



## GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NORTH EAST REGION)

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### Abstract

Gender equality is one of the fundamental Human Right according to the Constitution of India. In fact, Gender Equality is very much necessary to achieve a peaceful and sustainable world. When women are excluded from important areas, it is almost similar to placing half of the world's population away from the scope of opportunities in building prosperous societies and economies. Women should get equal access to education, work, and representation in political and economic decision making as it will benefit humanity at large. But the status of women has not been satisfactory as she is still not regarded as an equal. Women and girls are still suffering from violence and discrimination in every part of the world. It has to be realized that when it comes to development of the society, Women Empowerment should be significant topic of discussion. This paper will discuss some of the schemes launched by the Government of India to empower Indian Women. It will also include the role of Government of India in including the SDGs. Since India is the Second populous country in the World it plays a leading role in determining the relative success of SDGs. Some agencies like NitiAayog is mandated with the task of coordinating work on SDGs. Government of India has implemented a number of programs for the Protection, employment, skill development, education, career opportunities, entrepreneurship and political participation. Some of these programs are Beti Bachao Beti Padhau (BBBP), Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK), PradhanMantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Female Entrepreneurship, Kastruba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs), Ministry of Panchayati Raj to improve the social, political and economic status of women in India.

**Keywords:** Equality, Policy, Women, Empowerment, Gender, North- East.

### Introduction

Gender equality is the state of equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation, decision-making and state of valuing different behaviors, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender. Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Without equal participation of women and men there can be no real sustainable development. Gender equality is a fundamental human right. Women around the world do not fully experience equal rights and their potential as educational, economic, social development remains untapped despite progress. Women are still lagging behind in power and decision-making roles. Empowering women helps expand economic growth, promote Gender social development and establish stable societies. Women's economic empowerment benefits both women and children. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underscore women's empowerment and highlight the relevance of Gender Equality to addressing a wide range of global challenges.

### Objective

The objective of this paper is to:

- To bring in light some of the Government policies and constitutional measures to have an awareness among the Public.
- To focus on the Government Role and policies which brings the Gender Status to equality with reference to the policies implemented in the North- East.

### Limitations

- The analysis is based on Secondary Data only.
- The study is based on few policies initiated by Government of India.
- The study will focus on implementation on some policies in the North-East Region.

### Methodology

The analysis is based on Secondary data collected from various Government sources, Government Reports and Websites.



## Findings and Discussions

### Constitutional rights available to women in India

Indian constitutional guarantees several rights to all its citizens irrespective of Gender. Some of them are:

- ❖ Article 14: Fundamental Right to equality before law that is equal protection of laws in India.
- ❖ Article 15: Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of Religion, Race, Castes or place of birth.
- ❖ However, Article 15(3) empowers State to make any Special provision for Women and Children.
- ❖ Article 16: Equality of opportunity in matters of public empowerment or opportunity of any office under State and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of Sex.
- ❖ Article 19: Freedom of Speech and Expression and freedom to practice any profession or to carry out any occupation or trade or business.
- ❖ Article 21: Protection of life and personal liberty. Article 300-A: Right to Property.
- ❖ Article 243D: the constitution ensures participations of women in Panchayati Raj institutions by mandating not less than one third reservation for Women out of total no of seats.
- ❖ Article 15 of the constitutions allows special provision for Women and Children to be made for their welfare.

### Role of Government of India in including the SDGs

Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) has always emphasized on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. Goal no 5 of the SDGs is specially focused on the empowerment of Women. One of the ways to achieve the targets of sustainable development goals like poverty eradication inequality, good health and well-being for all, decent work and economic growth is through women empowerment. The other major areas of concern for SDGs are violence and discrimination against women, child marriage, effective participation of women at work place reproductive and sexual health of women, political role from Parliament to local bodies, ownership over land, and policies and laws to ensure effective implementation of these.

India has remained committed to the goal of achieving equality among its citizens. The constitution of India also has provision for equality of women in its Preamble, fundamental rights and also the Directives Principles of State policy. However, discrimination against women in India remains a major issue despite various policies and legislatives reforms being undertaken at all levels. The implementation of SDGs 5 will definitely go a long way in bring Gender Equality in India. “Though the discourse on gender justice and empowerment is rampant in our country. SDG 5 can help in bringing a gendered approach to the policies, schemes and laws of the country. India is expected to gain from its “demographic dividend” in the coming years and women are an integral part of this developmental process if India wants to tap its full potential. It is only through empowering the women in all forms that women will transcend beyond the constraints they presently face. It is essential to focus on these aspects if India wants to achieve its vision of “A society in which, women attain their full potential and are able to participate as equal partners in all spheres of life and influence the process of social change” (Draft National Policy for Women, 2016).

### Initiatives of Government of India in Educational, Financial, Professional, Safety, Political, Skill Development Fields for Gender Equality (with reference to North East Region)

#### Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme was launched by the Government of India to address the issue of decline in Child Sex Ratio (CSR). This was to be done through a mass campaign and multi-sectoral action plan in 100 gender critical districts across the country. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Campaign from Panipat district in Haryana on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2015. The type of activities that were used to raise awareness among people were Rallies, Group Discussions, Quiz Competitions, Public Meetings, Film Shows, Photo Exhibitions etc.

In the North East Region, certain activities were organised to raise awareness as well as collect feedback on the Beti Bachao and Beti Padhao Programme. The number of programmes organised by the MMT region Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura was 6. Two programmes were organised in selected districts of RiBhoi in Meghalaya, Saiha in Mizoram and South Tripura districts. 3800 hundred people were reached and 70 feedbacks were collected according to the Report on BBBP Awareness Programme. In Nagaland and Manipur region a total of 4 programmes were organised in Longleng district of Nagaland and Senapati District of Manipur. Overall, 20 feedbacks were collected and 800 people were reached. In Assam only 2 programmes were organised in Kamrup Metro and 2500 people were reached and 20 feedbacks were collected. In Arunachal Pradesh 2 programmes were held in Roing and Meka village and 1000 people were reached and 40 feedbacks were collected.



**MAHILA SHAKTI KENDRA:** The budget speech of the finance minister announced the setting up of the Mahila Shakti Kendra which is meant “to provide a one stop convergent support services for empowering rural women with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition. Accordingly, a new sub scheme namely Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) under the Umbrella Scheme Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shashaktikaran Yojana (PMMSY) has been approved for implementation during 2017-18 upto 2019-2020. The scheme will provide an interface for rural women to approach government for availing their entitlements and for empowering them through awareness generation, training, and capacity building. Student volunteers will play an instrumental role in awareness generation regarding various government schemes/ programmes as well as social issues that have an impact on lives of women in a given block (or equivalent administrative unit, when such blocks are not in place)” (Mahila Shakti Kendra Guidelines Nov 2017)

Under the scheme, district level centers for women (DLCW) have to cover 640 districts across the country. Funding is to be divided between the center and the state in a 60:40 ratio. For the north east states, the ratio is 90:10. Only 24 districts in India have functional DCLW. Till now this scheme has set up only 4 functional in 4 districts in Mizoram namely; Saiha, Champai, Mamit, and Serchhip and in 1 district in Nagaland named Longleng. It hasn't been implemented in the other states of the north east as yet. (The Wire April 15, 2019)

**PRADHAN MANTRI KAUSHAL VIKAS YOJANA (PMKVY)** 2016- 20 “was introduced as India’s largest skill development scheme. PMKVY is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and is implemented by the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC). The objective of this scheme is to enable a large number of Indian youths to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood. The scheme aims to train them on skills based on the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) and industry-led standards”.(PMKVY 2.0 Impact Evaluation Report: Executive Summary). Short term training is imparted in at PMKVY training centers which is expected to benefit school/College drop outs and unemployed youths. This scheme also aims to emphasize on women empowerment and improving employment opportunities. Some of the women centric projects have been carpet weaving, dairy and poultry farming, bakery and apparel training etc.

Assam has 179 training Centers, Arunachal Pradesh has 73, Manipur has 79 training centers. Mizoram has 77 training centers, Meghalaya has 120 training center, Nagaland has 31 training centers, Tripura has 59 Training Centers and Sikkim has 16 Training Centers. ([http://sarkariyojna.com>pradhan](http://sarkariyojna.com/pradhan))

**KASTURBA GANDHI BALIKA VIDYALAYA (KGBV)** scheme was launched by Government of India in August 2004 to make the education system more responsive to the needs of the marginalized girls and to enhance their access and retention. It was later integrated into the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Under the scheme residential schools were set up in the Educationally Backward Block (EBB), towns and minority concentrated areas all over the country. The schemes provide upper primary level education to girls in the age group of 10-14 years belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), Minority communities and children of families of Below Poverty Line (BPL).

In the North east region, the number of Operational KGBVs sanctioned up to 2018-19 are as follows: Arunachal Pradesh Sanctioned School was 81 and operational is 53, Assam Sanctioned:148, operational: 90, Manipur sanctioned:16 and Operational: 16, Meghalaya sanctioned: 19 and operational: 10, Mizoram Sanctioned: 2 and operational 2, Nagaland sanctioned: 22 and operational: 11, Sikkim sanctioned: 1 and Operational 1 and Tripura Sanctioned: 18 and operational 17.

#### **Ministry of Panchayati Raj (One-Third Reservation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions)**

Article 15 (3) to the Constitution of India empowers State to make special provisions for women. This constitutional mandate is recognition of the fact that women in India need to be empowered socially and economically so as to ensure their full participation in social, economic and political activities of the country. However, to make use of potential of women and also to empower them, 73rd Amendment Act 1992 (73rd CAA) for the first time provided one-third reservations for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and thus ushered a new era of women's participation in the local governance in India. This was indeed a big leap towards women empowerment which provided women with the scope and opportunity to participate in public life as well as in the decision-making and nation building process. Initially there were a few glitches as in some places the male relatives of the women representatives performed their work and the women would continue to stay behind. There are some more bottlenecks in the participation of women as Panchayati Raj Institution members are; interference from family members and male members, lack of cooperation from officials and burden of household responsibilities. However, this issue has been changing with time as the government is becoming strict with its policies and rules and the women members expressing their self-confidence and self-reliance.



When it comes to the North East region the system is different from that of rest of India. "The North-East States of India are Governed at the local level through a combination of customary(traditional) laws as well as the Indian panel court. As per as the village governance goes, three (Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya) out of the seven states are totally governed by the Sixth Schedule where the traditional village bodies are in charge of local Governance. The other four states Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and to some extent Manipur has enacted the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the constitution and have accorded a place to Women in decision making in the Panchayats." (Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institution in the North – East: Assam-A Report **PRIA**) There are areas in the North-East Region that are Governed by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment and there are also areas that fall under the Sixth Schedule. So, the idea of equal representation of women in places where Sixth Schedule is functioning is questionable.

## CONCLUSION

Women play an important role in the socio-economic progress of any society. For this progress to happen in reality, women must be regarded as an equal participant and an equal beneficiary of the development programmes. Despite the measures taken by the government to ensure gender equality in our country, the gender gap still exists in many places. When it comes to women empowerment, relying on government roles and policies may not be enough. It is the mindset and the orthodox attitude of the people that needs to be changed. The community needs to be sensitized so that they can realize that women's involvement in the affairs of the state or political representation of women is important. It has to be realized that women are doing an important job by getting involved in the running the state of affairs of a locality, state or country for which they require all support and co-operation. And it is only through this support and co-operation towards women that a nation can have prosperous societies and economies.

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