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Empowering Women Through Policy Programs: An Analysis of Government Schemes

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ABSTRACT

Women constitute half of society's population, and it tends to be believed that excellent introduction belongs to women. But it's a harsh reality that women have been mistreated in every society for a long time, and India is no exception. Women's empowerment is an integral part of India's socio-economic development. Women are victims of various evils, including discrimination, oppression, and violence, in their families, workplaces, and society. Numerous laws, many of which were passed during the British era, including the Abolition of Sati Act, 1829; Widow Remarriage Act, 1856; Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929; Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; and others, were passed by the legislature to improve the status of women in India. Aside from these laws, other acts about business or employment have special provisions for women, such as the Workmen Compensation Act of 1923, the Payment of Wages Act of 1936, the Factories Act of 1948, the Maternity Benefit Act of 1961, the Minimum Wages Act of 1948, the Employees State Insurance Act of 1948, and the Pensions Act of 1987, among others. The Indian government has introduced numerous schemes and initiatives over the years to address the multifaceted challenges faced by women and promote gender equality. This research paper examines the objectives, implementation mechanisms, and impact of various government schemes for women's empowerment in India. Key schemes analyzed in this paper include the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) initiative, Mahila Shakti Kendra, STEP (Support to Training and Employment Program for Women), Ujjwala Scheme and Working Women Hostel Scheme. Each scheme is evaluated based on its effectiveness, reach, and contribution to women's empowerment in India. This research paper is a valuable resource for policymakers, scholars, and activists interested in the development and impact of government programs for women's empowerment in India. It also provides insights into the broader global examination of gender equality and governments' roles in promoting inclusive development.

Keywords: *Women, Discrimination, Women Empowerment, Laws, Schemes, India.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Women are actively participating in advancing the society and economy of the arena in the twenty-first century. To increase women's participation in decision-making, which is the most important factor in socioeconomic development, it is essential to empower them. The census 2011, counts women population 48.5% of the total population in India², In the changing dynamics of society women's empowerment is relevant and very important. The term "empowerment of girls" refers to promoting girls' independence, financial independence, high self-esteem, confidence to handle any challenging situation, and active participation in various social-political development initiatives. Education strongly influences women's prosperity, development, and welfare. Education has been identified as an essential element in social change and development in any society or nation. Women's self-confidence is greatly boosted by education, which also helps them change their social status. Education gives people the ability and confidence to make better decisions. Through skill development and microfinance, women can achieve financial stability and stop depending on social assistance. Education for women also means education for the entire family. The Indian Constitution contains specific provisions to empower women and prevent gender discrimination in society. Article 14 talks about equality by law. The state may create unique protections for women under Article 15. Various governments have introduced various programs to empower women in male-dominated societies because the advancement of humanity would be incomplete without them. Existing laws have been updated and changed to reflect the demands of the 21st century. following independence Several new laws were enacted in India, creating criminal penalties for certain types of behavior that infringe, deprive, or degrade the dignity of women. Apart from the legislation enacted by the Central and State Governments, the apex court of the country and several High Courts of the States have protected Women through their judicial decisions.

II. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women are empowered when they have the freedom and choice to decide for themselves. They have the most powerful say in determining what is right for them and what is wrong for them. Due to their lack of rights, women have endured hardship over the years. They were treated poorly by the men in their lives. They were considered to be practically nonexistent in earlier centuries. As if voting, one of the most fundamental rights, belonged exclusively to men. Women became more aware of their power as times changed. The revolution for women's

² NITI AAYOG, <https://www.niti.gov.in/empowerment-women-through-education-skilling-micro-financing> (last visited September 3,2023)

empowerment started right after that. They became conscious of their rights and how to assert them. It acknowledged that circumstances cannot simply favor someone based solely on their gender. Women's empowerment boosts women's confidence in their ability to live meaningful and purposeful lives. It ends their reliance on other people and transforms them into self-sufficient individuals. We reside in an age of women's empowerment wherein girls work shoulder-to-shoulder with guys. A woman additionally manage to balance their commitment to their professionals properly as their domestic and circle of relatives. They play more than one role as a mom, daughter, sister, and wife and at running locations as specialists with superb simplicity and complexity.

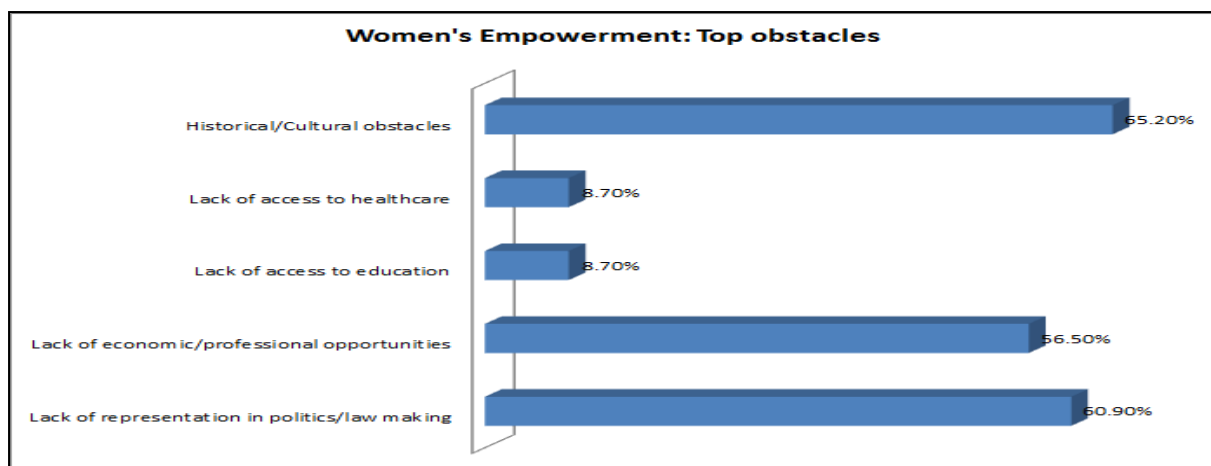
III. MOVEMENTS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The history of feminist movements in India is extensive. As these movements have developed, they have reflected the requirements and circumstances of various groups of women. This has sparked the growth of numerous feminist movements in India, all of which aim to improve the lives of women in their respective communities. These women's movements are distinct and complex, and each makes a unique contribution to the feminist cause in India. Women's movements are social and political movements that challenge women's social and political status, sometimes to gain new rights, power, or equality, and other times to change community perceptions and expectations of women. Here are some prominent women empowerment movements in India:

1. Sati Abolition Movement (19th Century): - This movement, which was led by social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, sought to end the custom of sati, in which widows were expected to commit suicide on the pyre of their husband's death.
2. Women's Suffrage Movement (Early 20th Century): - Women in India began demanding the right to vote and participate in political processes. Pioneers like Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant played significant roles in advocating for women's suffrage.
3. Women's Education Movement (19th and 20th Centuries): - Leaders like Savitribai Phule and Pandita Ramabai worked to promote women's education. They established schools for girls and women, breaking social barriers that prevented women from accessing education.
4. Quit India Movement (1942): - Women played a crucial role in India's struggle for independence. Leaders like Aruna Asaf Ali and Sucheta Kriplani actively participated in the Quit India Movement, demonstrating their commitment to the nation's freedom.

5. Chipko Movement (1970s): - While not exclusively a women's empowerment movement, the Chipko Movement saw women in Uttarakhand hugging trees to protest deforestation. Their actions highlighted the ecological importance of trees and the role of women in environmental conservation.
6. Women's Reservation Bill Campaign (1990s-present): - Activists and organizations have been advocating for the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill, which would reserve a certain percentage of seats for women in India's legislative bodies.
7. Nirbhaya Movement (2012): - This movement emerged after the brutal gang rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi in 2012. It sparked nationwide protests and led to discussions about women's safety and gender-based violence in India.
8. Me Too Movement (2018): - The global Me Too movement found resonance in India as women came forward to share their experiences of sexual harassment and assault, leading to discussions about workplace harassment and gender dynamics.
9. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child): - Launched by the Indian government, this campaign aims to address issues related to the declining sex ratio and promote the education and well-being of girls.
10. Self-Help Groups (SHGs): - Self-help groups have played a significant role in women's economic empowerment in India. These groups enable women to access financial resources, develop entrepreneurial skills, and gain economic independence.

These movements and initiatives have contributed to progress in women's rights and gender equality in India, but challenges persist. Gender-based violence, unequal access to education and economic opportunities, and deeply ingrained societal norms remain concerning. Women's empowerment remains an ongoing struggle in the country, with many individuals and organizations working tirelessly to bring about positive change.



IV. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH VARIOUS LAWS

The Indian Penal Code (IPC) is the primary law that establishes specific acts as crimes, declares them crimes, and provides punishment for those acts. The table below summarizes IPC provisions related to violence against women. In addition to the Indian penal code, criminal legal guidelines on specific issues have also been enacted. These include:

- The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956

SITA, or the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act, was passed in 1956. The straightforward intention of this Act evolved into the punishment of brothel owners, buyers, and pimps as well as the prevention of prostitution in or near public places. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, which was amended in 1978 and more recently in 1986, is now in effect. The Act's primary goal is to prevent or outlaw commercialized vice, specifically the admission of girls and women for prostitution as a prepared definition of habitation.

- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961

The Dowry Prohibition Act, passed by the Indian government in 1961, prohibited the use of dowries in marriage preparations. However, there were multiple instances of domestic abuse, suicides, and murders connected to dowries. The policies governing the Dowry Prohibition (maintenance of lists of gifts given to the bride and groom) were established in 1985. These rules state that a signed record of gifts given to the bride and groom must be kept at the time of the wedding. The list should briefly explain each gift, its estimated cost, the giver's name, and his or her courtship of the recipient.

- The Indecent Representation of Women Act, 1986

The Indecent Representation of Women Act of 1986, was enacted by Parliament to prohibit the indecent illustration of women in various paperwork. The purpose of the Act was to restrict the indecent depiction of women in publications, writings, artwork, figures, and other forms of media.

- Commission of Sati Prevention Act, 1987

The act was passed to address issues related to or incidental to the fee of Sati as well as to effectively prevent its glorification.

- The Pre thought and Pre-Natal diagnostic techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994

The Act gives for regulation of using pre-natal diagnostic techniques and for the prevention of

the misuse of such techniques for the motive of Prenatal sex will power main to lady foeticide.

- Act of 2005 Protecting Women from Domestic Violence

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 was passed by the Parliament to safeguard the rights of women who become the targets of violence of any kind that takes place within the family. The right of a woman to live in her marital home is guaranteed by the Domestic Violence Act. The Act applies to all women, whether they are mothers, sisters, wives, widows, or roommates. The court may also issue security orders to prevent the abuser from victimizing a woman at her workplace. In the case of *Vishakha vs. State of Rajasthan*³ SC laid down distinct recommendations to save Women from sexual harassment at workplaces and considered it important and expedient for employers at painting locations or institutions to look at those tips.

- The 2013 Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Protection and) Act

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 is a significant piece of legislation in India aimed at addressing and preventing sexual harassment of women at their places of work. The primary objective of the Act is to create a safe and harassment-free work environment for women and to provide a legal framework for dealing with complaints of sexual harassment.

V. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH VARIOUS GOVERNMENTAL SCHEMES

India has implemented several government schemes and initiatives aimed at promoting women's empowerment and gender equality. These programs cover various aspects of women's development, including education, employment, health, and social welfare. Here are some notable government schemes for women's empowerment in India:

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme

The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme is a government scheme that was launched in 2015 that aims to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services intended for girls. The scheme was launched with an initial funding of ₹100 crores (US\$14 million). It mainly targets Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Bihar, and Delhi clusters. The Beti Padhao Yojana was launched after the results of the 2011 national census. Key gender metrics showed a sharp decline in this census. This ratio has steadily decreased from 945 in 1999 to 927 in 2001 to 918 for every 1000 boys in 2011. Out of the 640 districts where the census was conducted, 420 districts—or roughly two-thirds of the nation—showed a sharp

³ *Vishakha vs State of Rajasthan*, AIR 1997 SC 3011

decline in the number of girl children. This list shows 244 districts that fall below the 918 national average, which is cause for serious concern.⁴ The cultural and religious preferences of boys have caused this ratio to decline. Inadequate care for the girl child causes complications following delivery, female infanticide, sex-selective abortions, and general neglect of the girl child's health, nutrition, and education. Therefore, launching a national awareness campaign was important while empowering people from rural and underprivileged areas to develop financial plans to support girls' education, health, and nutrition. The Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, declared that female foeticide must be eradicated and that issues to support girl childbirth and education must be addressed. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme was introduced following this announcement. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao program enables parents to open a tax-free account in the name of their girl child, with withdrawals only being permitted once the girl reaches the age of 18. This program aims to give girls financial and social independence. As part of the Sukanya Samruddha Yojana, the saving plan enables the girl's parents or guardians to easily save money while earning 7.6% interest annually.

2. Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK)

One of the well-known women's empowerment programs is Mahila Shakti Kendra, which was launched in India in 2017. The Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shashaktikaran Yojana (PMMSY), an umbrella program, introduced the MSK scheme. Through training, raising awareness of their rights, and developing their capacity, this program will give rural women a platform to reach out to the government and claim their benefits. It aims to provide women with convergent support services in one place so they can develop their skills, find employment, and increase their digital literacy. This program is active at all three levels of government, among others. The scheme is implemented through State Governments and UT Administrations with a cost-sharing ratio of 60:40 between Centre and States except for North East and Special Category States where the funding ratio is 90:10. Union Territories receive a total of 100% in central funding.⁵ The MSK is implemented in 115 backward districts in India to reach out to rural women and facilitate nutrition, health, employment, skill development, digital literacy, etc. The services offered through the MSK are enhanced by utilizing the resources of various government programs or schemes because women's empowerment takes on multiple dimensions. Through block-level intervention, student volunteers promote government

⁴Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana (BBBP) 2023 - Scheme & Benefits, <https://upstox.com/saving-schemes/beti-bachao-beti-padhao-yojana-bbbp%20scheme/#:~:text=Once%20a%20Sukanya%20Samruddhi%20Yojana,to%20avail%20of%20tax%20benefits> (last visited September 6,2023)

⁵ Press Information Bureau, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1795475>. (last visited September 9,2023)

programs or schemes, capacity building, and training for the empowerment of rural women.

3. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)

The STEP program was administered by the Ministry of Women and Child Development between 1986 and 1987 as a "Central Sector Scheme." It underwent revision in December of 2014. The STEP Scheme aims to give women employability-enhancing skills and the knowledge and abilities necessary to start their businesses or work for themselves. The Scheme is meant to help all women in the country who are at least 16 years old, including rural women. Under the Scheme, a grant-in-aid is awarded to institutions or organizations, including NGOs. The support under the STEP Scheme will be available in any industry for teaching skills related to entrepreneurship and employability, including but not limited to agriculture, horticulture, food processing, handlooms, tailoring, stitching, embroidery, zari, etc., handicrafts, computer, and IT enabled services, along with soft skills and work-related skills like spoken English, gems & jewelry, travel & tourism, and hospitality. It was decided to develop a scheme for strengthening the existing program components to make the program more effective in achieving the intended objectives. This decision was based on the experience gained from the implementation of the scheme during the seventh plan period and the years that followed (1985–1992), as well as on the advice given by the Ministry of Finance and the Planning Commission. The scheme has also been evaluated by an independent agency and it has been suitably modified to achieve the envisaged objectives more effectively and visibly.⁶

4. UJJAWALA: A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking for Commercial Sexual Exploitation

The Ujjawala scheme was introduced in 2007 to stop the trafficking of women and children. The scheme aims to prevent, rescue, rehabilitate, reintegrate, and repatriate victims trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation. Child and woman trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation is an organized crime that violates fundamental human rights. Lack of a safe environment, women's low status, and poverty are a few factors contributing to trafficking. A comprehensive program called Ujjawala was introduced by the government to combat illicit trafficking as well as to rescue, rehabilitate, and integrate those who had been trafficked for sexual exploitation. The scheme's implementation agencies are the Women and Child Welfare Department or Social Welfare Department of the State Government, Women's Development

⁶ Ministry of Women and Child Development, https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/Revised%20schemeof%20STEP_0.pdf (last visited September 7, 2023)

Corporations/Centres, Urban Local Bodies, Renowned Public-Private Trusts, and Voluntary Organizations.

5. Working Women Hostel Scheme

More and more women are leaving their homes in search of employment in major cities and urban and rural industrial clusters as the nation's socioeconomic structure changes over time. Lack of safe and convenient housing is one of these women's biggest problems. Concerned about the challenges these working women faced, the Indian government introduced a grant-in-aid program in 1972–1973 to build new buildings or expand existing ones to provide hostel facilities to working women in cities, smaller towns, and even rural areas where there are employment opportunities for women. Based on an evaluation, the existing scheme has been revised to promote the availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women who need to live away from their families due to professional commitments. The Working Women Hostel Program's primary goal is to give women more power. The government launched the working women hostel scheme to promote the availability of reliable and convenient accommodation for working women who leave their homes due to professional commitments. Under this program, working women are eligible for hostel accommodations if their combined gross income does not exceed Rs. 50,000 per month in metropolitan areas or Rs. 35,000 per month in any other town or rural area. When a working woman who lives in a hostel has an income that is higher than the permitted income limits, she must leave the hostel within six months of doing so.⁷

6. One-Stop Centre Scheme

Gender-based violence is addressed by the One-Stop Centre Scheme. It became effective on April 1, 2015. The scheme's main objective is to make it easier for women who have experienced violence to access a variety of services. One-Stop Centers (OSC) are designed to assist women who have experienced violence in public as well as private environments, including the home, community, and workplace. Women who are victims of physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or economic abuse will receive support and redress, regardless of their age, class, caste, level of education, marital status, race, or culture. Specialized services will be given to Aggrieved women who have contacted or been referred to the OSC due to attempted sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, crimes involving honor, acid attacks, or witch-hunting. The One-Stop Centre scheme is a sub-scheme of the

⁷ Mayashree Acharya, Working Women Hostel Scheme, <https://cleartax.in/s/working-women-hostel-scheme> (last visited September 8,2023)

National Mission for Empowerment of Women, including the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahayog Yojana. The Nirbhaya fund provides funding for the program. The Centre will offer the States and the Union territories full financial assistance under this plan.

7. Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme

The Union Ministry of Women & Child Development established the Mahila Police Volunteer program in partnership with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. Through police volunteers who will be women specifically trained for this position, the Mahila Police Volunteers program seeks to create a connection between the locals in villages and the police authorities. Their primary duty will be to keep an eye out for situations where local women are harassed, denied their rights and entitlements, or whose development is hindered. Haryana was the first state to adopt the initiative at Karnal and Mahendergarh District on a pilot basis under the Nirbhaya Fund during the financial year 2016-2017. Further, the proposals of Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Mizoram, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh have also been approved for the implementation of MPVs.⁸

VI. IMPACTS OF GOVERNMENT SCHEMES ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Government schemes introduced for women in India have played a significant role in addressing gender disparities, promoting women's empowerment, and improving their overall socio-economic status. These schemes have aimed at various aspects of women's lives, including education, health, economic empowerment, and safety.

1. **Education and Skill Development:** One key focus area has been promoting education among girls and women. Initiatives like the "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" campaign have increased female literacy rates. Girls who were once discouraged from pursuing education are now attending schools and colleges, leading to a more educated female workforce. The impact of these initiatives can be seen in the increased enrollment and retention rates of girls in schools. When women are educated, they are more likely to make informed decisions about their lives, including family planning, health, and career choices.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Several schemes, such as the "Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana" and "Stand Up India," have been instrumental in promoting women's economic empowerment. These schemes have enabled women to start and expand their businesses by providing financial assistance and access to credit. As a result, there has been a

⁸ Press Information Bureau, <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1579525> (last visited September 8, 2023)

significant increase in women entrepreneurs and self-help groups across the country. Women's economic empowerment has improved their financial well-being and enhanced their social status and decision-making power within their families. Women are now contributing to household incomes, which has positive implications for poverty reduction and family stability.

3. **Health and Well-being:** Government schemes have also focused on improving the health and well-being of women. Programs like the "Janani Suraksha Yojana" and "Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana" provide financial assistance to pregnant and lactating mothers, ensuring better healthcare during pregnancy and childbirth. As a result of these initiatives, maternal and infant mortality rates have shown improvement, and more women are accessing healthcare services. Women's health is a critical component of their overall empowerment, as healthy women are better able to participate in the workforce and contribute to their families' well-being.
4. **Safety and Security:** Ensuring the safety and security of women is another vital aspect of empowerment. Schemes like "One-Stop Centres" support and assist women affected by violence, including domestic abuse and sexual harassment. These facilities provide survivors with medical, legal, and psychological support. The impact of these schemes can be seen in the increased reporting of incidents of violence against women. Women are now more aware of their rights and have a support system in place to seek justice and protection. This has contributed to a safer environment for women in India.
5. **Women's Participation in Decision-Making:** Government schemes have also emphasized increasing women's participation in decision-making processes at various levels. This includes their involvement in Panchayati Raj institutions and local governance bodies. The impact of these efforts can be observed in the increased representation of women in local government bodies. Women are now actively participating in decision-making processes, influencing policies that directly affect their communities. This has resulted in more gender-sensitive policies and programs being implemented at the grassroots level.
6. **Awareness and Advocacy:** Many government schemes have included awareness and advocacy components to change societal attitudes and perceptions about women. Campaigns like "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" have raised awareness about gender discrimination and the importance of valuing and educating girls. The impact of these awareness campaigns is evident in the changing attitudes of communities towards the

girl child. Families and communities are now more likely to value and invest in the education and well-being of their daughters, leading to a shift in cultural norms.

7. **Access to Sanitation and Hygiene:** The "Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin)" has focused on improving sanitation and hygiene facilities, particularly in rural areas. Access to clean toilets and proper sanitation facilities is crucial for women's health and safety. The impact of this initiative can be seen in the increased availability of toilets in rural households, which has enhanced women's dignity and safety. Women no longer have to wait until nightfall to relieve themselves, reducing the risk of harassment and health issues.

VII. CONCLUSION

As a result, we observe that 21st-century societies regularly empower girls for the improvement of the sector and that women act as active agents for development, taking part in and directing their development. Women's empowerment in the twenty-first century depends on women's training. Education is a key tool that enables women to participate in decisions that affect their lives and help them gain social acceptance. Women who are empowered are more objective when making decisions, which makes it possible for a rural area to improve socially, politically, and economically. In conclusion, government schemes introduced for women's empowerment in India have had a significant and positive impact on the lives of women and society as a whole. These initiatives have contributed to increased education, economic empowerment, health and well-being, safety, and participation in decision-making processes for women. While challenges remain, such as the need for continued efforts to combat gender-based violence and discrimination, these schemes have undeniably made progress in advancing women's rights and opportunities in India. The ongoing commitment of the government, civil society, and the broader community is essential to sustain and further amplify these impacts in the future.

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