

# Women have become the fulcrum of administrative initiatives in four and a half years of the Narendra Modi government

Smriti Irani



As Vinesh Phogat pumped her fist in victory at the Asian Games, one saw but a small reflection of the grit and perseverance of a young Indian girl resonate on an international platform. Hailing from the state of Haryana, she exemplifies every Indian woman's desire to reach for the pinnacle in an area of her expertise or choice.

While one can rightfully conclude that success stories of women achievers are not a phenomenon new to our culture, women have become the fulcrum of administrative initiatives in the four and a half years of the Narendra Modi led government. When, from the ramparts of Red Fort, the PM declared his government's intention to ensure toilets are separately built for girls in government schools across the nation, many did not bat an eyelid. Since gigantic political announcements were the norm in the nation's capital, this seemed like the most non-glamorous proclamation by a head of state. However, studies have shown that when sanitation needs of young female students

are met, dropout rates amongst girl students can be effectively curtailed.

It was a significant yet silent proclamation that women, their rights, their needs in Indian democracy were not to be adjudged as a vote bank, for no school going girl child was a voter. The exercise of building over four lakh toilets in just one year in all government schools across the nation is symbolic of the cooperative federalism espoused by the PM, and an

**On this Rakshabandhan, when a sister lovingly ties a rakhi on her brother's 'kalai', it would be presumptuous to believe that it is she who is in need of protection**

added bonus in Indian polity.

Worshipped for wealth in the form of Laxmi, celebrated as the harbinger of wisdom and education in the form of Saraswati, anointed by the Gods as Shakti, women's strengths, capacities and possibilities have long been celebrated by Indian



civilisation. For years, 'gruhlaxmis' from the poorest of poor families battled with their destiny in smoke filled kitchens, gasping for breath with each meal lovingly cooked for their families. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana brought a much needed solution with clean cooking fuel – with the target of 5 crore female beneficiaries achieved and a revised target of 8 crore female beneficiaries set.

The financial inclusion revolution triggered by Jan Dhan Yojana benefited 16.42 crore female account holders leading, in a mere three years, to an increase to 40% from 28% of women's share in total savings accounts in India. Mudra Yojana with over 70% female beneficiaries meant 9.81 crore loans were

given to women entrepreneurs, and spoke volumes about the entrepreneurial capacity of Indian women.

As per Economic Survey 2016-17, 76% women had to travel long distances for facilities in households without toilets. Today, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan reaching the target of more than 8.5 crore toilets indicates the importance given to dignity of women in social infrastructure development.

Lifting of the ban on women going to haj without mehram (male companion), amending of passport rules which previously compelled applicants to give only their father's name but now give the mother's name equal status and respect, are all tantamount to good governance. For decades in

the textile sector, thigh reeling of tussar yarn was symbolic of unhygienic manual practices embraced by women, but the Integrated Scheme for Development of Silk 2017-20 provides support for Buniyaad reeling. Samarth – a skill capacity building scheme with an outlay of Rs 1,300 crore – demands that all partner institutions and firms have to mandatorily constitute an Internal Complaints Committee under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition & Redressal) Act 2013.

This attention to detail to ensure equal rights for women is visible in every department and every ministry of the Modi-led government. For the PM believes that the time has come when economy, society and people from all political hues must now ensure women-led development. So, on this Rakshabandhan, when a sister lovingly ties a rakhi on her brother's 'kalai', it would be presumptuous to believe that it is she who is in need of protection. What she needs, she demands and what is rightfully hers is an opportunity to walk shoulder to shoulder with each man to ensure that a new India full of possibilities rises in 2022.

*The writer is Union textiles minister*