

Kurukshetra Summary January 2018

EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN: THE WAY FORWARD

- Poverty is particularly acute for women living in rural households. Women's poverty is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy. Poor access to economic resources, education and support services results in their low participation in the decision-making processes. Rural women are not a homogenous category and thus, have different location specific needs.
- Rural women experience inequalities in healthcare and nutrition, have lower access to employment, lack ownership of property and are also victims of domestic violence. Yet, they take disproportionate responsibility for housework and child-care as compared to men. This asymmetrical division of labor, rights and assets renders them more vulnerable
- Rural women who constitute 66 per cent of total labour in farm production and livestock related activities have little role in marketing or selection of either livestock or their crop. Market economy trends in the era of globalization have further widened the gap between educational and technological opportunities available for rural women.
- There also exists a large divide between rural and urban women. Though work participation rate of rural women is higher than their urban counterparts, higher work participation rates *per se* do not indicate a higher level of welfare such as higher educational capabilities and/or asset and income. In fact, the situation is quite dismal for rural women especially for women belonging to SCs/STs and other vulnerable/marginal categories.
- Work participation rate of female workers in rural areas was higher which stood at 30 per cent as compared to the work participation rate of only 15.4 per cent in urban areas as per Census, 2011. Most of the rural women are engaged in the unorganized sector, agriculture & allied activities, microenterprises etc. These activities are drudgery-based and low income. Digital technologies have further deepened this gap due to poor digital literacy among rural women as compared to urban women.
- With around 60 per cent of India's population engaged in farming, women contribute to almost 70-80 per cent of farming activities but are neither legally, nor socially recognized as farmers, there is significant gender segmentation of operations in agriculture. While men predominate in activities such as ploughing and harvesting which have largely become mechanized these days, women predominate in activities like, weeding, transplanting and inter-cropping that involve more drudgery. Technological implements are either not available, or women have little access to them.
- Men have entered into more diversified occupations in non-agricultural sectors, while women have largely tended to remain in agriculture indicating the need for creating opportunities outside agriculture in rural areas.
- While, more than 18 per cent of farm families in India are headed by women, they face problems of access to *pattas* or title to land. As a result, they remain excluded from many government opportunities such as access to insurance, markets, credits etc. Lack of

recognition of their rights hampers Indian women's possibilities not only to become more successful and productive farmers, but also gain self-sufficiency and decision making power that can improve the livelihoods of their families and the community at large.

- There are fewer opportunities for women due to segmentation of women workers for limited activities. Nearly 80 per cent of the rural enterprises are of women. Most of these enterprises in rural areas are home based subcontracted works and are the lowest end of the value chain.

Challenges for rural women

- **Poor education:** Poor knowledge on legal rights hampers the social and political empowerment of rural women.
- **Digital literacy:** Poor access to Information Technology (IT) by rural women intensifies existing inequalities. Digital literacy has the capacity to empower rural women by raising social and political awareness, improving educational and employment opportunities.
- **Poor access to technologies:** There is inadequate development with respect to technologies specifically tailored to women-specific occupations. Besides, involvement of women in technology development and transfer has also received poor attention from both scientific and administrative wings of the government.
- **Poor livelihoods opportunities outside agriculture:** Women are rarely involved in the backward and forward production linkages with agricultures.
- **Lack of skills**
- **Vulnerability to climate change:** The effect of climate change drives rural women into dangerous situations/risks and vulnerabilities.
- **Lack of convergence between various Government programme:** Due to lack of adequate convergence among the various schemes implemented by various Ministers, particularly, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Rural Development and Ministry of Women and Child Development, empowerment of rural women remains scattered and isolated.

Government efforts

- **Deen Dyal Upadhyay Antyodaya Yojna (DAY-NRLM): Ajeevika** is a major project of Ministry of Rural Development. It focuses on rural women and aims to achieve universal social mobilization by involving rural women. At least one woman member from each identified poor rural household is to be brought under the Self Help Group (SHG) network in a time bound manner.
- There are other two important components of *Ajeevika*, relevant for improvement of livelihoods of rural women. **Deen Dyal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojna (DDU-GKY)** aims to skil rural youth who are poor and provide them with hobs having regular monthly wages or above the minimum wages. It is one of the clusters of initiatives and full social inclusion of the candidates is ensured by the mandatory coverage of socially disadvantaged group, where-one third of the persons covered should be women. **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)** is another component that aims to improve the present status of women in Agriculture and to enhance the opportunities for empowerment.

- Ministry of Women & Child Development has launched an extensive training programme with an objective of **empowering Elected Women Representative (EWRs)** and to help them assume the leadership roles expected to them and guide their villages for a more prosperous future.
- Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), of Ministry of Women & Child Development, extends micro-credit to the women in the informal sector through a client friendly, without collateral and in hassle-free manner for income generation activities.
- In order to support rural women and provide them with convergent support, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India approved a new scheme namely **Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK)** as a sub scheme under the **Umbrella Scheme of Mission for Protection and Empowerment for Women** for implementation during 2017-18 up to 2019-20 to empower rural women through community participation. MSK Scheme is envisaged to provide an interface for rural women to approach the government for availing their entitlements and for empowering them through training and capacity building.
- Community engagement through **College Student Volunteers** is envisioned in 115 most backward districts as part of the MSK Block level initiatives.
- The scheme at the block level will provide an opportunity to Student Volunteers to participate in the development process by bringing change in their own communities and ensuring that women are not left behind and are equal partners in India's progress.
- Ministry of Women & Child Development, has also prepared a portal namely **National Repository of Information for Women (NARI)** that will provide citizens easy access to information on government schemes easy access to information on government schemes and initiatives for women.
- Portal also provides information to women on issues affecting their lives – for example, there are tips on good nutrition, suggestions for health check-ups, information on major diseases, tips for job search and interview.
- Empowered rural women can play an important role in linking other women and girls to their entitlements such as access to nutritious food and supplements, equality in participation of women in government programs such as **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**, **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)**, **PM Aawas Yojna (PMAY)**, and crèches for women at working sites etc. They can also play an important role in bringing about a mindset change towards the value of girl child by actively associating themselves with programmes such as **Beti Bacho Bet Padhao (BBBP)**, **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** etc.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN

- The systematic focus on women's awakening has been consolidated into a more holistic, sharper mission under the Centre, via the appropriately named **Mission Purna Shakti**, which provides a single window for all women centric programmes run by various ministries.
- Rural women still remain a disadvantaged segment of Indian society. Statistics show that whereas 86.1 per cent females are engaged in agriculture, the figure of males is 74%.

- While 7.1% rural females are engaged in manufacturing the percentage for rural males is 7 i.e. less than that of females. Most of the training programmes have less female participation.
- Majority of rural women suffer not only from economic poverty but also from 'Information poverty'.
- Equal pay for equal work is one of the cornerstones of the gender equality movement the world over. Wage disparities have always existed in rural parts of the country, but in some spheres of activity, the divide has widened. So while men were paid 70 per cent higher wages than women for ploughing work at the end of 2004-05, the difference rose 80.4 per cent in end March 2012 and stood at 93.6 per cent at the start 2013-14.
- Women's economic empowerment Women's 'Self-help and Savings Groups' are on the increase and their efficiency is noteworthy. No external financial assistance has been given to them to start and conduct the operations of these groups. Deposit amounts have grown and are credited to the nearby rural banks. The banks have praised their regularity and clear accounting.

Role of education in empowering women

- Education is considered as a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their lives.
- As education is both an input and output of human development, educational equity will ensure enabling and entrepreneurial development. The female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 Census are 65.46 per cent where the male literacy rate is over 80 per cent.
- New UNESCO data proves education transforms development. It says:
 - ❖ If all women had a primary education, child marriages and child mortality could fall by a sixth, and maternal deaths by two-thirds.
 - ❖ Education empowers women. Educated girls and young women are more likely to know their rights and to have the confidence to claim them.

Constitutional provisions and laws

- **Article 14** Men and women to have equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic and social spheres.
- **Article 15(1)** Prohibits discrimination-against any citizens on the grounds of religion, race, sex, caste etc.
- **Article 16** Equality of opportunities in matter of public appointment for all citizens.
- **Article 39(d)** Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- **Article 42** The state to make provision for ensuring first and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.
- Government has also enacted specific laws to safeguard the interests of women and for up gradation of their status. These are,
- **The Hindu Succession Act, 1956** which provides for women the right to parental property.

- **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961** which declares the taking of dowry an unlawful activity and thereby prevents the exploitation of women.
- **Equal remuneration Act, 1976** which provides payment of remuneration equal with men for work of equal value.
- **The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971** which legalizes abortion conceding the right of women to go for abortion on the ground of physical and mental health.
- **The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983** which seeks to stop various types of crimes against women.
- **The protection of Women from Domestic violence Act, 2005** provides for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family.

Few initiatives to encourage empowerment of women by Government of India Include:

- **Aajeevika Skill : Making Rural Poor Youth Employable**
- **Mahila e-Hatt - Digital marketing portal Mahila e-Haat** launched for women entrepreneurs: Launched by the Women and Child Development Ministry. The only eligibility criteria to register is that the sellers – any women or women members of a self-help group – have to be above 18 years of age to eliminate the problem of child labour.
- **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) – SEP** scheme is intended to benefit women who are in the age group of 16 years and above across the country. The assistance under STEP scheme will be available in any sector for imparting skills related to employability and entrepreneurship.
- **Rajev Gandhi National Creche Scheme for the Children of Working Mothers**
 - Effective day care for young children is essential and a cost effective investment as it provides support to both mothers and young children. Lack of proper day-care services is, often, a deterrent for women to go out and work.
 - Women working in the organized sector can avail day care facilities for their children which their employers are obliged to provide under various legislations.
 - On the other hand, the need of the children of the women working in the unorganised sector still remains largely unaddressed.

Conclusion

Empowering Rural Women is essential, not only for the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also for overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural workforce worldwide.

NATIONAL POLICY FOR WOMEN 2016

- The vision of the National Policy for Women 2016 is to create “a society in which women attain their full potential in all spheres of life and influence the process of social change”
- While it is hopeful for its comprehensive listing of issues, acknowledging the multiple facets of women’s life, it is disturbing as it does not recognise women as active agents and only reiterates many measures that are mostly directed at managing the manifestations of the larger structural issues.
- The document has listed seven priority areas namely; 1. Health; including food security and nutrition; 2. Education; 3. Economy; 4. Governance and Decision; 5. Violence against Women; 6. Enabling Environment and 7. Environment and Climate Change.
- Apart from nutrition and reproductive health, which is normally the thrust of all policies, the current policy outlines the issues of the elderly, women at menopausal age and other physical health conditions of women. Though, the list is promising, the solution suggested are directed towards the health insurance model which could only worsen some of the structural issues.
- Given that many women are outside the paid economy and have poor control over household resources, contributory health schemes are bound to affect women adversely. Further, women are also given the additional responsibility of ensuring safe food and nutrition to different members of the community through formation of women SHGs. This not only makes this group of women accountable for community’s nutritional insecurities, but also would increase the burden of unpaid work.
- Retention of girls in schools, providing for their gender specific needs including issues of sexual harassment are the core concern in the education section. Here again, the solution does not take into account the diversities of the different regions and sections and the emerging complexities.
- The elaborate flagging of issues on women’s work, both paid and unpaid work (especially the work done at home) is an appreciable one, given the crisis in women’s employment. The document acknowledges the segregation of women into the information sector the need for expanding new work opportunities for an increasing number of educated women.
- Issues of adverse sex ratio, trafficking of women and girls, monitoring and managing violence against women including sexual harassment at the workplace marks the section on violence against women.
- Other sections put together a number of aspects ranging from provisioning of basic utilities to natural resource management and climate change. The policy also promises comprehensive social protection mechanism for vulnerable women such as single women, widows, deserted, separated and divorced women. The need for extending existing laws to domestic workers or the need for a new legislation in the sector which has been the demand of domestic workers, however, needs to be included in the document.
- Gender inequality in governance structures and forums are also outlines, the solutions of which are limited to gender sensitive training and reservations for women ignoring the deep rooted nature of such issues.
- The most important commitment which can have large scale implications in terms of assessing and monitoring women’s status is the promise of gender disaggregated data

across all important dimensions of women's life. Given that adequate data has been a major issue in terms of capturing and analyzing the interlinkages across issues, this commitment is really a welcoming one.

- The national policy acknowledges the importance of economic participation of women, and one of the objectives of the policy is to increase and incentivise work force participation of women in the economy. The issues of women's economic participation across sectors are discussed under three specific sector; agriculture, industry and service detailing the specific contexts and measures that requires to be undertaken.
- The acknowledgement of women's unpaid work and the need for its recognition and valuation, resonating the concerns raised in the SDGs is surely an important landmark of the policy. To reduce the burden on women thereby freeing women to take up paid work, provision of crèches and other facilities are outlines. But, the fact that many of the governmental schemes, such as ICDS, are built upon the devalued work of women who are framed as 'voluntary' workers needs to be accounted and addressed if any substantial change is to occur in the larger perspective of women's unpaid work and its valuation.

Conclusion:

- Overall, the policy ably captures the different dimensions of women's life and promises interventions at different levels. The policy, though it starts with acknowledging the need for a rights based approach is a repeat of the dominant welfare approach.
- Finally, it is important to note that a policy document is only the first step and may be the easiest. It needs to be followed up with strict implementation plans that demand coordination among various ministries which will finally decide the failure or success of the larger policy.

PM UJJWALA YOJANA: MAKING WOMEN HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER

- It has been stated that almost 38 per cent of the world's population is still dependent on traditional biomass for cooking. Vulnerability to health hazards increases due to the pollution generated from inefficient burning of biomass and use of traditional biomass cook stoves. The pollution does not confine to household but also affect the nearby atmosphere.
- Nearly 121 million households are still using the inefficient chulhas as per the Census 2011. As per a WHO report, smoke inhaled by women from unclean fuel is equivalent to burning 400 cigarettes in an hour.
- The **Sustainable Development Goal – 7** sets an objective to provide access to an affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy services by 2030.
- In India, nearly 40 per cent of the populations deprived of clean energy for cooking. Recognizing LPG as a major component of the clean cooking solution, India has taken lead to provide a clean solution to BPL families through about 80 million LPG connections by 2020 under the major program of **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)**.
- The connections are released in the name of adult woman member of a BPL family having no LPG connection either in the name of the beneficiary or any other family member and based on Socio-Economic Caste Census Data.

Achievements of PMUY:

- Use of LPG as cooking fuel has helped in a big way to rural women, empowering their livelihood in terms of improvement in health, and the increased economic productivity by saving time spent on arranging cooking needs, As of November 2017, about 32 million LPG connection in about 712 districts have been released under PMUY.
- State Government have also come forward to provide support by funding either stove or regulators. It is a perfect example of cooperative federalism where Centre and States have joined hands to resolve a common issue of cooking.
- There are many questions raised about the PMUY scheme that the rural LPG users do not go for frequent refills due to insufficient funds.
- The cost people incur on medicine on account of health hazard due to inefficient burning of biomass is not comparable with the incurred cost of LPG cylinder refill. Similarly, the time spent by rural women in arranging fuel woods and carrying water is also significant, which can be utilized for other productive output. It should also be noted that a behavioural change will take some time to happen; people accustomed to the traditional cooking system may need some time to change their cooking practice.
- Although not complete in itself, PMUY started with a systematic approach. And, a lot more is needed from the affordability, accessibility, and behavioural aspects.
- The PMUY is likely to result in an additional employment of around 1 Lakh and provide a business opportunity of at least Rs. 10,000 Cr. over the next 3 years to the Indian industry. This scheme has provided great opportunities under the 'Make in India' campaign for all the manufacturers of cylinders, gas stoves, regulators, and gas hose.

Way forward

- As far as clean cooking energy access is concerned, another possible alternative for cooking is using electricity for clean cooking in rural areas.
- A National Mission of Clean Cooking (MNCC) needs to be pursued to coordinate efforts on cooking fuels, efficient cook stoves and related R&D with an aim to achieve full clean cooking fuel coverage by 2022.

WOMEN'S SAFETY TOP PRIORITY

- Violence against women (VAW) has been a worldwide phenomenon, inviting concerns and debates nationally and internationally.
- WHO, in its research on VAW, categorized it as occurring through five stages of life cycle: “1) pre-birth, 2) infancy, 3) girlhood, 4) adolescence and adulthood and 5) elderly”.
- The WHO Global Campaign for Violence Prevention, notes, “The number of ‘missing’ women, killed for gender-related reasons, is of the same order of magnitude as the estimated 191 million human beings who have lost their lives directly or indirectly as a result of all the conflicts and wars of the 20th century-which was, with two world wars and numerous other murderous conflicts, the most violent period in human history so far.”
- VAW has been an issue of the women’s liberation movement in India since the beginning of the movement in India since the beginning of the movement during 1974-75. The Patna Conference of February 1988 further identified the various social and economic forms of VAW, which take various forms and shape like ‘purdah’ sati, dowry deaths, female infanticide, selective abortions, and rapes.
- Analysis of data from the national Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, GOI, shows that out of the total IPC crimes committed in India during 2013, 11.7 percent were crimes committed against women and the rate of crime against women stood at 52.2.
- The Commission on the Status of Women in its 57th session, held at United Nations Headquarter in New York in March 2013, had “Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”, as its priority theme and aims at putting an end to all kinds of violence against women and girls.
- The issue gets compounded in areas where exposure and literacy rates among women are low, they are not financially independent to break out of the dependence barrier to speak out against violence, or have internalized oppressive and violent structures as a part of their existence due to social and cultural conditioning.

Some of the steps taken by government:

- **Universalisation of Women Helpline:** The Helpline number 181, as allocated by the Department of Telecommunication (Government of India) provides 24 hours response, both for emergency and non-emergency situations, where women may be affected by violence including sexual offences and harassment both in public and private spheres, including in the family, community, workplace, etc.
- **Panic button on mobile phones:** This initiative was launched keeping in view the need for women to reach out for help urgently in a situation of violence/sexual attack. The Department of Telecommunications notified the “Panic Button and Global Positioning System in Mobile Phone Handsets Rules 2016” issued under section 10 of the Indian Wireless Telegraph Act 1933.
- **Mahila Police Volunteer:** The mahila pole volunteer initiative is based on the principle of community volunteerism. It was envisaged in collaboration with Ministry of Home Affairs in order to facilitate a positive link between police and community and to help women in distress. Every Gram Panchayat across the county would have one Mahila Police Volunteer

who would act as a link between rural women preventive and curative aspects, proper implementation of various laws and provisions available for safety of women and act as an enabler for victims of harassment/violence who may not find it comfortable to directly approach the police.

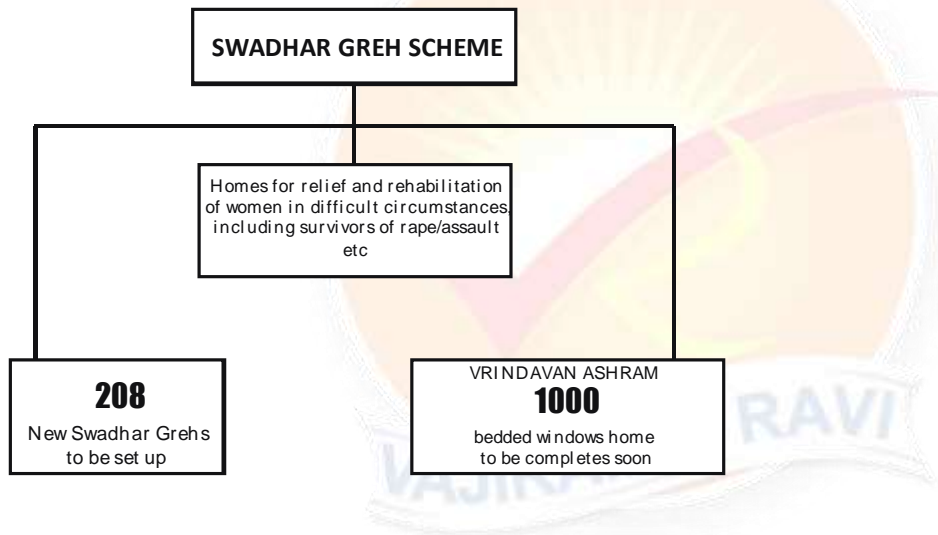
- **33 per cent reservation for women in police**
- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013:** It lays down detailed definitions of what constitutes sexual harassment, defines the employee and the employer, defines what constitutes as a workplace, and takes into account both the organized and the unorganized sector, thereby covering all women working in offices, factories, or even as domestic help in homes irrespective of the age of the woman.
- The Act further makes it mandatory for employers to constitute an 'Internal Complaints Committee' if there are more than 10 employees to, handle cases of sexual harassment at the workplace.
- It is important to note here that while the Act allows provision for conciliation under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act 1996, it does not allow for a demand for monetary compensation from the victim thereby working as a deterrent towards false complaints to extort money.
- The Act has, however, received criticism from various quarters on the grounds that the internal committee has the power to decide differently and as such discriminate between the compensation paid by different perpetrators based on their income and financial stability.
- Further, it does not cover agricultural-workers and armed-forced nor recognizes sexual harassment faced by men in certain situations. Some women activists and NGOs are also of the view that the provision to penalize a woman in case of false complaint would also negatively affect those women who might be not be able to sufficiently prove an instance of harassment for lack of evidence, even through the case might be genuine.
- **Inclusion of acid attack victims in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act:** In 2013, SC banned the sale of acid to the public in order to curb the incidents of acid attacks, however during the year 2016 number of victims subjected to acid attacks went up by 23.3 percent from 249 (in 2015) to 307.
- Recognizing the horror of these kinds of crimes and the related injuries that they inflict on women, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was passed in December 2016.
- The recognition of acid attack victims under this Act would help them with education and occupational provisions and allow them to avail of 3 percent reservation for jobs earmarked for the disabled. With the coming of this Act, India would also fulfill its obligations towards the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory.
- **UJJAWALA: A comprehensive scheme for prevention of trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration of victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation** - The scheme is made up of 5 components which aim at making the victims financially independent and improve their health, social status, and living conditions. It works on the principles of: Prevention; Rescue, rehabilitation; Reintegration; and Repatriation.

Conclusion:

- It is important to note that combating harassment and violence in urban and rural spaces with different cultural and social set-ups requires a dynamic approach and no one mechanism can have the same effect across regions that make up a diverse society as India.
- Therefore, the approach to addressing VAW need to come in a holistic multi-pronged way, designed by putting various arms of the governance mechanism into a structural whose so as to address these associated concerns that inhibit women from speaking up.

Swadhar Greh-A Scheme for Women in difficult Circumstances

- Recognizing the need to prevent women from exploitation and to support their survival and rehabilitation, Swadhar – A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances was launched by the Department of Women and Child Development in 2001-02. The scheme through the provisions of shelter, food, clothing, counseling, training, clinical and legal aid aims to rehabilitate such women in difficult circumstance.



WOMEN AND PANCHAYATS

- Women, constituting almost half of village population, are an important stakeholder in the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs). However, the truth is that despite 33 percent reservation, their genuine participation in Panchayat remains an unfulfilled goal. Mindful of this lacuna, Government has launched a nationwide programme to train women *sarpanch* to enable them take leadership positions in their villages.
- In pursuance of Article 40 of DPSP, PRIs were formed in a number of states but many shortcomings were observed in their functioning. Their elections were irregular and Panchayats were generally devoid of any real powers or developmental roles. So it was considered that there was an imperative need to enshrine in the Constitution certain basic and essential features of Panchayati Raj Institutions to impart certainty, continuity and strength to them. Thus, Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 came into existence.
- **Constitution 73rd Amendment and Panchayati Raj in India:** The 73rd Amendment 1992 added a new part IX to the constitution titled “The Panchayats” covering provisions from Article 243 to 243(O); and a new Eleventh freedom Schedule covering 29 subjects within the functions of the Panchayats.
- However, states have been given enough freedom to take their geographical, politico-administrative and others conditions into account while adopting the Panchayati Raj System.
- 73rd Amendment to the Constitution mandate that at least one third of the seats in the Panchayats must be reserved for women, at least five states have increased the proportion of reserved seats to 50 percent. Bihar was the first state to do so in 2006 and was followed by Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh.
- **Need for Capacity building of Elected Women Representatives (EWR):** Despite 33 per cent reservation for women in the Panchayat bodies, the EWRs continue to remain ineffective since they do not have appropriate knowledge and skill to administer the village, and the show continues to be run by their husbands.

Training programme for Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) of Panchayats:

- A comprehensive module for capacity building of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) of Panchayats and a training program for Trainers of women Panchayat leaders across the country was launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in collaboration with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on 17th April, 2017.
- **Areas of Training :** The WCD Ministry has initiated his countrywide program of training the women *sarpanches* and other women representatives at the grassroots level in various areas like engineering (building of roads, drains, latrines etc.), finance, social development, education, health, and environment among others. The training will help the women *sarpanches* in takin the schemes launched for the benefit of the common man especially those in distress and the under privileged.
- The women *sarpanches* are also being encouraged to form a whatsapp group and share their good practices as well as one another in finding solutions to common problems.
- **Transparency:** It is hoped that newly trained women representatives will be able to ensure greater accountability, honesty and transparency in the execution of development projects.

- Training women *sarpanches* across the country will help bring following important changes :
 1. It will help to create model villages
 2. It will help prepare women as political leaders of the future.

EDUCATING THE GIRL CHILD FOR BETTER TOMORROW

- Educating a boy is educating a person... Educating a girl is educating a nation, this statement is well justified.
- The journey to become a successful nation begins with Universal Education for Women. India can reach its true potential as a nation only when its women population are equipped with the power of education.
- Free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 6 and 14 is a fundamental right to citizens under the 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India. Yet, the state of education of women in India is far from 'free' or as totalizing and encompassing as the right appears to guarantee.
- Although over the years, India's literacy rate has improved manifold, from 12 per cent in 1947 to 74.4 per cent in 2011, but if we look at the percentage of educated people, there is a huge gap between male (82.14 percent, in 2011) and female (65.46 percent, in 2011) literacy rates in India,

We can summarise the reasons as to why the education is indispensable for women as follows:

- **Social development :**
- **Gender Equality :**
- **Economic Productivity:** Educated women can bring in more productive linkage, backward and forward both, which can bring in fruits in multiple amounts.
- **Reduction in Infant Mortality:** A well educated woman will have more chances of making better decisions for her family's health.
- **Improved Living Standard:** Education will improve chances of employment for women and hence their family income.
- **Woman Empowerment:**
- **Better Future Prospects:** Women who are educated are able to take charge of their future and also play an important role in shaping the future of their family by bringing up their children in a far better way by making them aware and accessible to better opportunities and prospects which are, by and large, ignored by the uneducated women/mothers.
- **Holistic and Inclusive Development of the Society:**

Women's education in India is hampered at different stages:

- Some of the barriers to women's education are sociological, rooted in gender stereotyping and gender stagnation and other are driven by economic concerns and constraints.
- A consequence of gender profiling and stereotyping is that when the parents cannot afford education for their kids, the son is always given preference over the daughter, if at all they try and send them to school.

- If the daughter wants to go for higher studies, it becomes a matter of discussion among parents, relatives, neighbour.
- Educating the girl is sometimes, viewed as an unnecessary and extravagant indulgence.



Level of education with Key Issues:

Level of education	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	VOCATIONAL FINISHING SCHOOL	& PROFESSIONAL
Issues	1 Low enrollment -getting the girl child to the school	1 High drop-out rates	1 Gender stereotyping and segregation	1 Gender stereotyping
	2 Sociological and psychological barriers to sending girls to school	2 Inadequate facilities	2 Domestic preferences	2 Self efficacy (own belief and ability to succeed)
	3 Engagement of the girl child in other work	3 Engagement in other work (housework, farms etc.)		

Women education hampered at different stages:

Stage	Early Childhood	Adolescent	Higher Studies	Post Marriage
Issues	Sons get preference over daughters in many rural areas	Female school drop-out rate stands at 63.5%	Women's marriage is given priority over education	Women takes care of the family and puts back studies or career

Process so far

- 1. Sakshar Bharat mission for female Literacy:** This programme was formulated with the objective of achieving 80% literacy level at national level, by focusing on adult women literacy seeking – to reduce the gap between male and female literacy to not more than 10 percentage points. It works on four broader objectives, namely imparting functional literacy and numeracy to non-literates, acquiring equivalency to formal educational system, imparting relevant skill development programmes and promote a learning society by providing opportunities for continuing education.
- 2. Right to Education (RTE):**
- 3. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya:** The aim is to ensure that the equality education is feasible and accessible to the girls of disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level.
- 4. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level:** The NPEGEL, is a focused intervention of Government of India, to reach the “Hardest to Reach” girls, especially those not in school. It is for reduction in the school dropouts by giving special attention to weak girls. The scheme is being implemented in educationally backward blocks (EBBs) where the level of rural female literacy is less than the national average and the gender gap is above the national average.

5. **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan** : The scheme was launched with the objective to enhance access to secondary education and to improve its quality.
6. **Dhanlakshmi scheme**: To promote awareness and importance of education of girls child, government has launched a special conditional money transfer scheme for Girl Child following 3 conditions.
 - a. At birth and Registration of Birth
 - b. Progress of Immunization and Completion of Immunization
 - c. Enrollment and Retention in School.
7. **SABLA-Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls**: It enables the adolescent girls for self development and empowerment. It aims to upgrade home based skills, life skills and integrate with the National Skill Development Programme (NSDP) for vocational skills.

The way Forward

- I. **Grassroot level improvements/interventions**
 - **Sensitisation and awareness building for women's education**: Unless parents of the girl child see value and instead prefer to use her help in household chores.
- II. **Strategic and Approaches**:
 - **Target Segment and Approaches**: In rural areas, where enrolment of women in education is rather low, mechanisms need to evolve such that the schools are more accessible for the girl child as well as the psychological and sociological barriers to sending the girl child to school are overcome.
 - **Incentivisation for Education of the Girl Child**: To facilitate this process, education of the girl child must become an attractive proposition for the parents of the girl child, who might otherwise prioritise sending the male child only to school.
- III. **Legislative initiatives**:
 - **Reservation for women in Education**: Certain percentage of women participation across various level through required legislation and reservation will not only ensure fair representation, but also encourage schools and institutes to actively devise means and programmes to attract women to their portals.

GENDER EQUALITY FOR A PROGRESSIVE SOCIETY

- According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index 2014, India registered a significant decline in its performance. Its ranking is 114 in the 142 countries list, far below as far as the status of women is concerned. On the health front, India stood at 141 out of 142, only ahead of Armenia. There is a long established linkage of national development with issues such as lack of nutrition and inadequate education of women.
- Out of 46 percent children affected by malnutrition in the country, about 70 per cent are girl children.
- Gender based violence is a global health, human rights and development issue that transcends geography, class, culture, age, race and religion to affect every community and country in every corner of the world.
- The Article 1 of UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence 1993 provides a definition of gender-based abuse, calling it "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life".

Government Initiatives:

- **Beti Bacho Beti Padhao (BBBP)** scheme, launched in January 2015 at Panipat, is a response to the falling child sex ratio (CSR).
- From 976 in 1961, the CSR fell to 918 in 2011. This indicated societal discrimination at birth or at the pre-natal stage.
- To enhance public information on sex ratio, **Guddi Gudda** Boards are put up at district level to display data on Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB).
- It is a joint initiative of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource and Development.

Schemes for nutrition and health

- Introduction of acceptable fortified Take Home Ration for the children of 7 months to 3 years old with an increased nutritive value, by addition of milk protein.
- Some components of **SuPoshan Abhiyan** include: effective micro planning; active involvement of sectors such as health, Agriculture and Food, involvement of community, *Poshan Sahayogini*, *Poshan Mitra* team, *Gram Sabha Taderth Samiti* for mobilizing the

community for reaching out to the disadvantaged and excluded in education, quality training etc.

- Introduction to one wholesome meal in the afternoon in place of THR for pregnant and lactating mothers has also been successful. This effort also helped in increasing fetal weight and hence better outcome at birth.
- States where there was no shortage of Aanganwadi workers have fared better. One of the schemes provides special crèches for children of women working as daily labourers for 8-9 hours of work.
- General malnutrition amongst rural females is another area of major concern. Anaemia is prevalent in all age groups – over 50 per cent men and 70 per cent women in India are anaemic. Anaemia antedates pregnancy and gets aggravated during pregnancy and is one of the major causes of child anaemia. Example of a local level successful example comes from Nasik where 1.35 lakh girls (14 to 18 years) (Tribal/Rural/Urban) were reached out through weekly supplementation of 100 mg of elemental iron & 500 mcg of Folic Acid, 6 monthly de-worming along with life skill training and monitoring through a self-compliance card.

Challenges to Education

- In the rural areas, most girls drop out of the school due to burden of household work; taking care younger siblings, weak economic condition of the family who were not able to afford school expenses, social/family restrictions on girl education and non-availability of schools in the area.
- Discontinuing school during the menstrual time is also quite common as there is non-availability of sanitary napkins and disposal system in schools.
- Government schemes such as **SABLA, SAKSHAM, ARSH, Adolescent Education and the Mission Convergence (Gender Resource Centres)**, etc are well planned and well thought, but there is a greater need to strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- There is a need for organising women's collectives for advocating and fostering increased enrollment in girl child education. Jagjagi Kendra is a good example from Bihar. This non-formal centre conducted gender-based studies for girls from 9 to 14 years of age with three hours specially assigned for sensitizing mothers of girl children.
- Government of Haryana schemes have stressed on the right to safety of girls in all environments. On 26 January 2015 the State launched ATM like machines in various institutions where adolescent girls could purchase three sanitary napkins for Rs. 10.

Protection against gender discrimination, sexual abuse and social security

One Stop Centre Scheme

- Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has formulated a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for setting up One Centre, a sub-scheme of Umbrella Scheme for **National Mission for Empowerment of women** including *Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyaog Yojana*.
- In order to run these centres, there have been good results from a strengthened cooperation by National Commission for Women (SCW).
- There is a need to increase allocation on rescue of trafficked victims and also strengthen welfare fund of Acid attack victims/Survivors.
- Government of Rajasthan has implemented **Rajasthan Samuhik Vivah Niyaman Evum Anudan Niyam 2009** with the objective to curb heavy expenditures in marriage and social ill practices like child marriage, dowry etc. and to encourage community marriages and marriage registration.
- To counter sexual violence and sex selective abortions, women help line, Aparajita – One Stop Crisis Centre, Sneh Aangan, PC-PNDT Bureau of Investigation, Mahila Help Desks in Polic stations, Mahila Suraksha Evam Salah Kendra, Special Women Security Cell and notification of Girl Child Policy 2013 have been implemented.
- Other measures to ensure empowerment of women in rural areas include financial empowerment in the form of Sakhi Mandals/Mission Mangalam or freedom from Shackles of debt and financial problems.

HEALTH OF RURAL WOMEN - WEALTH OF NATION

- Investment in the health of women and children, besides saving lives and preventing avoidable tragedies, secures high social and economic returns for the country. Increasing health expenditure by just \$5 per person per year up to 2035 could yield up to nine times that value in economic and social benefits, according to a study published in Lancet in 2014.
- A significant proportion of women in the rural area still are unable to get access to all the health service.

Government Initiatives:

- The Ministry follows a life-cycle approaches for designing the various health initiatives i.e., **RMNCH+A (Reproductive Maternal Neonatal and Child Health)** strategy wherein the +A stands for adolescents.
- **Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Kayrakram (RKSK)** was started in 2014 as comprehensive programme for adolescents.
- **Weekly Iron Folic Acid Supplementation to all adolescents** sanitary napkins under Menstrual Hygiene scheme and counseling (including gender based violence issue) through establishment of **Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics (AFHCs)** at various levels of health facilities, are the components of RKSK.
- Under the Peer Education Programme four peer educators (**Saathiya**) – two male and two female – are selected per 1000 population to orient the adolescents on various health issues.
- From adolescents we move onto family planning. The ASHAs (accredited social health activists) and ANMs (auxiliary nurse midwives) are trained for identification of newly married couples and provide them with a basket of choices for family planning including provision of condoms and Oral Contraceptive Pills (OCPs) right at the doorsteps of the beneficiary. The Mission Parivar Vikas (MPV) program has been launched recently to focus on seven states with the highest fertility Rate (TFR).
- The next stage in the life cycle is pregnancy.
- Under the new **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)**, the 9th of each month is dedicated to special ante-natal check-up of pregnant women at Government facility.

- As part of the **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)** – a safe motherhood scheme, conditional cash assistance is provided to eligible pregnant women for delivering in public health institutions.
- The scheme has been a success along with our other efforts as the current institutional delivery rate of the country stands at institutional delivery rate of the country stands at 78.9 per cent (NFHS 4).
- An extension of this is the **Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK)** which ensures absolutely free services to pregnant women including transport, caesarean delivery and diet to women and their new borns.
- The Health Ministry is catering to the HIV positive women through the National AIDS Control program.
- The PPTCT programme aims to prevent the peri-natal transmission of HIV from an HIV infected pregnant mother to her newborn baby.
- With the growing burden of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in the country, cancers and particularly breast and vertical cancers, affect women across all sections of society. The ministry has rolled out the population –based screening for diabetes, Hypertension and Common Cancer (Oral, Breast, and Cervical).
- The basket of services for health of all women, with special focus on the rural areas, is aimed for providing affordable and accessible health services, to advance the agenda of **Universal Coverage** in the country. This shall contribute significantly to meeting targets set under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to which India is committed.

Maternity Leave increased from 12 to 26 Weeks

Keeping in mind the welfare of working women, the Parliament has passed the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

Following amendments have been made through this bill :-

Maternity leave available to the working women to be increase from 12 weeks to 26 weeks for the first two children.

Maternity leave for children beyond the first two will continue to be 12 weeks.

Maternity leave of 12 weeks to be available to mothers adopting a child below the age of three months as well as to the “commissioning mothers”. The commissioning mother has been defined as biological mother who uses her eggs to create an embryo planted I any other woman.

Every establishment with more than 50 employees to provide for crèche facilities for

working mothers and such mothers will be permitted to make four visits during working hour to look after and feed the child in the crèche.

The employer may permit a woman to work from home if it is possible to do so.

Every establishment will be required to make these benefits available to the women from the time of her appointment.

WELFARE OF TRIBAL WOMEN

- Government has adopted Tribal Sub-Plan (now called as “Scheduled Triple Component”) strategy for ensuring overall development of tribal areas across the country while ensuring inclusive growth of Sts including tribal women.
- Ministry of Tribal Affairs while trying to ensure that women benefit equally from general schemes also has some special schemes meant for the benefit of ST women and girls as given below :
 - (i) **Scheme of Girls & Boys Hostels for STs.**
 - (ii) **Scheme of Ashram Schools in tribal areas:** The objective of the scheme is to provide residential school for STs to increase the literacy rate among the tribal students and to bring them at par with other population of the country.
 - (iii) **Scheme for Strengthening Education among ST Girls in Low Literacy Districts:** This scheme is being implemented in 54 identified low literacy Districts where the ST population is 25% or more, and ST female literacy rate is below 35%, or its fractions, as per 2001 Census.
 - (iv) **Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub Scheme (SCA to TSS) (hitherto known as SCA to Tribal Sub Plan (TSP)):** It is 100% grant from Government of India. Its objective is to bridge the gap between Scheduled Tribes (ST) population and others by providing support for education, health, sanitation, etc.
 - (v) **Grants under Article 275(1) of the Constitution :** It is 100 per cent grant from Government of India.
 - (vi) **Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana :** National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC), an apex organization under Ministry of Tribal Affairs is implementing this exclusive scheme for tribal women. Under the scheme, Scheduled Tribes women can undertake any income generation activity. Loans upto 90 per cent for scheme costing upto Rs. 1 lakh are provided at a concessional rate of interest of 4 per cent per annum.

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WOMEN AS PART OF RURAL WORKFORCE

- Contradicting the consensus of Women-in-Development and Gender-and-Development framework that structural adjustment increase intra household inequalities neoliberal paradigm with its deregulation of labor markets lead to the emergence of the phenomenon of “feminization of labour”, denoting increasing participation of women in low-wage industrial and service jobs.
- The emerging phenomena of feminization of rural labour is discernable through a gender analysis of rural people seeking work in which, 25.8% of rural women labourers are seeking work in contrast to 16.2% rural male labourers. Moreover, rural women (228 Millions) outnumber rural men (153 Millions) among the marginal work seekers.
- In this regard, social science literature brought to bear facts about complementation of women’s income, feminization of poverty, female headed household etc that lend credence to the phenomena of feminization of rural labour in India.

Feminisation of agriculture in India:

- Feminization of global farming is not only about increasing number of women on farm, But Women work roughly twice as many hours as men as well as Women’s contribution to agriculture – whether it be subsistence farming or commercial agriculture – when measured in terms of the number of tasks performed and time spent, is greater than men.
- There is consistent increase in the number of women cultivators from 148 million in 1981 to 351 million in 2011 as well as perceptible growth in the number of women agricultural labourers from 208 million in 1981 to 591 million in 2011.
- Such increasing participation of women in agriculture not only signifies the phenomena of feminization of agriculture, but also discovers the prevalence of female proxy participation in Indian agriculture.

Feminisation of rural employment in India:

- There is changing gender equation in rural employment under MGNREGA with a steady increase in proportion of women participation as against a consistent decline in the proportion of men participation from 2012 to 2017 across India. Although, the act mandates one-third reservation for women participation in these works, the national average in this

regard has gradually improved from 47 per cent in 2012 – 2013 to 56 per cent females in 2016 – 2017.

Synergy between feminization of agriculture and feminization of rural employment :

- As a source of sustainability, MGNAREGA lends improvement in agricultural production through soil and water conservation efforts on the lands of the small and marginal farmers that increases agricultural productivity and enhances farm income.
- On the contrary, as source of dialectics, increase in wages of rural workers brought forth by MGNAREGA not only magnetize agricultural labourers but also the small and marginal farmers. Nevertheless, women participation largely causes synergy between agriculture and MGNAREGA works, in so far as landed women labourers' amongst small and marginal farmers and landless women labourer's serve in rural employment during off seasons while the infrastructural improvement and irrigation development brought through MGNAREGA works lends credence to the sustainability of agriculture. Moreover, feminization of agriculture as well as MGNAREGA is largely anticipated as the remedy for feminization of poverty.

Challenges of rural women at work:

- Gender discrimination in land ownership
- Feminization of rural poverty : Lack of access to credits, capital, descent work in addition to dependent children succumb rural women to the vicious cycle of poverty, which is deeper than that of men due to the gender equality in the control and use their own income, household resources etc. to the same degree as men.
- Malnutrition
- Poor Health
- Lack of Education
- Overwork
- Unskilled
- Mistreatment
- Powerlessness