



"GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO EMPOWERING WOMEN IN INDIA;

With Special reference to Assam"

Mr. Ditul Lahan

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Sissiborgaon College.

Abstract

Women empowerment is a prolonged issue not only in India but the World since last century. In the recent years several terms used to refer these issues relating with gender and Feminineness. Whatever the term used to describe the different matters in this issue it is same that the women are discriminated in different fields like social, political, economic, religious, cultural etc. not legally but mentally and naturally in our male dominated societies. Therefore the Government of India has launched different Acts to secure the rights of the women since British reign till now and launched hundreds of different schemes to protect the women and to lift them in to the equal stage with the man.

Keyword: Women empowerment, gender, discriminates, Government & Social.

Introduction:

Women empowerment is a prolonged issue not only in India but the World since last century. In the recent years several terms used to refer these issues relating with gender and Feminineness. Whatever the term used to describe the different matters in this issue it is same that the women are discriminated in different fields like social, political, economic, religious, cultural etc. not legally but mentally and naturally in our male dominated societies. Therefore the Government of India has launched different Acts to secure the rights of the women since British reign till now and launched hundreds of different schemes to protect the women and to lift them in to the equal stage with the man.

In the article 14-16 (Under Right to Equality- Article 14-18) of the Indian Constitution lays down equal rights of man and woman. Any form of discrimination based on gender is strictly prohibited. Woman in India got sufficient rights during India's independence in 1947, much earlier than most of the Western countries granted to their woman citizens the right to vote. .

Meaning:

Women empowerment refers to empowering women to be self dependent by providing them access to all freedom and opportunities. Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic social and political status of women and also guarding them against all forms of violence. Since women constitute almost 50% of world population, women empowerment involves building up of society political environment in order to breathe without fear of oppression, exploitation, discrimination etc.

Empowerment of women has five component- i) sense of self-worth, ii) right to have and determine choices, iii) right to have access to opportunities and resource, iv) right to have power to control their own lives, v) ability to influence

direction of social change .Women entrepreneur feels difficult in reaching her goal in business, but his empowerment basically depends on gaining more strength in financial, social and cultural aspects.

Objective of study:

In this paper I want to review the different Acts and schemes launched by the Government of India and Assam over the centuries, their objectives and implications among the women in our state of Assam and in what extent these Acts and the Schemes have effect on the powers and the privileges of the women in different ways like equality, discriminations, empowerment etc. and how they are worked to protect the rights of the woman in the field of society. The Central govt., the State Govt., Non Governmental Organizations and the social reformers have been allegedly trying to develop the status of the women and empowering them in different field in society over the decades through different Acts, scheme, awareness programme etc. But in what extent these initiations are worked in empowering women and safeguarding the rights and privileges of women is still remaining a critical question. Does these agencies are overcome their goals? As we are all aware that, in our societies we have there three picture of women empowerment. Some are exercised the most privileged position in the society, some are equal to the men and some are placed much oppressed position in society.

Methodology;

In this study I adopt the descriptive design and taken secondary source of information like Acts, schemes, legislations and other secondary sources. I tried to explain these legislations, acts and schemes in brief to clarify that whatever the Government have tried to improve the position of women in society. Now we are trying to describe shortly the schemes and legislations.

Government Legislations:

1. Abolition of Sati Act, 1829.
2. Special Marriage Act, 1954.
3. Hindu Succession Act, 1956.
4. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.
5. Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.
6. Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.
7. Domestic Violence Act, 2005.
8. Sexual Harassment Bill, 2010(Ram, 2004)

This Government Legislations all are in the support of women rights in all spheres like marriage, familial, domestic, economic, social etc.

The central Government has launched some schemes for women who are may be described as follows:-

- 1) *The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961*: "It intended to receiving or giving of a dowry by either party to the marriage either by the parents or anyone else associated with marriage". It applies to people belonging to all religion in India. The Indian Penal Code is modified ii 1983 to establish specific crimes of dowry related cruelty, Dowry Death and abetment of suicide". it punished violence against women by their husbands or their relatives when they could show the proof of dowry demands or dowry harassment. The legislation underwent and amendment in 1984 which specified the presents given to either bride or a groom at the time of marriage that are Allowed.
- 2) *National Plan of Action for Girl Child (1991-2000)*: this is a specially formulated action plan by the Government of India to protect and promote the girl child. It was introduced to prevent female foeticide and infanticide,

illuminate gender discrimination, provide safe drinking water and fodder near homes, rehabilitate and protect girls from exploitations, assaults and abuse.

3) *National Commission for Women (1992)*: It was established as a statutory body in January in 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act 1990 (Act No 20 of 1990 of Govt. of India). The Central Government held consultation with NGO's social workers and experts related to the structure, powers and functions of the commission proposed to be set up. In 1990, the bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha and in August 1990 the Government made several amendments and introduced new provision to vest the commission with the power of a civil court. Finally on August 30, 1990 the bill received President's assents. Therefore, on January 31st 1992 the First Commission was constituted with Mrs. Jayanti Patna as the chairperson. Presently the chairperson of the NCW is Rekha Sarma who assumed office on August 2018. The commission was established "to review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women, recommend remedial legislative measures; facilitate redress of grievances and advise the Government on all policy matters affecting women. It took up the issue of child marriage, sponsored legal awareness programmes, Paribarik Mahila Loka Adalat and reviewed laws such as Dowry Prohibition Acts 1961, PNDT Act 1994, Indian Penal Code 1860 and the National Commission of Women Act 1990 to make them more stringent and effective."

4) *The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005*: It has been enacted to criminalize instances of dowry and domestic violence. This Act gives the legal definitions of 'domestic violence' under Section 3. It is a civil law that focuses on the "relief given to the aggrieved women such as compensation. Protection right to residence in the shared household" Domestic violence covers mental as well as physical abuses and also threats to do the same. Any form of harassment, coercion, and harm to health safety or well being is covered under this Act.

5) *The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act 2017 for the Private sector*: This Act came in to force from 1st April 2017. It is an amendment to the Maternity Benefit Act 1961. Under this Act the Government increased paid maternity leave from 12th week to 26th weeks. It extended certain benefits to mothers who adopt a child as well and provides that "every woman who adopts a child shall be entitled to 12th week of maternity leave from the date of adoption" It introduced a provision relating to 'work from home for women, which may be exercised after the expiry of the 26th weeks leave period'. The Act makes, mandatory crèche facility for every establishment employing 50 or more employees." The Act also makes it mandatory for employers to educate women about the maternity benefits available to them at the time of their appointment.

6) *The Women Reservation Bills*: It Proposes to amend the constitution of India to give 33% reservation for women seats in Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies. This is an attempt to increase women's political participation. The bill was first introduced on 12th September 1996 by the United Front Government of H.D. Deve Gowda. Successive Governments tried to push for the bill it took 14 years to get it passed in the Rajya Sabha on 9 March 2010. The bill has yet to be passed in the Lok Sabha.

7) *National Policy for the Empowerment Women (NPEW)*: It was adopted in 2001 which states that any forms of violence against women, physical and mental at domestic and social level, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices shall be dealt effectively with a view to eliminate them. It aimed at creating and strengthening institutions and mechanisms/schemes for assistance and prevention of such violence which also include sexual harassment at the workplace and customs like dowry; for the rehabilitation of the victims of violence and for taking effective action against the perpetrators of such violence. Emphases have also been laid on setting up various programmes to deal with trafficking in women and girls.

Under the above policy i.e. NPEW several women empowerment schemes have been formulated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, India. Some of the schemes are as follow:

- i) **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme:**
- ii) **One Stop Center Scheme:** Launched on April 1, 2015, it Intend to provide 24 hour immediate and emergency responses to women affected by the violence, both in private and public spaces. Women Helpline (WHL) has been established in every state and union territory to provide integrated support and assistant to women across the country through a single uniform number. These centers will be integrated with 181 along with other existing help lines.
- iii) **Women Helpline Scheme:** It came in to effect on April1, 2015. It intends to give 24 hour immediate and emergency responses to women affected by the violence, both in private and public spaces. Women helpline has been established in every state and union territory to provide integrated support and assistance to women across the country through a single uniform number.
- iv) **UJJAWALA (1st April2016):** It is a comprehensive scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re- integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation. The Scheme is implemented by agencies like The Social Welfare/Women and Child Welfare Department of State Government, Women's Development Corporations, Women's Development Centers, Urban Local Bodies, reputed public/Private Trust or Voluntary Organizations.. The Agency should be registered under the law and must have a properly constituted managing Body with its powers, duties and responsibilities clearly defined and laid down in its constitutions.
- v) **Working Women Hostel Schemes:** The Government of India had introduced a scheme in 1972- 73 of grant-in aid for construction of new/expansion of existing buildings for providing hostel facilities to working women in cities, smaller towns and also rural areas where employment opportunities for women exists. This scheme has been revised to promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women who need to live away from their families due to professional commitments. The new scheme was launched on 6th April 2017.
- vi) **SWADHAR GREH (A Scheme for women in difficult circumstances):** A schemes which targets the women victims of difficult circumstances who are in need of institutional support for rehabilitation so that they could live their life with dignity. The scheme aims to provide shelter, food, clothing and health as well as economic and social security for the aggrieved women.
- vii) **NARISHAKTI PURASKAR:** It is the 'Annual Award given by Ministry of Women and Child Development (Govt. of India) to individual women or to the institution that work towards the cause of women empowerment" It is represented by the President of India on International Women's Day at Rastrapati Bhawan I New Delhi on8th March.
- viii) **Awardees of Stree Shakti Puraskar 2014:** The Government of India instituted 5 National Awards which are called Stree Shakti Puraskar" a measure to recognize the achievement of individual women in the field of social development .The award consists of a cash prize of Rs 1 lakhs and a citation The awards are the names of imminent woman personalities in Indian History ike Devi Ahilya Bai Holker, Kannagi, Mata Jijibai etc.
- ix) **Awardees of Rajya Mahila Sanman & Zila Mahila Samman:** Conferred from 2015 onwards, these awards would recognize and reward selfless work done by exceptional and committed women at the community and grassroots level. One award in every district and one award in every state.
- x) **Mahila Police Volunteers:** "They would act as a link police and the community and facilitate women in distress. The MPVs will be chosen by the Home Department of the concerned state/union territory through the SP of the district. The MPV will directly report to the Circle Inspector in the Police Thana"
- xi) **Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK):** " For empowering rural women through community participation and to create an environment in which they realize their full potential. It will provide an interface for rural women to approach the Government for availing their entitlements also empowering them through training and capacity building"
- xi) **NIRBHAYA FUND:** For projects specifically designed to improve the safety and security of women. It is non-lapsable corpus fund, being administered by Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance.

Schemes of Assam:

- * *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao.*
- * *Sukanya Samridhi Yojana.*
- * *Balika Samridhi Yojana.*
- * *Mukhyamantri Rajshri Yojana.*
- * *CBSC Udaan Scheme.*
- * *National Scheme of Incentive to girls for Secondary Education.*
- * *Mukhya Mantri Kanya Surakhya Yojana.*
- * *Mazi Kanya Bhagyashree Scheme.*
- * *Orunodoi or Arunodoi Scheme.*
- * *Indira Miri Universal Widow Pension Scheme.*
- * *Assam Kalpataru Scheme.*

Above all the central and the state Govt. of Assam have taken several steps to safeguard the status of the women in different ways. But we have noticed that, though the different Acts and Schemes have launched by the central government as well as state government to empower the women still the women's of Assam are discriminated and marginalized at the every level of the society whether its social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over Assam. A few women are engaged in service and other activities. On the other hand it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. Increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them. It is also noticed that some women are too weak to work. They consume less food and work more. Therefore, the women who are weaker are needed to be stronger. Another problem is the workplace harassment of women. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment and so and so. For these reason they require empowerment of all kind in order to protect them and to secure their purity and dignity.

To sum up it can be said that, women empowerment can't be possible unless not only the women but the men came with and help them to empower. It is a socio-cultural and religious phenomenon not political-economic and other phenomenon. Until the discriminating justification reducing in our socio-cultural and religious activities mere government legislation, schemes and any other programme can't empowering the women at a large. There is need to change our mind sets and reform our malpractices and to formulate reducing poverty, promoting education of women and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

Reference:

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt. of India 2021.
2. India Code: Digital Repository of All Central and State Acts, The Protection Of Women from Domestic Violence
3. Ministry of Women Child Development, Government of India, Revised Guidelines and Application GFormat I Support to Training and Employment Programme of Women 2009.
4. Nirbhaya, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt. of India 2021
5. National Commission of Women; Official Website.
6. Krishnaraj, Meithvey. (1986). *Women's Studies in India*. Bombay Popular Prakashan.
7. Desai, Neera. (1977). *Women in Modern India*. Mumbai: Vora Company.