

OVERALL EMPOWMENT

# Harbingers of a New India

The Modi-led government has announced policies based on the life cycle of a woman – so technically speaking policies to empower and safeguard women exist for a girl child in the womb to someone who is on her way out of her mortal coil.

OPINION

KARUNA GOPAL VARTAKAVI



the actual target of affordable homes is 3 crores. Prime Minister Modi's women empowerment formula is all encompassing. He knows that the dignity of a woman depends on not just having a toilet at home but by having financial independence. Studies prove that domestic violence comes down as the financial independence of a woman rises.

*"Keys of a house open doors of dignity, confidence, sure future, a new identity and expanding possibilities." PM Modi*

Kutty Adhilakshmi was a healthy baby weighing 3.1 kg at birth. Her mother Gayathri is the beneficiary of Poshan Abhiyan – a 1000 day program of the Modi government – This Mission improved nutritional outcomes for pregnant women, lactating mothers and their children. Malnutrition (wasting, stunting, underweight) takes away the lives of nearly half of all children under five years of age. POSHAN Tracker, an ICT-enabled platform, monitors in real-time crores of women. It helped provide supplementary nutrition to 11 crore beneficiaries.

Gayathri's mother was not as fortunate as her. The daily act of cooking has been a major health hazard for her mother like millions of women in India due to the use of traditional firewood. Prime Minister Modi made clean cooking fuel LPG, accessible to rural and underprivileged households. Over 9.4 crore LPG connections have been released under Ujjwala Yojana.

Many Indians cannot see anything common between Baby Agnes and Kutty Adhilakshmi other than their gender and birth year - both girls were born in 2022. One was born in Meghalaya the other in Tamilnadu. But for a discerning eye and an analytical mind there are many commonalities.

WOMEN IN NEW INDIA

To begin with, both the girls are born in New India. Their auspicious arrival shattered the ever declining sex ratio of the country - for the first time in the history of independent India the Sex Ratio of the total population (females per 1000 males) has reached 1020! It improved by 19 points from 918 in 2014 to the present 1020.

In January 2022, Elizabeth who was pregnant with Agnes, received the keys of her brand new home. It was one of the two crore affordable houses constructed by Modi Government for the underprivileged. Elizabeth is the proud owner of her abode along with her husband. In today's India over 69% of houses are either solely or jointly owned by women. More than 2.46 crore houses have been sanctioned while



Bonding with rakhi with PM

Shabana Ilmi, Gayathri's bosom pal has always told her to do something – why not put her passion of designing to good use? There are platforms like 'Mahila-e-Haat' that allow home made products to be sold to global customers. Government E Procurement (GeM) is another avenue for growing as an entrepreneur. Shabana who worked in the guindy industrial area in a factory for years is a bubbly entrepreneur now – She availed 'Mudra Loan' and became a job-creator doing contract work for a Bio-Toilet company. As many as 34.42 crore loans have been sanctioned and 70% of those loans were availed by aspirational women like her.

Shabana knows that her enterprise has a huge potential. The sanitation coverage in India was just 39% till 2014. Swachh Bharat Mission of Modi Government built 11.5 crore toilets in rural India and 70 lakh in Urban India.

DIGNITY & SAFETY

After the construction of toilets, 93% of women reported that they were no longer afraid of being hurt by someone or harmed by

animals while defecating; 95% of women are no longer afraid of contracting health infections; 92% of women said they don't fear going to the toilet in the dark of night. 93% of the women reported no longer having to stop having food or water to control the urge to defecate or urinate.

Sanitation and water supply are intractably linked. Before 2014 a whopping 83% of rural households were devoid of any functional tap water connection. In a short span of just 37 months, over seven crore rural households have been provided with tap water connections. Jal Jeevan Mission is freeing women from the age-old drudgery of fetching water from a distance carrying heavy loads.

Shabana holds special respect for abolishing Triple Talaq. She believes that 82% decrease in Triple Talaq cases within one year of the Act led to Self-reliance, Self-respect & Self-confidence of Muslim women in India.

WOMEN & BANKABILITY

Women became bankable after the launch of Jan Dhan

Yojana. Today almost Rs1.46 trillion are under Jan Dhan accounts and 55% of those are held by women. Thanks to these accounts, credit was accessible to women during Covid. This seamless transfer of money during covid was a boon for many women.

Both Agnes and Adhilakshmi were born at a time when India is trying to create a 'safe nation'- Mahila police volunteers, women's safety app HIMMAT, Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, Capital punishment for those found guilty of raping a child under the age of 12, minimum punishment for rape of a girl less than 16 years increased from 10 years to 20 years are some tangible milestones.

POLICIES BASED ON LIFE-CYCLE OF A WOMAN

The Modi led government has announced policies based on the life cycle of a woman – so technically speaking policies to empower and safeguard women exist for a girl child in the womb to someone who is on her way out of her mortal coil. Women's access to

education, skill training, institutional credit and maternity benefit have gone up exponentially in recent times. Women are being trained to run and maintain electric vehicles, install solar rooftops, and other jobs historically dominated by men.

Agnes and Adhilakshmi are born in a wonderful India where 43% of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) graduates are women and the most precious ecological treasure – The 'Sunderbans' are protected by 3000 Tiger Widows.

Prime Minister Modi fondly refers to north eastern states as the 'Ashtalakshmi States' and Agnes comes from there. Modiji also aspires to see India being led by 'Nari Shakti' - Adhilakshmi name stands for the primal force that leads. Both these girls along with scores of other girls born in New India are both beneficiaries and brilliant harbingers of a prosperous nation – the New India.

*Ms Karuna Gopal Vartakavi, President, Foundation for Futuristic Cities and Bjp National Incharge, Women Policies & Research*