

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN KARNATAKA: PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Karnataka has made significant strides in empowering women through various policies and initiatives aimed at improving their socio-economic status and ensuring gender equality. The state government has implemented numerous schemes focusing on education, health, financial independence, and safety for women. Despite these advancements, several challenges continue to hinder the full realization of women's empowerment in Karnataka. Gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and sexual harassment, remains a significant issue. Additionally, deep-rooted societal norms and patriarchal attitudes still limit women's freedom and opportunities, particularly in rural areas. Economic disparities, inadequate healthcare facilities, and limited access to education also pose substantial barriers. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including stricter law enforcement, community awareness programs, and enhanced government support for women's rights. Strengthening partnerships between the government, non-governmental organizations, and civil society is crucial to fostering an environment where women can achieve their full potential and contribute equally to the state's development.

KEYWORDS: *Empowerment, Women Policies, Socio-Economic, Gender Equality, Health, Financial Independence, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Harassment, Economic Disparities and Healthcare*

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INTRODUCTION

Karnataka female literacy rate was reported to be around 70.08% as per the 2011 Census, showing progress but still lagging behind the male literacy rate of 82.47%. The state government aims to increase female literacy through various education initiatives. As per the 2011 Census, the sex ratio in Karnataka is 973 females per 1,000 males. This is slightly higher than the national average of 940 but indicates a need for continued efforts to improve gender balance.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21, the female labor force participation rate in Karnataka was about 28.9%, which is above the national average of 22.8%. However, there is still room for improvement, especially in urban areas.

Karnataka reported 2,273 cases of rape and 7,720 cases of assault on women with intent to outrage modesty, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). These figures highlight the ongoing issue of gender-based violence in the state. Karnataka has introduced several social security programs to enhance the well-being and economic

security of women, aiming to address their specific needs and challenges. These programs span various sectors, including health, education, employment, and safety. Here is an overview of some key social security programs for women in Karnataka:

Karnataka Mahila Abhivruddhi Yojane (KMAY) Introduced in the year 2014. This is a comprehensive initiative aimed at promoting women's development across various spheres, including health, education, and economic empowerment. KMAY integrates various existing schemes and focuses on improving the socio-economic status of women through targeted interventions and resource allocation. It includes programs for skill development, health services, and entrepreneurship. The scheme targets women across Karnataka, with special focus on rural and economically disadvantaged women.

Indira Gandhi Matritva Poshan Yojane (IGMPY): Introduced in the year 2010. This scheme aims to support maternal and child health by providing financial incentives to pregnant and lactating mothers. Eligible women receive a cash incentive to ensure adequate nutrition and healthcare during pregnancy and after childbirth. The scheme complements the government's efforts to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates. Pregnant and lactating women who are residents of Karnataka and meet specific income criteria.

Swadhar Greh Scheme: To provide shelter, food, clothing, and health as well as economic and social security for women in distress. The scheme includes the provision of temporary accommodation, counseling, training, and rehabilitation services to women who are in difficult circumstances, such as victims of domestic violence, trafficking, or other vulnerabilities. Ensures that women in distress have access to a safe environment and the support needed to rebuild their lives.

Kittur Rani Chennamma Award: To recognize and honor women for their exceptional contributions in various fields, including social work, education, sports, and arts. The award includes a cash prize and citation, encouraging more women to contribute positively to society and acknowledging their efforts publicly. This award celebrates the achievements of women and promotes role models for younger generations.

Special Nutrition Programs for Pregnant and Lactating Women: The Objective is to ensure the nutritional needs of pregnant and lactating women are met, reducing maternal and infant mortality rates. Programs provide supplementary nutrition through Anganwadi centers under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme. Targets women from low-income households to ensure that both mother and child receive adequate nutrition.

Political Progress of Women in Karnataka

In the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, which consists of 224 seats, women's representation has historically been low. In the 2018 Karnataka state elections, only 8 women were elected, making up approximately 3.5% of the total seats. The representation of women in the Karnataka Legislative Council is also limited, with women holding a small fraction of the 75 seats. Karnataka has been a frontrunner in implementing the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which mandates one-third reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (local self-government bodies). As of recent statistics, women make up around 50% of the elected representatives in Gram Panchayats, Taluk Panchayats, and Zilla Panchayats due to the reservation policy. This participation has significantly empowered rural women and given them a voice in local governance.

Karnataka has extended the reservation policy to urban local bodies, such as Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils, and Town Panchayats, reserving one-third of seats for women. This has increased women's participation in urban governance as well. In the 2019 general elections, Karnataka elected 3 women out of 28 total Members of Parliament (MPs) from the state to the Lok Sabha (House of the People), making up around 10.7% of the state's representation in the lower house.

Women in Ministerial Positions

The inclusion of women in ministerial roles within the Karnataka state government has been limited. Women have held key portfolios, but their overall presence in the cabinet remains low. Efforts are ongoing to encourage more women to take on leadership roles within the government. Karnataka has been a supporter of the Women's Reservation Bill at the national level, which proposes to reserve 33% of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women. However, the bill is yet to be passed into law. Various NGOs and women's rights organizations in Karnataka are working to train and support women candidates, especially from marginalized communities, to participate actively in politics. Programs focused on leadership development, legal awareness, and electoral processes aim to empower women to contest elections and hold office.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. Societal norms and patriarchal attitudes still limit women's political participation. Women often face barriers such as lack of financial resources, political mentorship, and support from within their families or political parties. Karnataka has made significant strides towards increasing women's political participation through reservations and various support initiatives. However, for meaningful and sustainable political empowerment, there needs to be a continued focus on addressing the societal, economic, and structural barriers that women face in politics. Creating an inclusive political environment, coupled with comprehensive support systems, is essential for enhancing the political empowerment of women in Karnataka.

Economic Progress of Women in Karnataka

Karnataka has implemented various initiatives and policies to economically empower women, but several challenges persist. Here's a detailed overview of the key statistics and insights into the economic empowerment of women in the state. Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR): According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2018-19, the female labor force participation rate in Karnataka was approximately 27.9%, which is slightly above the national average of around 21.8%. Despite this, women's participation in the workforce remains significantly lower than that of men. Women in Karnataka are predominantly employed in the agriculture sector, followed by the informal sector, which includes domestic work, construction, and small-scale industries. Fewer women are employed in formal sectors such as IT, manufacturing, and government services compared to men. Some of the programmes for the empowerment of women in Karnataka are discussed below

Programs and Initiatives for Women Empowerment in Karnataka

Entrepreneurship and Skill Development

Bhagyalakshmi Scheme: Launched in 2006 to promote the birth of girl children in below-poverty-line families, this scheme provides financial assistance for the girl's education and ensures a sum of money at maturity when the girl reaches 18 years of age. This scheme was introduced to promote the birth of girl children in below-poverty-line families and ensure their education and future security. Under the scheme, a fixed deposit is opened in the name of the girl child, which matures when she turns 18. The family receives a cash incentive if the girl continues her education without getting married

before the age of 18. Families with a maximum of two girl children who are born after 31 March 2006 are eligible, provided they meet the criteria of being below the poverty line.

Stree Shakti Program: This program launched in October 2000 is aimed at empowering rural women by forming self-help groups (SHGs) and providing them with micro-financing options to start small businesses. Over 1.5 lakh SHGs have been formed under this initiative, benefitting around 22 lakh women. Objective: These centers provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, under one roof. The centers offer services including medical aid, police assistance, legal counseling, psychological support, and temporary shelter. Karnataka has multiple Sakhi centers that cater to women's immediate needs and long-term rehabilitation. To ensure safety and justice for women facing violence and to provide them with necessary resources to rebuild their lives.

Udyogini Scheme: This programme launched in 1997, aimed at encouraging entrepreneurship among women, the Udyogini Scheme provides financial assistance for women to start small businesses. It focuses on economically weaker sections and those from rural backgrounds.

This scheme is focused on encouraging entrepreneurship among women by providing financial support for starting and growing small businesses. Women are given financial assistance through banks at a subsidized interest rate to start businesses in sectors like retail, services, and production. The scheme prioritizes women from economically weaker backgrounds and rural areas. The scheme provides loans up to ₹1 lakh, which can be used for setting up micro-enterprises.

Sanjeevini – Karnataka State Rural Livelihood Promotion Society (KSRLPS): Launched in 2011, the programme, focuses on improving the livelihoods of rural women by providing them with skill development training and promoting self-employment. It aims to empower women by helping them earn a sustainable income. The program provides training in diverse areas such as tailoring, handicrafts, food processing, and small-scale manufacturing. It also facilitates credit linkages and market access to help women start and expand their businesses.

Mathrushree Scheme: Launched in the year 2018, under this scheme, the Karnataka government provides financial assistance to pregnant women from below-poverty-line families. A sum of ₹6,000 is given in three installments to ensure maternal health and nutrition. This maternity benefit program aims to provide financial assistance to pregnant women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Under the Mathrushree Scheme, pregnant women from below-poverty-line families receive financial assistance of ₹6,000, disbursed in three installments. The assistance helps support maternal health and nutrition during pregnancy. The scheme is available to women who are residents of Karnataka and belong to BPL families and rural women, especially those from marginalized and economically weaker sections.

Women's Cooperatives: Started in 2014. Karnataka has numerous women's cooperatives that focus on sectors like dairy, handicrafts, and agriculture. These cooperatives provide women with opportunities for collective economic activities and income generation.

Challenges

Women in Karnataka continue to face a significant gender wage gap. In many sectors, women earn less than their male counterparts for the same work. This disparity is more pronounced in the informal sector and rural areas. A large proportion of women work in the informal sector, which often lacks job security, benefits, and fair wages. This makes women more vulnerable to exploitation and economic instability. As per the 2011 Census, the female literacy rate in Karnataka was around 70.08%. While this is an improvement, disparities in education persist, especially in rural and

marginalized communities. Higher literacy and education levels are crucial for enhancing women's employability and economic empowerment.

While Karnataka has made progress in promoting the economic empowerment of women through various government schemes, microfinance initiatives, and skill development programs, challenges remain. Addressing issues like the gender wage gap, informal employment conditions, and access to education and training is essential for achieving true economic empowerment for women. A holistic approach that combines education, financial inclusion, social support, and policy interventions is key to empowering women economically in Karnataka.

CONCLUSION

Karnataka's social security programs for women are designed to address various aspects of their lives, from birth to motherhood, economic empowerment to protection against violence. These programs play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for women, ensuring their safety, and promoting their active participation in the socio-economic development of the state. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of these schemes are essential to ensure they meet the evolving needs of women in Karnataka. The social welfare schemes have played a crucial role in improving the socio-economic status of women in Karnataka. By focusing on education, health, economic empowerment, and safety, these programs have provided women with the tools needed to enhance their quality of life and contribute to their communities. Continuous evaluation and expansion of these schemes are essential to address emerging challenges and ensure inclusive growth for women across the state.

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