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EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN IS A PRE-REQUISITE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The present apprehensive approach that we need to cope with is how to empower women and thereby doing so how to attain sustainable development comprising both the urban areas and the rural areas. The main hindrances we face today are gender inequality, unskilled labour, unemployment, empowering women, and backward rural areas etc. This paper highlights the key factors influencing the women empowerment and sustainable development and surfaces the current government policies dealing with the problems and promoting women across the country to come forth to contribute not only for their own class but also in the development of nation. Today the government is on the fire for formulating plans for the weaker section of the society, disabled people, and victims of gender biasness etc. if government is playing its role on its part then it is the duty of the part of the society too which wants to get benefitted. Those people need to register their presence and as well as give active participation along with the government to resolve the issues and problems and help this nation to build better.

The soul of India lives in its villages. More than 60% people of India reside in rural areas. Now, the burning question is before everyone whether these people are availing the full facilities given by the government to ensure their bright future. The foundation of any nation depends on its people. No nation can progress without its women because it is she who builds the nation strong. If women are weak, marginalised then how can a country lead to progress? Progress demands overall development of a country like urban and as well as of rural without gender biasness.

Our society is structured on the concept of patriarchal system where women are governed by wish of a male as they receive orders from them and fulfil them accordingly. But gone are the days, when women were considered as weaker or marginalised section of the society. Now they demand for equality in every section of the society. They have been raised a voice against any kind of violation, suppression as well as oppression. They are struggling for their identity, for better means of livelihood not particularly for urban women but also for rural women.

In the case of rural development, it implies both the economic betterment of people as well as greater social transformation. So active participation of any community in the development process is recognised as a tool for its empowerment and women are becoming this tool. The government has taken a cautious view to make adequate provisions in its policies and programmes, through which it is to be ensured that the women of the country are not only empowered but also become active participants in the development process in the country. In fact for the sustainable development of rural women, better enforcement of land reforms and greater access to credit are needed. This development includes overall development of rural women like employment opportunities, Panchayati Raj, institutions, development authorities, drinking water facilities, sanitation, fresh food, shelter and medical assistances etc.

Various programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development are formulated keeping in view the above point of view. These programmes have special components for women, major schemes having women component, implemented by the ministry include the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (SGSY) now restructured as National Rural Livelihood Mission for giving more and more benefits to rural women. The present government has introduced many schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna (PMJDY), Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna (PMUY), and Mission

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Indradhanush etc. The state government has also introduced so many schemes for the empowerment of the women; Dial 1090 is the link of this category of women empowerment. The state government has taken an initiative for school girl like Kishori Suraksha Yojna, Shadi Bimari Anudan Yojna, and Samajwadi Pension Scheme for women etc. The aim of implementation of these programmes is monitored specifically with reference to coverage of women.

Regarding the economic independence of every citizen of India, the Prime Minister of India has introduced a nationwide scheme named Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna (PMJDY) in August 2014. In this scheme financial inclusion of every individual who does not have a bank account is to be achieved. The aim of implementing this scheme is to provide an access to those fellows who remain deprived of financial support given by the government. Through this scheme accounts of rural people are opened up to 15.75 crores while the urban people are up to 10.03 crores till November 30, 2016.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna (PMUY) [v] also comes in the category of rural women empowerment. It is an ambitious social welfare scheme of Narendra Modi government launched on May 1, 2016, in Baliya, in Uttar Pradesh. Under this scheme the government aims to provide LPG connections to 5 crores BPL households in the country. This scheme is aimed at replacing the unclean cooking fuels mostly used in rural areas. Thus the objective of this scheme is empowering women of rural areas along with their health. Because the unclean fuel may become the cause of many respiratory problems. The target is achieved up to 1 million LPG connections had been completed on November 2016.

In the connection of the series of developments of women empowerment the government has started one more ambitious scheme i.e. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao[i]; it aims to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services meant for women. It was introduced in October, 2014 to address the issue of declining child sex ratio. The scheme was launched with an initial corpus of Rs. 100 crores. According to census data, the child sex ratio (0-6 years) in India was 927 girls per thousand boys in 2001, which dropped drastically to 918 girls for every 1000 boys in 2011. A 2012 UNISEF report ranked India 41st among 195 countries. Several promotions were made by the government to promote awareness like- making 2016 Olympics bronze medallist, Sakshi Malik, a brand ambassador of this scheme in Haryana, the Hashtag #SelfieWithDaughter on social media etc.

For deciding the better future of every girl in India, the government has introduced Sukanya Samridhi Yojna, it was introduced in January, 2016. The aim is to cope with the marriage requirements and as well as the higher education of girls in the country. So after being educated they may contribute in development of the country. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2005 is also contributing in sustainable development of rural people especially of women. It is a flagship rural job guarantee scheme that was announced by the then UPA government that aims at providing 100 days wage employment to every household and the priority is given to a woman if she households. It fulfils the minimum requirement of a rural household and ensure them for their basic needs. One third of this scheme is reserved for the women. According to the Meghalaya state report [iv] the women participation among the total beneficiaries constitutes 42 percent against the mandated 33 percent of women participation. This shows quite a positive sign for making rural women financially independent and thus empowering them.

The United Nations (UN) [ii] is also having an apprehensive approach to cope with the situation of rural women development. In developing countries, rural women represent approximately 43 percent of the agricultural labour force, and produce, process and prepare much of the food available, thereby giving them primary responsibility for food security. For ensuring such developments to be made the UN has set up the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Each year 15th October has been observed as International Day of Rural Women.

The government has given proper instructions for the safety of women at all worksites as the ratio should be at least 50% of women. National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) promotes the self-help group of women. A self-help group (SHG) [vi] comprises of 10-20 women in general and 5-20 in difficult areas. The aim of these SHGs is to provide self-help, mutual cooperation and collective action for social and economic development. NRLM is working with these groups of exclusively women membership because it recognises that women are marginalised in the economy, in the polity and in the society. Thus building and sustaining institutions of poor women at various levels would give them social, economic and political empowerment and thereby bring significant qualitative improvement in their lives. NRLM focuses mainly on women headed households, single women, women victim of trafficking, women with disability and other such vulnerable categories. The

Membership of these SHGs are quite voluntary and it consists of only poor women and they really experience membership.

Generally it is the tendency of women in India that they deny for their basic rights but now these women are speaking out for their rights. Move Haq Meri Pehchan (My rights, My identity) [iii] is that SHG supported by NRLM. It looks at a gendered understanding of livelihoods focusing on women farmers. Through pilot implemented in select districts of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, UN women and its partner ANANDI have been supporting government functionaries of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) to ensure its design, implementation and monitoring is more gender-responsive. The motto of these SHGs and their federations shall play an active role in taking up social issues affecting their members-issues of domestic violence, alcoholism, girl child marriages etc. It will work with the Gram Panchayat to access entitlements of the government for their members and also to lend constructive support to the efforts of the Gram Panchayats for public welfare. Thus NRLM shall facilitate women to assert their rights for inclusion in the economy, for accessing resources, for addressing powerlessness and exclusion, for enabling participation and most significantly for realising equality. An important component of NRLM is the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojna (MKSP) which aims at supporting women farmers. It also seeks to reduce drudgery for women farmers. Many more steps are taken to ensure the sustainable development of women like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (Gramin) for providing them shelter on cheap rate. Other programmes like Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojna (PMGSY) is also one of the crucial programmes of the government. Though at the superficial level it does not have any significant impact on the living conditions of the rural women but it can provide a connectivity through the rural roads which may enhance the opportunities for the girl child to have an access to the education facilities. Due to better roads they may have an easy approach to medical facilities of urban areas.

To ensure this process of development of rural women, the government has to take certain steps for promoting small scale and cottage industries along with skilled manual labour. Time to time workshops and meetings should be held to know the problems and hindrance of the programmes and in this process education plays a vital and dynamic role. So steps should be taken in a way that every girl may attend her school and make her golden future. In a sum up it can assume that above mentioned programmes should be checked after a fixed time, so that the real findings can come out whether the beneficiaries are benefitted or not. This will help to know the real living conditions of the rural women in terms of providing adequate facilities.

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