLAKSHMI SCHEME:-

This is a conditional cash transfer scheme for the girl child with an insurance cover which would go a long way towards ensuring the survival of the girl child and assuring a better life for her^{42,43}. The direct and tangible objective of the scheme is to provide a set of financial incentives for families to encourage them to retain a girl child, educate her and prevent child marriage. The scheme provides for cash transfers to the family of the girl child (preferably to the mother) on fulfilling certain specific conditions^{42,60}. All girls born after 19 November 2008 are eligible, after registration of birth. An insurance maturity cover will be taken for the girl child born after 19 November 2008 and if the girl child remains unmarried till the age of 18 years, she will get Rs. 1 lakh. Each condition like registration of birth, immunization, school enrolment and retention, insurance (maturity) cover are independent of each other and cannot be applied for retrospective fulfilment of conditionality⁴². For example, if a girl is in Standard-2, she will be eligible for cash transfer from Standard-2 onwards and will not be eligible for cash transfers related to her birth and registration of birth, immunization, enrolment and retention in Standard⁴³. The scheme will apply to all girl children irrespective of their socio-economic status and the number of girl children in the family⁴³.

BETI BACHAO, BETI PADHAO:-

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the daughter, educate the daughter) is a campaign of the Government of India that is aimed at spreading awareness and enhancing the efficiency of welfare services for girls in the country^{43,44,70}. The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme is a national initiative jointly run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Human Resource Development. It addresses the issue of declining child sex ratio in the country. The campaign aims at ensuring that girls are born, nurtured and educated without discrimination to become empowered citizens of this country. The campaign interlinks national, state and district level interventions with community-level action, bringing together different stakeholders for accelerated impact^{43,44,70}. The initiative's YouTube channel shows various videos related to the campaign^{22,72}.

CONCLUSION:

In a diverse and populous country like India, the government machinery is not fully capable in implementation of various schemes and policies. The reasons can be attributed to mainly two factors; firstly, inefficiency of government in implementation and secondly, lack of awareness among people especially women. Indian government's intention to provide assistance to the poor and their upliftment is clear, but at the implementation part, government fails⁴⁴. The reason of inefficiency of Government to enforce the developmental schemes can be attributed to improper monitoring, lack of accountability, corruption and misalignment of incentives^{45,44}.

The Government should take responsibility to reach out the women through social media, public campaigns promoting awareness of various governmental schemes among women^{46, 44}. What is needed is a mechanism to ensure that the skill-set is identified and honed in the best possible way. It is the fundamental responsibility of Government to ensure that all women in our country from different occupations are trained in their respective skill-sets and are employable. Their skill-set should be best used to help them become self-employed entrepreneurs⁴⁷.

In order to really bring women empowerment in the Indian society, it needs to understand and eliminate the main cause of the ill practices against women which are patriarchal and male dominated system of the society. It needs to be open-minded and change the old mindset against the women together with the constitutional and other legal provisions²².

Besides, various schemes are being implemented to uplift socio-economic status of rural poor women and pave a path for their empowerment⁴⁸. There are many schemes, many programs for the purpose of women empowerment at every stage of administration⁴⁹. Proper awareness about the schemes and policies should not be restricted to papers only but the implementation should be there so that every woman can be familiar with her rights⁴⁹. Women' education has to be made compulsory and women should be encouraged to become literate because without being educated, women cannot have a access to her right^{49,73}. Awareness camps for women should be organized where they can become familiar with the framed schemes and policies and can take benefit of them^{43,49}. When a woman is educated and skilled, she also makes a family and society educated and skilled. As long as women are not fully educated, skilled and prosperous, the country cannot achieve the desired economic growth⁴⁷.

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