

Enhancing Employability skills of women at the grass root level through Implementation of Schemes and Programmes for the empowerment of Women in Himachal Pradesh – an Approach

Dr Purnima Thaper
IIAS Associate
Asstt. Prof. Public Administration
COE, GDC Sanjauli
Shimla-6

ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment can be defined to promoting women's sense of self worth, their ability to determine their own choices, their right to influence social change for themselves and others. The term women empowerment is all about authority, or the power embarked on women sharing indistinguishable rights. The term refers to the liberation of women from socio-economic restraints of reliance. This progress has to be accompanied by their freedom in decision making both within and outside their home with the ability to influence the direction of social change. Empowerment cannot be defined in terms of specific activities or end results because it involves a process whereby women can freely analyze, develop and voice their needs and interests, without them being pre-defined, or imposed.

However, women equality and empowerment has always remained a priority area and has been taken utmost care by stake holders. The assumption that planners can identify women's needs; runs against empowerment objectives. The concept of 'Gender Discrimination' has much wider coverage in the Indian economy. My paper titled “**Enhancing Employability skills of women at the grass root level through Implementation of Schemes and Programmes for the empowerment of Women in Himachal Pradesh- an Approach**” discusses about the Women Empowerment, Constitutional safe guards, as well as plans and programmes started by the government for women empowerment. My question here is that are these government schemes and programmes actually able to empower women? Are these schemes and programmes helpful in diminishing the women problems at the grass root level?

Key words: - Women Empowerment, Health, Nutrition, Government Schemes, Grass root

Introduction

Women's empowerment can be defined to promoting women's sense of self worth, their ability to determine their own choices, their right to influence social change for themselves and others. The term women empowerment is all about authority, or the power embarked on women sharing indistinguishable rights. The word 'Women Empowerment' itself implies that women are not powerful enough - they need to be empowered. This painful truth has been in existence for a long time. The term refers to the liberation of women from socio-economic restraints of reliance. This progress has to be accompanied by their freedom in decision making both within and outside their home with the ability to influence the direction of social change. Empowerment cannot be defined in terms of specific activities or end results because it involves a process whereby women can freely analyze, develop and voice their needs and interests, without them being pre-defined, or imposed.

Women empowerment all refer to the empowerment of women to take all decisions from their choice. So that she can take all the decisions for her social and economic development. Empowerment of women will surely encourage all of the women to stand for their education and the life of their own choice. The women empowerment mission encourages women to be self-reliant. So that she can have positive self-esteem and generate potential in herself to compete with the world and to make the position of her choice.

Many years ago, infant mortality rates and women's' death due to complications in pregnancy were comparatively very high. Over the years, though, that number has significantly fallen. In the year 2022, no fewer than 45,318 women have died during childbirth revealed by Worldometer (Worldometer is run by an international team of developers, researchers, and volunteers with the goal of making world statistics available in a thought-provoking and time-relevant format to a wide audience around the world.) As WHO says while most of these complications develop during pregnancy, most are preventable or treatable. "Other complications may exist before pregnancy but are worsened during pregnancy, especially if not managed as part of the woman's care. The major complications that account for nearly 75 percent of all maternal deaths are severe bleeding (mostly bleeding after childbirth); infections (usually after childbirth); high blood pressure during pregnancy (pre-eclampsia and eclampsia); complications from delivery and unsafe abortion.

Ensuring that women receive the due attention in nutrition and hygiene, education on proper sexual knowledge, the know-how of the right age to become pregnant, educating men in maternal care, and new-born care, all these factors contribute to saving more lives and making the world better. It is not just true for pregnancy. This can only happen when people realize the importance of women empowerment and the woman also. Even when a woman reaches puberty, most rural sectors are unaware of sanitary methods and health conditions, leading to infections and severe conditions that result in deaths.

However, women equality and empowerment has always remained a priority area and has been taken utmost care by stake holders. It is in recent years that noticeable work started beginning to lift women out of the abyss of insignificance and powerlessness.

As according to different eminent writers the most important point, however, is that all efforts to conceptualize the term more clearly stressed that empowerment was a socio-political process, that the critical operating concept within empowerment was power, and that empowerment was about shifts in political, social, and economic power between and across both individuals and social groups.

Review of Literature

Review of literature mainly concentrates various books, important journals, reports, papers and articles related to Women Empowerment, various schemes and programmes for women at the grassroot level. In addition to this the IIAS library helps a lot in my research as it develop, maintain and promote high quality print and electronic collection that are readily accessible. It has quality collections/resources, user facilities and library staff, to maintain an environment conducive to study and research. The brief review is presented in the following paragraphs:

As according to (**Wolf 1999: 4–8; Scott 1990**). Empowerments have such different meanings and consequences? The explanation may lie in the fluidity of the term ‘power’. To empower implies the ability to exert power over, to make things happen. It is an action verb that suggests the ability to change the world, to overcome opposition. It has a transformatory sound, an implicit promise of change, often for the better. Consequently, empowerment has often been the watchword of crusaders (fighter) trying to make the world a better, more equitable place. But this change is often seen as requiring a revolution or, at the very least, fundamental social transformation

For **Srilatha Batliwala**, empowerment is ‘the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power’ (1994: 130). It requires political action and collective assault on cultural as well as national and community power structures that oppress women and some men. Thus, while acknowledging the need to improve the lives of grass roots women, **Batliwala** insists that women’s empowerment must include transformative political action as well.

Naila Kabeer defines empowerment as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. “**Kabeer's** 'strategic life choices' are major decisions "such as choice of livelihood, whether and who to marry," recognising that not all choices are equally significant (1999a: 437). She sees three dimensions to empowerment – resources, agency and achievements – each of which builds on the others. Resources can be material, human or social, including physical resources, individual capabilities and claims that the individual can make on others. **Kabeer** writes that "the terms on which people gain access to resources are as important as the resources themselves when the issue of empowerment is being considered" and that "empowerment entails a change in the terms on which resources are acquired as much as an increase in access to resources" (2001: 20).

Jo Rowlands (1997, 1998) brings a broader analytical perspective to the discussion of gender and empowerment, she argues that ‘empowerment is more than participation in decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions’ (1997: 14). It is personal, relational and collective. She recognizes that empowerment is not just a gender issue but also a development issue affecting women and men. She cautions, however, that empowerment is a process rather than an end product, neither easily defined nor measured. At the same time, she believes ‘there is a core to the empowerment process ... which consists of increases in self-confidence and self-esteem, a sense of agency and of “self” in a wider context.

G. Sen (1993) defines empowerment as “altering relations of power...which constrain women’s options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being.”

In the year 1990, renowned economist **Amartya Sen** shared with the world an intriguing phenomenon he had come to observe, about the 100 odd million women who were simply ‘missing’. In an essay for **The New York Times**, he wrote, “These numbers tell us, quietly, a terrible story of inequality and neglect leading to the excess mortality of women.” Exacerbating (worsen) this phenomenon, he noted, were a myriad of social, cultural, and economic factors, including poor access to education, nutrition, health, and economic rights (including property rights). Thirty years later, the UNFPA’s State of the World Population Report 2020 estimates that India accounts for 45.8 million of the world’s 142.6 million missing women.

Research suggests that investing in Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) has important linkages with gender equality. As a result, India has witnessed several schemes and progressive legislation—both at the central and state levels—that aim to empower women and increase their participation in the economy. However, despite the government’s targeted efforts, India has had limited success. The Global Gender Gap Report 2020 has ranked India among the five worst countries in the ‘Economic Participation and Opportunity’ index. Despite the priority accorded to skilling programmes by the government, less than two percent of women received formal training in 2017-18.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened this gendered vulnerability. National Sample Surveys’ data reveals that the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) has been in decline in rural areas, and has remained stagnant in urban areas since the late 1980s.

Objectives of study

1. To study the Government Schemes to empower women and increase their participation in the economy through various schemes and programmes.
2. To study the elements of gaining control over one’s body and sexuality and the ability to protect oneself against sexual violence to the empowerment process
3. To build a positive image of women in the society by recognising their contributions in social, economic and political sphere.
4. To evaluate the impact of, various schemes and programmes started by government for women empowerment; (yet to be done)

History of Women Empowerment

Women’s empowerment in India has a long history. Great social reformers in the past like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Acharya Vinobha Bhave and Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar etc abolished ghastly (horrible) practices like Sati and child marriage and worked relentlessly in the past for the upliftment of women in India. However, issues related to welfare of women have always been a priority among policy makers since independence, though the path has witnessed repositioning with time and as per the requirement. The Indian National Congress, one of the first political parties of India, raised its voice to demand political rights for women in the year 1917. The Indian constitution has very clearly given an equal level playing ground to women and has directed authorities to frame rules and regulations to safeguard the right.

However, feminist scholars during 1970s as a way to challenge patriarchy, as a radical approach concerned with transforming power relations in favour of women's rights and gender equality. The policy of women's empowerment is incorporated well into the constitution of India which became effective in the year 1950. Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, The Maternity Benefit Act in 1961, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (prevention and protection act) in 2013 are some of the few specific laws which were sanctioned by the Indian Parliament with respect to women's rights. And in the year 2001, the Government of India launched a National Policy of women empowerment with specific objectives like strengthening legal systems aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.

Nevertheless, India has a long way to go when it comes to women exercising their fundamental rights and enjoying their freedom equally as men. And although the constitution of India grants equal rights to both men and women, gender disparity still lurks around in both urban and rural areas of India.

Present status of women

As per the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2020 published by the World Economic Forum, India ranks 112 out of 153 countries with a score of 0.668 out of 1. A sample of 29 countries with recent data on upper secondary school completion by sex, location and wealth uncovered gaps in completion rates among the poorest rural girls and the richest urban girls ranging from 11.5 to 72.2 percentage points. Extreme poverty is projected to deepen for women and girls globally. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the share of people living on less than \$1.90 a day had fallen from 11.2 per cent in 2013 to 8.6 per cent in 2018. COVID-19 derailed this progress, with the rate expected to rise to around 9 per cent in 2022. By the end of 2022, around 383 million women and girls will live in extreme poverty compared to 368 million men and boys. ([Progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2022-en_0.pdf](#) (unwomen.org))

India ranked 108 out of 149 countries with a score of 0.665 as per the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2018. Thus, India's performance has marginally improved from 0.665 in 2018 to 0.668 in 2020. Present situation of women in India, being equal to their male counterparts is still a far cry for Indian women. Indian women can hardly take decisions at home or outside. Despite the government's effort to ensure equality of opportunity for education for both men and women in our society, the **literacy rate** of women in India, **especially in rural areas**, still remains very poor. In the last census 2011 sex ratio of India is 940 and literacy rate among women are 65.46% as compared to the men 80%. The literacy rate and sex ratio in India has always been matter of concern because in both the cases our women population is behind the race with respect to male population. Traditional practices like female infanticide, dowry, and early marriage have also contributed to the problem as many families find it economically unviable to educate the girl child. Gender role stereotyping attributed to women has generally led to prejudice and discrimination against women. For example, women may be considered to be less reliable as workers because of their child-rearing functions. Then representation **of women in different legislative bodies** remains low across India. According to the report of **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women**, India ranks **148 out of 193 countries** in the number of elected female representatives in parliament. Women Equality and Empowerment (SDG5) is one of the 17 sustainable Development goals, and is also integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development. Women's and girls' social and economic empowerment also contributes to their ability to pursue their right to a healthy life. In all societies, power is not

equally distributed. Economic and social empowerment puts women and girls in a stronger position and gives them agency to make decisions that promote their own health and wellbeing, as well as that of their families. We believe that social and economic empowerment is a key factor to improving sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls. It enhances their ability to have a voice in decision making processes like marriage and pregnancy. It also enables women and girls to ensure that water, sanitation and hygiene services respond to their needs.

Union Minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani speaking on the 25th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, at the United Nations that India recognises the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment in all aspects of developmental agenda. She highlighted that more than 200 million women have been brought into the formal banking system through the Government's Financial Inclusion Initiative. Innovative use of digital technologies has provided equal opportunity for women to access insurance, loans, and social assistance.

The empowerment of women and girls is the expansion of choice and strengthening of voice through the transformation of power relations, so women and girls have more control over their lives and future. This is achieved through increasing women's agency, ensuring equal access and control over resources and having supportive institutional structures in place. The government of India has taken the safety and empowerment of women and children into serious consideration. The growing injustice towards women had to be minimised, and these schemes are the solutions to the major problems related to women in India.

Schemes and Programmes (At the Centre level)

The Ministry of Women and Child Development is implementing various schemes/programmes for empowerment of women across the country. There are various schemes and programmes which are functional for women at the central level and the details of few schemes are as follows

For Women empowerment:

- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)**, {erstwhile Maternity Benefit Programme} has been contributing towards better enabling environment by providing cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and nursing mothers. In the ministry of Women and Child development Department 7,62,66,123 applications have been received from 3,05,89,256 beneficiaries from all 36 States/UTs on PMMVY-CAS. The maternity benefits amounting to 11, 735, 21 have been disbursed to **2,69, 51,446** beneficiaries till date . (Data as on 17th October, 2022)
- **Schemes of One Stop Centre (OSC)** and Women Helpline (WH) are being implemented to facilitate access to an integrated range of services including medical aid, police assistance, legal aid/ case management, psychosocial counseling and temporary support services to women affected by violence. Till date Number of operational OSCs as on date

is 708 Total numbers of cases registered from 2015 to 2020 are 305896.(Data 30 Jun 2022)

- **Working Women Hostels** for ensuring safe accommodation for women working away from their place of residence. Under this scheme, 2 new proposals have been received and 2 sanctioned in Himachal Pradesh during last three years. Data till 26 July 2022

Total No. of Working Women hostels,Beneficiaries and Funding/expenditure progress	
Number of Working Women hostels	972
Number of Beneficiaries	74,666
Funds released in 2021-22 till date (in Crores)	11.63
Number of New Hostels sanctioned in 2021-22	1

The Ministry of Finance, Government of India had set up a dedicated fund called Nirbhaya Fund in 2013, for implementation of initiatives aimed at enhancing the safety and security for women in the country. It is a non-lapsable corpus fund, which lies with the Ministry of Finance.14 projects come under Ministry of Home Affairs,3 in Ministry of Railways,1under MeiTY/ IIT Delhi,1under Deptt. of Justice,1 under M/o Tourism,4 projects under Ministry of Road Transport & Highways,10 projects under Ministry of Women and Child Development,1 under M/o External Affairs. So total 35 projects were appraised by EC (Empowered Committee) an amount of Rs. 9176.65 Cr. was provided under the Nirbhaya Fund parked with the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance up to 2021-22.

Swadhar Greh to provide relief and rehabilitation to destitute women and women in distress. As Swadhar Greh Scheme is being implemented as a subscheme of the Centrally Sponsored Umbrella Scheme “Protection and Empowerment of Women” funds are released through the States, with cost sharing ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and the States excepting for the North Eastern and Himalayan States where it shall be 90:10 and for UTs it is 100% with effect from 1.01.2016

• Number of Homes	• 357
• Number of Beneficiaries	• 7956
• Fund Released Rs in lakh	• 572.39

Data as on 26th July 2022

Ujjawala, a Comprehensive Scheme for prevention of trafficking and for rescue, rehabilitation, re-integration and repatriation of victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. Manipur and Assam are at the top with 22 and 20 ujjawala homes provided to the destitute womens and HP and many otherstates not contributed any homes under these schemes

Number of Projects	241
Number of Homes	107
Number of Beneficiaries	1838
Fund Released (rs in lakhs)	27.32

Women Help Line

The Scheme of Universalisation of Women Helpline is being implemented since 1st April, 2015 and is intended to provide 24 hours emergency and non-emergency response to women affected by violence through referral service (linking with appropriate authority such as police, One Stop Centre, hospital) and by providing information about women welfare schemes/ programmes across the country through a single uniform number (181). So far, women helplines have become operational in 35 States/UTs. They have managed more than 77 lakh calls. The Scheme is funded through Nirbhaya Fund.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), a comprehensive programme is being implemented to address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and related issues of empowerment of women over a life-cycle continuum. Till date the child ratio by birth is increasing at all India level. The total sex ratio at birth is 918 in the year 2014-2015 and now in 2020-2021 it is 937.

Schemes and Programmes (At the State level)

As per details from Census 2011, Himachal Pradesh has population of 68.65 Lakhs, an increase from figure of 60.78 Lakh in 2001 census. Total population of Himachal Pradesh as per 2011 census is 6,864,602 of which male and female are 3,481,873 and 3,382,729 respectively. Overall literacy rate in Himachal at 83.8% is considered to be good and above national literacy rate of 74%.

A NITI Aayog report released recently has shown that sex ratio at birth in Himachal Pradesh has recorded a substantial drop. In the base year (2012-14) the state had a sex ratio of 938 girls for every 1,000 boys but in the reference year (2013-15) it came down to 924. The undesirability of the girl child in urban and literate society highlights societal attitudes and, thus, calls for change. This is required especially in districts with higher literacy rates like Kangra, Mandi, Hamirpur, Una, etc., which have low sex ratios. The brutal gang rape and murder of a 16 year old student in Shimla District's Kotkhai Tehsil has pointed fingers at the increasing rate in crimes against women in Himachal Pradesh. Figures sourced from police records reveal that there has been a gradual increase in crimes against women in the last five years.

Women and child empowerment is important for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development of any country and state and this has always been a priority for the state government also. The Government has taken various steps to ensure empowerment of women through their social, educational, economic and political uplifting through various schematic interventions. While the schemes implemented by the State Government like Beti Hai Anmol, Mukhyamantri Kanyadan Yojna, Mukhyamantri Shagun Yojna, Vidhwa Punarvivah Yojna, Nari Seva Sadan, Swavlamban Yojna, Grihini Suvidha Yojna etc. ensures girl-friendly environment especially for vulnerable sections of society. The government has not only started many welfare schemes and programs but has also worked with constant commitment to make these schemes a reality.

They working continuously with the aim of promoting uniformity, for good upbringing of girl child, providing them a safe environment, accessible and trustworthy surroundings which is free from all kinds of discrimination, promoting gender equality and child centric laws have always been the one of the priorities of the government. The 'Nari Ko Naman' program started by the government is also proving to be a positive initiative towards women empowerment. Under this program, 50 percent concession is being provided to all women in the buses of Himachal Road Transport Corporation. The scheme has provided relief to about 1.25 lakh women traveling in the buses of the corporation every day and about Rs. 60 crore will be spend annually on this scheme.

Apart from this Mukhyamantri Grihini Suvidha Yojana launched by the Himachal Pradesh government is proving effective in providing facilities to poor families and women. Under this scheme the government is providing free gas connections, stoves and cylinders to the eligible women. Due to successful implementation of this scheme, the Himachal became the first fully LPG enabled and kitchen smoke Free State in the country in December 2019. In last five years an amount of Rs. 134 crore was spent for providing free gas connection and cylinder to 3.35 Lakh women.

To change the mindset towards girls, enhancing the age of marriage and making girls empowered and self-reliant they have started Beti Hai Anmol Yojna. Under this scheme, an amount of 21 thousand is deposited in the bank or post office on the birth of baby girl in below poverty line families, which can be withdrawn by the girl on attaining the age of 18 years. The benefit of this scheme can be availed up to two girl child only. During the last five years the government has benefitted about 21 thousand girls by spending Rs. 40.89 crore under Beti Hai Anmol Yojna. This scheme is helping in eradicating discrimination with girls. It is also proving beneficial in bringing awareness among people about having girls in the society. This scheme has helped a lot in improving the child sex ratio in the state. There is also a provision of scholarships for the girl child under this scheme. This scholarship lessens the pressure of girl's education on the family. During last five years the government had provided scholarships to 1, 16,490 girls. Apart from this, about Rs. 39.29 crore have been provided under Mukhyamantri Kanyadan Yojna, for the marriage of nine thousand girls whose fathers were either not alive or were suffering from any serious disease and unable to earn their livelihood.

The financial assistance to the girls belonging to BPL families under Mukhyamantri Shagun Yojna. Under this scheme the eligible beneficiaries have been given Rs. 31 thousand as shagun at the time of marriage. About seven thousand girls have been benefitted under this scheme by spending Rs. 20.54 crore. The government is also motivating the remarriage of widows and has started Vidhwa Punarvivah Yojna in the state. Under this scheme an amount of Rs. 50,000 is being provided to the women at the time of remarriage. So far, an amount of Rs 2.24 crore has been provided to 448 widows for remarriage.

The women living below the poverty line (BPL) who's annual income is below Rs. 50 thousand. An annual financial help of Rs. Six thousand is provided to these women for the upbringing of two children under Mother Teresa Asahay Matri Sambal Yojna. In last five years about 99,260 women have been benefitted by spending Rs. 39.39 crore under the scheme.

The State government has also opened a Nari Seva Sadan at Mashobra for the helpless, widowed and destitute women. Here inmates (patients) are provided free food, accommodation, medical facilities etc. Rehabilitation assistance of Rs. 25 thousand is also given to the women on leaving the Seva Sadan. If any inmate gets married, then a financial assistance of Rs. 51 thousand is provided to her. The government has provided financial assistance of Rs 2.36 crore to 176 women.

In the present year under the scheme Beti Hai Anmol Yojana 50 beneficiaries got the benefit of this scheme and they have got fixed deposit in their name.

Apart from this, various other schemes are also being implemented by the state government to make women self-reliant and empowered.

Tentative Analysis

This research is an attempt to understand the word Empowerment and what this word actually means to women. The term refers to the liberation of women from socio-economic restraints of reliance. This progress has to be accompanied by their freedom in decision making both within and outside their home with the ability to influence the direction of social change. The Government has started many schemes and programmes for women but if they are not able to make changes in their own lives and not able to take decisions for her body then how are they get empowered with these government schemes. Moreover the schemes and programmes which had started the Centre and the state government there is no proper monitoring of these schemes at the state level. Not all these schemes and programmes are functioning at the centre and the state level.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The empowerment of women and girls as the expansion of choice and strengthening of voice through the transformation of power relations, so women and girls have more control over their lives and future. There should be **Process-oriented Nature of Empowerment** which denotes a process of acquiring, providing, bestowing the resources and the means or enabling the access to and control over such means and resources.

The empowerment should be in Holistic Nature because Empowerment is an all encompassing term in which a whole range of economic, social and political activities, including group organisation, agriculture and income generation projects, Nutrition, education, integrated health care and so on towards the common goal of empowering the poor. **Empowerment Deals with the** immediate needs arising from women's current responsibilities vis-a-vis the livelihood of their families and children, while the latter address bigger issues such as sexual division of labour within the home, the removal of institutionalised forms of gender discrimination, the establishment of political equality, freedom of choice over child-bearing, and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women.

This is achieved through increasing women's agency, grassroot women interaction and ensuring equal access and control over resources and having supportive institutional structures in place.

The government should make all efforts to implement these schemes with strict monitoring and take these schemes to the eligible beneficiaries. The government is continuously moving towards the upliftment of women, which is a sign of bright future, inclusive and sustainable development of women and girl child empowerment. With the proper functioning of these schemes the positive results of the efforts made by the government are visible on the ground and these schemes are proving boon for the girls and women's of every section of society.

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