

Women Empowerment and Five Year Plans in India

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Abstract:

Women empowerment has been a subject of extensive discussion and reflection across the world over the past few decades. The concept implies ensuring equal opportunities and equity among genders, social classes, ethnic groups, and age groups. It encompasses strengthening life chances, enhancing access to resources, and promoting collective participation of women in various spheres of life. Recognizing its importance, governments globally—especially in developing countries like India—have placed women empowerment at the forefront of policy agendas. In India, the significance of women's role in development was acknowledged as early as the First Five Year Plan (1951–1956). Since then, successive Five Year Plans have incorporated numerous provisions, schemes, and policy measures aimed at addressing gender disparities, improving socio-economic conditions, and enhancing women's agency. This paper attempts to examine the major provisions for women empowerment in the Five Year Plans and highlights the status, progress, and challenges of women empowerment in India through these planned developmental efforts.

Keywords: Women, Women Empowerment, Five Year Plan, India, Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

In India, there was a common belief in ancient period that God reside there where women are considered worthy of worship. Thus women were given much respect at that time. They had position of honor in family and society. History records that even in the Vedic period, Indian women occupied a high ranking social status without any gender distinction. The status of the women was so high that no religious ceremony was considered effective without wife. They were also the equal participants of all the political, social and economic activities. But with the advent of time, the status of women had been declined slowly though they were equal to male counterparts in the total population. They have been treated as object of pleasure or robots intended to serve man. It is a subject of concern that this very significant proportion of population has been considered as the secondary citizen with little independence or subordinate to man. When this has reached to a deplorable state, the question of 'women empowerment' came in to existence. The phrase '*women empowerment*' implies a fundamental redistribution of power within and between families and societies. It represents an externally induced process or mechanism of change aimed at achieving women's equality and overall development. Empowerment is essentially a process of enhancing equity, which often requires challenging and transforming existing structures, systems, and institutions that perpetuate inequality. Because these structures are deeply rooted, the process of empowerment tends to be selective, uneven, and gradual. Here, power is understood not as a mode of domination but as strength, the capacity to influence, participation in social and political processes, the right to make choices, and the ability to shape the direction of social change. The process of empowerment consists of several mutually reinforcing components. It begins with and is sustained by economic independence, which implies access to and control over productive resources. A second component of empowerment is knowledge and awareness,

followed by self-image and self-confidence. The final component is autonomy, which enables individuals to exercise independent decision-making and control over their lives.

During the British period, few steps were taken to improve the status of women e.g.- abolition of sati-pratha, widow-remarriage etc. Under the Constitution of India, which we have adopted after independence, special provisions have been made to grant them the equal status and their betterment. It was the view of Late Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru who was the first Prime Minister of India, that women have suffered much from various kinds of suppression and all these have to go so that they can play their full part in the life of the nation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To know the need of women empowerment.

To access the awareness of women empowerment in India.

To study the government schemes in five year plans for women empowerment.

To offer useful suggestions in the light of findings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based entirely on secondary data. Various secondary sources—such as books, journals, magazines, and research articles—have been critically reviewed and analyzed for this purpose.

FIRST FIVE YEAR PLAN

According to the First Five Year Plan (1951–1956), sufficient services for women's welfare had to be promoted in order to fulfil their rightful role in the home and the community. For the states to launch comprehensive programs for women's welfare, well-run social service departments were required. The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB), which represented the welfare approach to women's issues, was founded in 1953 to lead welfare measures.

SECOND FIVE YEAR PLAN

The Second Five Year (1956–1961) Plan placed a strong emphasis on giving women workers' issues particular attention because they were less organized than males and faced physical and social discrimination. According to the Plan, they should have maternity benefits and childcare for their kids at work, as well as protection from hazardous jobs. Additionally, it recommended that the equal pay for equal labour concept be put into practice and that training be made available to help women compete for higher-level positions.

THIRD FIVE YEAR PLAN

Among other things, the Third Five Year Plan has prioritized the development of women. Additionally, it identified female education as a key welfare tactic. The majority of social welfare funding has gone toward condemning adult women's education programs and growing rural welfare services. The primary focus of women's health programs was on family planning, nutrition, health education, and maternal and child welfare services.

FOURTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

Education for women continues to be a priority in the Fourth Five Year Plan. Promoting women's wellbeing inside the home as the foundation of operations was the fundamental policy of this plan. In terms of social welfare, the strategy was to delegate most departmental programs to the non-profit sector. The Central Social Welfare Board implemented the following initiatives for women's welfare during this time:

Examined adult women's education programs.

socio-economic initiatives.

FIFTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

The training of women who require care and protection has been prioritized in the Fifth Five Year Plan. They might be working women, needy, have dependent children, and have modest incomes. In order to address various family issues and the role of women, the Plan changed the strategy for women's advancement from welfare to development with the goal of integrating welfare and development services. In order to give women the abilities and information necessary to carry out the duties of a housewife, it also suggested a functional literacy curriculum that covers topics like child care, nutrition, health care, and home economics.

SIXTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

One of the most crucial ways to improve women's status, according to the Sixth Five Year Plan, is to guarantee them a fair share of employment opportunities, set aside a certain percentage of funds for them, and give them a quota in all programs aimed at reducing poverty. This plan was considered a turning point in the advancement of women. In September 1982, the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) was established to give rural women living below the poverty line appropriate opportunity for self-employment.

SEVENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

The Sixth Five Year Plan's recommendations for expanding the participation of women in various rural development programs and integrating them into the mainstream of national development were reiterated in the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985–1990). Efforts were made during this plan to give welfare measures to all societal segments, with a particular focus on the women, who are the most disadvantaged. Finding Beneficiary Oriented Schemes (BOS) 1986 that directly benefit women in various Ministries/Departments was a crucial step in the Seventh Plan. The GOI released the National Perspective Plan for Women (NPPW) 1988-2000 in 1988 to assess the degree of women's integration into India's development and to offer suggestions for social justice and equity for all women. For the NPPW, reservations for women in a variety of professions are very important. Assistance with Training-cum The work for Women (STEP) initiative was started in 1987 with the goal of enhancing women's abilities in order to increase their work prospects. Women's employment and income-generating training and production centres were established to help women become self-sufficient.

EIGHTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

The 1992 launch of the Eight Five Year Plan (1992-97) signalled a change in strategy for women's development programs from development to empowerment. It pledged to make sure that women are not excluded from the advantages of development in other areas and that they are given the opportunity to participate equally in the process of development. The eighth plan created the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1993 to the Indian Constitution, which allocated one-third of the seats in Panchayats and Municipalities to women.

NINTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

The Ninth Five Year Plan, which went into effect on April 1, 1997, significantly altered the traditional approach to planning for women in two ways. One of the main criticisms leveled at the Ninth plan was the "empowerment of women." As the driving force behind societal progress and transformation, women were viewed as empowered. The tactics of 1. reserving one-third of seats for women in state legislative assemblies and parliament were the focus of the ninth plan.

TENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

For women, the Tenth Plan (2002–2007) established specific measurable goals. They are: Women are organized into Self Help Groups (SHGs) for the purpose of generating revenue under the Swyamsidha program, which is a modified version of the Indira Mahila Yojana. Additionally, it makes it easier to

acquire services like water supplies, non-formal education, health care, and literacy. Empowering women politically, educationally, economically, and legally is one of the fundamental tenets of government outlined in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) of the United Progressive Alliance Government. To ensure that gender equity concerns are taken into consideration and that plans benefit women, there is a need to improve the involvement of women in the creation and execution of development plans.

ELEVENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN

For the first time, women were acknowledged in the Eleventh Five Year Plan as both equal citizens and contributors to social and economic advancement. According to the strategy paper for the Eleventh Plan (2007–2012), "Gender is a significant divide that demands immediate attention." Particularly concentrated efforts are made to rid society of this ailment by fostering an atmosphere that empowers women on the political, social, and economic fronts. However, similar concerns over the gender gap have been voiced in previous initiatives. The women's strategy is limited to three areas: women's health, economic empowerment, and violence against women. Creating a safe and violence-free environment for women was a significant challenge prior to the 11th plan. Last but not least, the 11th plan acknowledged that a country cannot be healthy unless its women are. In order to interrupt the cycle of poor health and new born mortality, it aimed to lower the prevalence of anaemia and malnutrition among the teenage girls. A committee of "feminist" economists has been established by the government in a novel step to guarantee gender-sensitive public resource allocation in the 11th Five Year Plan.

Twelfth Five Year Plan

"Faster, Sustainable, and More Inclusive Growth" is the title of the twelfth five-year plan. The growth rate of 8.2% was chosen for this plan. For women who are single, especially those who choose to be single, the Planning Commission is advocating for special treatment. Women's involvement in favour-related jobs in animal husbandry and agriculture. Women's unique requirements must be taken into consideration when developing policies and plans for the Twelfth Five Year Plan. The 12th Five Year Plan focuses on government, urbanization, education, and health. Several key strategies for strengthening women's agency were emphasized in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan. These include:

- Economic Empowerment
- Social and Physical Infrastructure Development
- Enabling and Supportive Legislations
- Enhanced Participation of Women in Governance
- Inclusion of All Categories of Vulnerable Women

Post-2017: Transition to NITI Aayog Framework

After formal Plans ended, the central government introduced and scaled several high-visibility schemes focused on girls and women (e.g., Beti Bachao Beti Padhao; Sukanya Samridhi; various women's entrepreneurship and protection initiatives), while states started their own flagship programmes. Schemes also targeted financial inclusion (PMMY/MUDRA), crèche support, and safety initiatives; however, the Plan framework's systematic, multi-year targets gave way to programme-based interventions.

Policy Recommendations

1. Reintroduce medium-term gender plans (3–5 years) with clear measurable targets.
2. Strengthen gender budgeting at central and state levels.
3. Invest in the care economy (crèches, elderly care, childcare centers).
4. Boost women's employment through skills, safety infrastructure, and local job creation.
5. Improve data systems for measuring empowerment, unpaid work, and violence.
6. Norms-change programmes involving men, families, and communities.

7. Strengthen legal protections and ensure fast-track justice for gender-based violence.
8. Expand digital access for rural women to enhance financial and educational empowerment.

CONCLUSION

An examination of these Five Year Plans reveals that in spite of the policy emphasis on welfare or investment in human resources, the share of investment in the social services in terms of the actual allocation has been steadily declining in successive plans. The objective emphasized in the various plans as well as the share of allocations indicate that among programmes specially designed for women's development, the order of priorities up to the Fourth Five Year Plans has been education, then health and lastly other aspects of welfare on the assumption that all other programmes will benefit women indirectly if not directly. Various policies and programmes have been made by the government for the empowerment as well as the development of women. But still there are many areas of concern that need attention towards upliftment of women.

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