

## **Indian Women Empowerment act and commissions, recommendation for development of women**

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### **Introduction:**

Women empowerment has now become a global issue and development buzz word in India. The last decade witnessed very active and multifaceted efforts in various national and international forms for achieving principles of equality, sustainability and empowerment with a special focus on women. The issue of empowerment of women moved center stage with the global paradigm shift from a growth oriented approach to a human development approach. Certain acts, commissions and recommendation for development of women has been initiated.

### **Acts for Development of Women:**

To safeguard the Constitution guarantees the state passed some women related specific legislation like The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948, The Plantation Labour Act, 1951, The Family Courts Act, 1954, The Special Marriage Act, 1954, The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 with amendment in 2005, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995), Dowry Prohibition Act, The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1976, The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983, The Factories (Amendment) Act, 1986, Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 and The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 came into force on October 26, 2006.

### **Commissions for Development of Women**

#### **1. National Commission for Women**

The Government set-up this statutory body with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women and review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary in January 1

#### **1. Reservation for Women in Local Self-Government**

The Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas by passing the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act 1992.

#### **2. The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000)**

To ensure the survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child. The plan of action was established.

#### **3. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001**

“National Policy for the Empowerment of Women” in the year 2001 was prepared by the Department of Women and Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource and Development. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

### **Current Policies for development of women**

Whether it is pre-independence or post, India has been taking active steps towards women's status and education. The 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, has been a path breaking step towards the growth of education, especially for females. According to this act, elementary education is a fundamental right for children between the age of 6-14 years. And the government has undertaken to provide this education free of cost, and made it compulsory for those in that age group. This government undertaking is more widely known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Since then, the SSA has come up with many schemes for inclusive as well as exclusive growth of Indian education as a whole, including schemes to

help foster the growth of female education.

### The major schemes:

**Mahila Samakhya Programme:** This programme was launched in 1988 as a result of the New Education Policy (1968). It was created for the empowerment of women from rural areas especially socially and economically marginalized groups. When the SSA was formed, it initially set up a committee to look into this programme, how it was working, and to recommend new changes that could be made.

**Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBV):** This scheme was launched in July, 2004, to provide education to girls at primary level. It is primarily for the underprivileged and rural areas where literacy level for females is very low. The schools set up have 100% reservation: 75% for backward class, and 25% for BPL (below Poverty line) females.

### National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL):

This programme was launched in July, 2003. It was an incentive to reach out to the girls who the SSA was not able to reach through other schemes. The SSA called out to the “hardest to reach girls”. This scheme has covered 24 states in India. Under the NPEGEL, “model schools” have been set up to provide better opportunities to girls.

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women’s Empowerment (*Swashakti*). National Policy for the Empowerment of Women came was passed in 2001.

In 2010 March 9, one day after International Women’s day, Rajyasabha passed Women’s Reservation Bill, ensuring 33% reservation to women in Parliament and state legislative bodies

Women in independent India have more rights than their counterparts in many other countries of the world. But most of our women are not very conscious of these rights. Uneducated rural women do not have any awareness of their rights. Prof Ram Ahuja conducted a study a few years ago in eight villages of a district in Rajasthan among 753 women belonging to different age-groups.

His intention was to assess the degree of awareness and measure the level of satisfaction among women about the rights sanctioned by the Constitution of India. He concluded that the level of awareness of rights among women depends upon the following four aspects.

- (i) Individual background of women which orders to their educational level, aspiration level and personal needs.
- (ii) Social environment of women which includes the social expectations of kins, husband’s values and family members’ perceptions.
- (iii) Economic base of women which refers to the level of class-membership, that is. whether they belong to lower class, middle class or upper class, Subjective perception of women which refers to women’s own feeling and assessment of their statuses and roles.

In Prof. Ahuja’s study more than 75% of women were not known about their rights; 20% of them did not have any awareness of their political rights: less than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of women had the chance of inheriting their husband’s property and only 0.5% of them got a share of the father’s property.

Some other general observations made by experts, it could be concluded that even today majority of our women are being identified not as independent individuals but only as daughters, wives, mothers or as family members. Women are also not ready for their separate or independent identification. Hence, women are still regarded as belonging to the “weaker section”.

It can also be said that majority of our women (surely more than 50%) are happy with their family life and do not cherish any ambition relating to political and public life. Those earning women members also do not have the full freedom to spend their money in accordance with their own will and wish. Most of women do not prefer to take decisions on important matters but leave them to their menfolk’s discretion.

Thus, our women are not completely free from the hold of the customs. In the unorganised sector, exploitation of women continues, for they are illiterate, ignorant and unorganized. In most of the homes male-children are still being preferred to female children. It appears that the societal approach towards women, their role and status has not radically changed.

Hence, bringing about more and more legislations to ensure better opportunities to grant more rights and concessions is of no benefit unless there is a basic change in the people’s attitude towards women and women’s role in society.

Women’s emancipation and empowerment cannot be completed if due importance is not given to her education the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi are quite true and take up an even greater importance in today’s conditions. “Women have been the pivot of life and all lives have originated from the women’s

womb” and “when we educate a man, the teaching is for an individual, but when a woman is taught, the teaching is for nation”. These words are very true as the woman, who by her multiple roles influences the life of people around her, either it’s her family, community or society, knowledge to understand their rights and to fight for it. When a woman is educated she will be able to set an example for others and play a very important role in the up lift and empowerment of all classes.

### **Conclusion**

After independence there was a greater change in the status of women in Indian society. The constitution provided a right to equality for both the sexes. There was drastic change of position of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century to a position of equality. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the progress of women can be seen.

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