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Impact of Government Policies on Women's Empowerment in India

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Abstract

This study indicates the mega government policies' role in addressing women empowerment in India, including government initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Swachh Bharat Mission and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). These policies have been significant in providing avenues for women to enhance their socio-economic status, end gender disparity, and economic independence, education, and well-being. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana, initiated with a view to enhance the sex ratio of women, was aimed at avoiding female foeticide. Swachh Bharat Mission has benefitted women immensely in terms of safety and health by enhancing sanitation and ensuring employment in local sanitation committees for women. MGNREGA has had a major impact on rural women since activities of a woman within the household have no economic value but through schemes such as MGNREGA, women have been economically empowered. Yet social resistance, limited access to government schemes and limited marginalised women's representation continue to be challenges. These issues have been projected in this research paper, stressing the importance of continuous community involvement and social support to marginalized women. Various government schemes have bettered the position of women but continuous and adaptive approaches are required to bring forward women empowerment in India.

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Introduction

Empowerment of women in India has undergone tremendous changes over time, fuelled by a series of government programs with a view to narrowing the gender gap and upgrading the social, economic, and political status of women. Empowerment is not merely about economic independence but also the right to decide on one's life, health, education, and indeed overall roles in society. Even though socio-cultural impediments persist, policies and initiatives introduced by



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the Indian government have gone a long way in promoting the position of women and providing them with an equal role in all walks of life. One of the most effective government programs that are highly successful is Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), initiated in 2015, under which there is gender-biased sex selection and de-valuing of girl child in society. This program focuses on raising awareness regarding the imperative of educating and safeguarding the girl child. The program has succeeded in stemming the gender-biased discrimination of girls and has contributed to an increase in the number of girls joining schools. In the long term, it has also succeeded in ending activities like child marriage, which overwhelmingly Favors girls, thus enhancing their educational attainment and overall social well-being.

Toilet construction in rural homes under SBM has benefited women immensely by enhancing their dignity and safety. Open defecation, which is a widespread phenomenon in the majority of rural habitations, exposes subjects' women to violence and health risks, particularly during menstruation. These have been countered by the Swachh Bharat Mission, which has provided women with a secure, secluded, and personal space for hygiene, empowering them in the process. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 is another prominent program that has considerably benefited women, especially rural Indian women. The act provides rural families with a 100-day wage employment guarantee wherein at least one-third of the beneficiaries are women. This policy has also benefited women in the form of a secure income, which has financially empowered and made them independent. Through involvement in MGNREGA programmes, women have become prosperous and active family decision-takers. This has, in turn, improved their status in their family and society, with more control over their lives and means.

Government Policies Focused on Women's Empowerment in India

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)

Launched in 2015 by the Government of India, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme is a government initiative aimed at promoting the welfare of girls, promoting the education of girls, and preventing female foeticide. The initiative is significant given that there has traditionally been a low sex ratio and a strong patriarchal culture in large parts of India that prefers to place the girl in a secondary position to the boy. The primary goal of BBBP is to establish a society where girls are accorded equal value and priority in relation to boys. The ultimate goal of the BBBP scheme is to extend equal opportunities for education and healthcare to girls, eradicate gender discrimination such as infanticide and female foeticide, and increase the value of girls in society. The aim of the scheme is to change the attitude of people towards girls and ensure that the family offers equal significance to daughters and sons. The scheme also focuses on empowering girls by offering them resources such as education, health, and protection. Perhaps the most significant



impact of the BBBP programme has been a healthier national sex ratio. These efforts have resulted in a steady increase in the percentage of girls attending school. The greater the number of girls at school, the lower the likelihood of early marriage, thereby bringing about improved outcomes for their education and well-being. Moreover, the BBBP scheme has also made women stronger in asserting their claim for equality. Women have started making voices for their rights, and they are supported by the education and security part of the programme. This has led to more confidence among women to participate actively in gender equality issues.

Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)

The Swachh Bharat campaign (SBM) is India's most ambitious cleanliness and sanitation campaign. It started in 2014 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. SBM is not an open women's empowerment program, but it has had a huge positive effect on women's health, safety, and dignity, especially in rural India where sanitation and hygiene are terrible. The mission's main goals are to enhance sanitation and hygiene across the country, get rid of open defecation, especially in rural India, and make people aware of how important sanitation and hygiene are. The Swachh Bharat Mission has had a huge effect on women's health and social status. Women in rural sections of the country were mostly in charge of getting water and taking care of cleanliness. They had to make long and dangerous excursions to get to water sources or public restrooms. This not only put them at danger of getting hurt, but it also made them more likely to be hurt or harassed.

Under the SBM, building toilets in rural homes has made women much safer and more dignified. Having access to private sanitation facilities has cut down on open defecation, which protects women from health hazards and harmful practices. Several women have taken on leadership roles in local sanitation committees, where they have the capacity to speak out, make decisions, and get sanitation-related resources. The program has also helped people feel more confident and powerful when it comes to making changes in their own communities and in local government. Women on these committees have made positive contributions that have helped get more people involved in the community and made it easier to work together to solve sanitation problems. Even if these goals have been met, the losses that come with keeping the Swachh Bharat Mission going are still happening.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

The main goals of MGNREGA are to provide jobs for rural people, build long-lasting rural infrastructure using labour-intensive methods, and get more women into the workforce, especially in rural areas where there aren't many jobs. MGNREGA has greatly improved the economic independence of women in rural areas. Hundreds of thousands of women have signed up for the program and been paid for their efforts. This program has substantially improved their financial



situation at home and in their communities, giving them more control over their money and allowing them to contribute to the economy. Economic independence has also made it more common for women to be involved in making decisions about the family, which has given them more power and freedom in home matters. Women have been empowered by being able to make their own money, which has given them a voice in their households and in the community around them. Also, MGNREGA has opened up new opportunities for women to be leaders in rural areas. People prefer having women in charge or on job cards because it makes them more visible and helps them become better leaders. The program has also helped women learn new skills in construction, roadwork, and irrigation. This has given women the chance to learn skills that are usually only for men, which has made them even more capable and confident.

Challenges and Gaps

In spite of the auspicious change realized through formal programs, entrenched cultural and social resistance is the most intransigent element of gender inequality in India. Underlying traditional gender patterns continue to influence the lives of a majority of women, and, in particular, rural India, where, even today, women continue to consider domestic labor as essential over education and work. Patriarchy shapes public as well as personal life, limiting access for women to resources and opportunities. In the majority of Indian regions, women are still discouraged from participating in decision-making at the family and community level, which places them hierarchically lower than men. Social norms favoring male dominance over women's autonomy also discourage them from controlling their own lives. Even with progressive policies like BBBP and MGNREGA, all these cultural resistances continue to exist, with a tendency to resist women's empowerment programmes and preventing women from being able to fully benefit from such policies. Implementation gaps are also a major impediment to the effectiveness of policies on gender equality.

In addition, though these policies are designed to facilitate women's participation in the labour force as well as management positions, they do not make much attempt to understand the particular needs of marginalised women, including women belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward classes. These women are discriminated against in layers of caste, class, and religion, thereby making them more marginalized and harder to redress. The lack of targeted interventions means that the policies are not doing enough to address their unique issues, leaving them behind in the overall effort to empower women in India. Therefore, despite the good intentions of such policies, more effective and inclusive ones are still required that take into account the intersecting concerns of marginalised women.

**Policy Recommendations**

For the success of those policies aimed at empowering women, empowering community participation at all levels is absolutely crucial. Women and local communities must be actively involved in decision-making processes so that policies are formulated considering their respective needs and situations. Such engagement not only gives a sense of accountability and ownership but also opens up space for identifying particular issues for women in different locations. Through the engagement of locals, e.g., institutions and leadership at the local level, policies can be made more targeted to address the different needs of women both in towns and villages. This is a participatory method that ensures women and particularly women who live in marginalised communities are being heard, thus the chances for successful implementation and desired effects.

It also helps in breaking cultural barriers and resistance because communities will identify with those policies they have been actively involved in formulating. In addition to increasing participation, policies must be inclusive and intersectionality-aware to address the needs of marginalised women. Women across social, cultural, and economic layers have special needs that category solutions cannot. For instance, women from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward classes face cumulative discrimination based on caste, class, and gender. To empower such women in a meaningful manner, policies should be framed having their special needs in view. Inclusive policies that help promote gender equality also lead society in the direction of increased opportunities for social justice, making society more balanced. Secondly, to make such policies effective, strong monitoring and evaluation systems are needed. There will be regular monitoring of the process of implementation so that gaps and areas needing improvement can be identified.

Open tracking systems for progress that include the feedback from the beneficiaries will provide concrete evidence of the achievements and setbacks of the policies. This evidence-based policy-making allows policymakers to adjust the necessary modifications and allocate the appropriate resources to where they are needed. Constant monitoring also promotes accountability so that the impact of these programmes reaches the target group. With good monitoring systems, the government can refine its policies to meet women's needs and make steady progress toward gender equality.

Conclusion

Programs like BBBP have changed how people think about females, while MGNREGA has given women in rural areas more authority over their finances. The Swachh Bharat Mission has also made women safer and cleaner by improving sanitation. But there are still some big problems, such deep-seated cultural resistance, gaps in policy execution, and not including women from particular categories, like scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other weaker sectors. certain are



problems that keep certain policies from reaching their full potential and spreading as far as they could. It is important that these rules are always kept up to date to reflect changes in India's economy and society. This will help women become more powerful in the long run. To make sure that these policies meet the needs of all women, they need to be better implemented, more inclusive, and more involved with citizens. India can make society fairer by improving these things. This would give women the power to make choices about their own lives and eventually choose their own futures.

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