

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT UNDER THE SHADOW OF UPA GOVERNMENT

Preeti

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, H.P.U. Shimla

Woman empowerment is an elaborated and burning issue of the 21st century whose waves have been come out from the four walls of the home to the corridors of The Indian Parliament. This is why the focus of government plans is on “Woman Empowerment” instead of “Woman Development”. Now, the very first question that strikes in the mind is what does the women empowerment literally meant? The real meaning of women empowerment is when a woman can make the best approach in order to achieve her ultimate destination fearlessly that she wants without losing her dignity. Like men folk, she should be provided with financial independency, and enjoys equal rights to seek higher education. She should be taken care of her likes and dislikes and sentimental values where she gets due rights in properties and must be encouraged in order to confirm her contribution in the national development.¹ In other words social, economic, political, religious, cultural and domestic equalities are the landmarks of women empowerment.

The concept of woman empowerment was introduced in the women conference at Nairobi in 1985AD for the first time. There the five concepts of women empowerment were defined, each of them showing how women can be empowered and what is the significance of doing so.²

In fact, empowering women is not only the challenge to under developed nations but to the developed nations also. Although women form the half of the total world population yet they are deprived of their rights. It can be made crystal clear even if we look at “Political Right” the only one phase of rights. Women faced a great struggle in order to get the smallest share of their political right i.e. “Right to Vote” across the globe.

Besides having the flexible constitution and being a developed nation the countries like England had to face the huge movements for a long time only to get the right to vote for women in 1918 AD. Countries rich in culture and literature like France provided women with the right to vote in 1928 AD. The scientifically proficient country America had to wait for the same till 1944 AD.³ Though India is the exceptional in this case. In

India women were included in voter list in 1922 AD and they cast their first term vote in 1923 AD. In 1926 AD, the first Indian woman was nominated for the Indian council. Later on in 1974-75 AD the “Committee on the status of women” recommended the women reservation in parliament and legislative council.⁴ The framers of Indian constitution were familiar with the relevance of women so they made the provision of equal rights for both men and women. The fundamental rights enshrined in Article 14, 15 and 16 guarantees the principle of equality before law, equality of sexes and equal opportunity in all walks of life. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth or any of them. At the same time clause 3 of the same article states that ‘Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children’ in order to maintain a balance in the position and status of the male and female. Under fundamental duties, Article 51 (A) (e) provides that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India, inter alia, to renounce practices of derogatory of the dignity of women. The four enactments viz. The Hindu Marriage Act 1955, The Hindu Succession Act 1956, brought a definite change in the people’s legal perception of women.⁵

Besides this Parliament is also making different amendments continuously for the betterment of women. Some of such examples are Labor Act 1951, under which women are given brake in order to feed their babies. Equal Labor Act 1976, Dowry Prohibition Act 1986, Sati Prohibition Act of 1987 and The Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 are the fine examples of such amendments. Whereas the programs like Girl Adolescence Program 1992, Mother and Infant Program 1992, Balika Samridhi Yojna 1993, National Maternity Benefit Program 1994, Balika Samridhi Yojna 1997, Mahila Shakti Yojana 1998 and women Power Prize Programme 2000 etc. are the various initiatives of Indian Government in order to establish the concept of women empowerment.

Along with these programs women empowerment is also targeted in the Five-Year Plans for the all-round development of country.

Timeline of the Five Year Plans-Views on Women

First Five Year Plan (1951-1956 AD):-Set up the Central Social Welfare Board in 1953 AD to promote welfare work through voluntary organizations, charitable trusts etc.

Second Five Year Plan (1956-1961 AD):- Supported the development of Mahila Mandals to work at grass roots.

Third, Fourth and interim Plans (1961-1974 AD):- Had provisions for women's education, pre-natal child health services, supplementary feeding for children, nursing and expectant mothers.

Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-1978 AD):- Saw a major shift in the approach towards women, from welfare to development.

Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985 AD):- Accepted women's development and a separate economic agenda. Took a multi-disciplinary approach with a three-pronged thrust on health, education and employment.

Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-1990 AD):- Had the objectives of bringing women into the mainstream of national development.

Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997AD):-Saw the paradigm shift from development to empowerment and benefits to women in the sectors of education, health and employment. Outlay for women rose from Rs. 4 crore in the first plan to Rs. 2000 crore in the eighth.

Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002 AD):- Had empowerment of women as its strategic objective, Accepted the concept of a woman component plan to assure that at least 30% of funds/ benefits from all development sectors flow to women.

Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007 AD):- Suggested specific strategies, policies and programs for the empowerment of women.⁶

In this regard, the first concrete step for empowering women was taken by Narsihma Rao Government, when 73rd and 74th constitution Amendments reserving 33% seats for women in urban and rural bodies were passed. In the same phase, on 31st January, 1992 'National Women Commission' was founded in India. Recently, a conference of women members of parliament and members of legislative assembly was organized by the honorable Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan. The esteemed efforts were made by men more than women for women empowerment in this conference.⁷ Although, women reservation bill has been passed in Rajaya Sabha and hoping that in future it would be passed in Lok Sabha also.

But multi-dimensional approach must be implemented in India in order to determine the real women empowerment. In India majority of women live in the rural areas and are largely engaged in domestic work and household activities. On contrary the women of urban areas are either

housewives or working women in different department or fields. The both urban and rural women are mostly trapped into vicious circle of economic backwardness, poor nutrition and ill health. Hence, various efforts should be made in order to determine the women empowerment. The government is well astonished with the fact and as a result various steps are taken for the upliftment of women.

Women Empowerment and UPA government

In May, 2004 UPA Government came onto throne under the esteemed leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh (in collaboration with Communist Party) and took different steps for the women empowerment during its two tenures w.e.f. 2004-2009 and 2009-2014.

This government was proactive at least flagging certain very crucial matters, which had provided social justice agenda an important space in the deprived and marginalized communities in to the mainstream discourses once more. Issues related the unemployment and poverty. Dalits, backward classes religious minorities and women were specially highlighted and gained political support during the first UPA regime.⁸

The debate over the women reservation Bill resurfaces during the 1st regime of UPA govt. when a Bill prepared by the then Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, suggested raising the number of seats to 800 plus in parliament to give reservation to women.

Following are the development done by UPA amongst Women Empowerment:-

- Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act has provided civil remedies to women in abusive/violent relationships.
- Hindu women given equal rights to inherit coparcenary property.
- Law passed to bar arrest of women at night.
- Bill introduced to permit flexibilities in working hours for women.
- Strengthening of laws on rate prevention and child marriage prevention on anvil.
- Gender budgeting started.⁹
- National Rural Health Mission was launched for comprehensive health care, especially for women and children.
- In NRHM, 14000 women get employment in 6800 anganwais.¹⁰

Scheme which were started by UPA government for the upliftment of women in India:-

- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (July 2004):- Educational facilities (residential school) for girls belonging to SC, St, OBC, minorities communities and families below the poverty line (BPL) in Educationally Backward Blocks.
- Mother and child Tracking System (MCTS), 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 immunizations.
- The Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojna (IGMSY) 2010:- Provides money to help ensure the good health and nutrition of recipients.
- Janani Suraksha Yojana(JSY) 2005:- In this mother care scheme, onetime cash incentive to pregnant women for institutional/ home births through spilled assistance.
- Sabla or Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of adolescent girls,2011:- Empowerment adolescent girls (age) of 11-18 years with focus on out of school girls by empowerment in their nutritional health status and upgrading various skills etc.

Besides all these plans and programs the central and state government is making many more plans for the women empowerment namely:-

The Swarnjayanti Gram Sawarojgar Yojna (SGSY) for self-employment, the Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojna (SGRY) and the National Food for Work Program (NFWP) as wage employment, the Indira Awas Yojna (IAY) for providing shelter and the Accelerated Rural Water supply Program (ARWSP) and the Swajaldhara for providing safe drinking water and the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) for Sanitation Program. All these schemes were meant for overall development and upliftment of all women's in India.

Thus it is crystal clear that UPA government had taken vital steps for the women empowerment. This was the UPA government in 2007 when. Honorable Pratibha Patil got the honor of the first women President of republican of India in the Presidential elections.At the end of the day it is well known to everyone that various steps should be taken in the political sphere for the women empowerment who are form half of the total

Indian population. It is a necessary because Economical liberty is a slave of political liberty and politics affects social, cultural and religious etc., all the fields of life directly or indirectly. So it is clear that, if we really want the upliftment of the women empowerment in country, efforts should be made in the field of political sphere. Hence, the political empowerment of women is demand of present era.

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