

## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION IN INDIA AT GLANCE**

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### **Abstract**

Education is a fundamental means to bring any change in a society, which is an accepted fact throughout the world. Education not only helps in the development of personality of the child but also determines his future. Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the prevailing masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in the different parts of the world. The rise of the feminist ideas has however, led to the tremendous improvement of the women's condition throughout the world in recent times. This paper tries to analyze the condition of women in India with respect to education which would empower them. Despite of reforms made by the Government, they do not have proper chance to learn and grow and access to education has been one of the most pressing demands of women rights. Thus, the paper attempts to discuss the various issues related to the education of women which would empower them to lead a life of dignity since women power is crucial to the economic growth of any country.

**Keywords:** Women Education, Women Empowerment, Literacy rates, Women Rights

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## INTRODUCTION

*“You educate a man; you educate a man, you educate a woman: you educate generation”*

### **- Brigham Young**

Education is a fundamental means to bring any change in a society, which is an accepted fact throughout the world. Education not only helps in the development of personality of the child but also determines his future. Investment in the education is considered as the most vital by all the modern nations today. It brings about individual as well as social development which is accepted by everyone. Education plays a key role in importing proper equipment to the human beings in leading a gracious and harmonious life.

Generally, we know that man and woman are like two sides of the same coin. They are of equal importance and are interdependent. They are a peerless pair being supplementary to one another; each helps the other, so that without the one the existence of the other cannot be conceived, and therefore it follows as a necessary corollary from these facts that anything that will impair the status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of them both. In framing any scheme of women’s education this cardinal truth must be constantly kept in mind. Man is supreme in the outward activities of a married pair and therefore it is in the fitness of things that he should have a greater knowledge therefore. On the other hand, home life is entirely the sphere of woman and therefore in domestic affairs, in the upbringing and education of children, women ought to have more knowledge. Not that knowledge should be divided into watertight compartments, or that some branches of knowledge should be closed to any one; but unless courses of instructions are based on a discriminating appreciation of these basic principles, the fullest life of man and woman cannot be developed. (Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, pp. 425,426; 20-2-1918)

Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the prevailing masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. The rise of feminist ideas has, however, led to the tremendous improvement of women’s condition throughout the world in recent times. India being a developing nation, it has a huge tussle among its political, religious and administrative organs resulting into blocked development

and the worst effect of that we can witness into women condition. They do not have proper chance to learn and grow and access to education has been one of the most pressing demands of women's rights. Women education in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country. India is poised to emerge as one of the most developed nations by 2020, more literate, knowledgeable and economically at the forefront. No doubt, women will play a vital role in contributing to the country's development. Women power is crucial to the economic growth of any country. In India this is yet to meet the requirements despite reforms. Little has been achieved in the area of women empowerment, but for this to happen, this sector must experience a chain of reforms. Though India could well become one of the largest economies in the world, it is being hindered due to a lack of women's participation.

### **NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION FOR WOMEN IN INDIA**

Gender discrimination has always been a big issue from the ancient days till date. Even though the severity has been hugely reduced, today's women still face discrimination right from schools, colleges to even work places. As a country this has resulted in millions of individual tragedies, which adds up lost potential. Studies do show that there is direct link between a country's growth and the way that country's women are treated. The health of a society fluctuates highly based on the status of women. Developing countries are where gender discrimination is highly seen.

Napoleon Bonaparte says that "give me an educated mother I will give you an educated nation." Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the forefront of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the International Women conference at NAROIBI in 1985. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. So, we cannot neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment. India is poised to becoming superpower, a developed country by 2020. The year 2020 is fast approaching; it is just a year away. This can become a reality only when the women of this nation become empowered. India presently account for the largest number of illiterates in the world. Literacy rate in India have risen sharply from 18.3% in 1951 to 64.8% in 2001 in which enrolment of women education

have also raised sharply from 7% to 54.16%. Despite the importance of women education unfortunately only 39% of women are literate among 64% of the man. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plan and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the fifth five year plan (1974~78) onwards has been marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission of Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the right and legal entitlements of women. The 73<sup>rd</sup>, 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local level.

### **HISTORY OF EDUCATION FOR WOMEN IN INDIA**

It is very important to know the historical background of the position that women occupied in the medieval and later the colonial period is of utmost importance. Women were never put on high pedestal in the Shastras.

Although in the Vedic period women had access to education in India but as the time grew they lost this right to avail education and academic exposure. However, in the British period there was revival of interest in women's education in India due to Britisher's strong influence to the core Indian education system. During this period, various socio-religious movements led by eminent persons like Raja Rammohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar emphasized on women's education in India. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Baba Saheb Ambedkar were leaders of the lower castes in India who took various initiatives to make education available to the women of India. They also ensured about their participation in the social gatherings and events by introducing them into polity and administration at all levels. However women's education got a fillip after the country got independence in 1947 and the government has taken various measures to provide education to all Indian women. As a result women's literacy rate has grown over the three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 1971 only 22% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2001 54.16% female

were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 14.87% as compared to 11.72% of that of male literacy rate and is on growing path.

## **RIVIEW OF LITERATURE**

1. **Karat, B. (2005)** discusses the struggle of women for survival during the past. The women in India and in the world have been through the path of struggle and hardship.
2. **Nair, J. (1996)** gives the history of the rules and laws made for the women and how they were bound within those laws.
3. **Agarwal S.P. (2001)** examines the present status of the women education in India through different perspective and plans. It gives a clear picture regarding the importance of education in empowering women.
4. **Gupta, N.L. (2003)** analyses the education of women that have passed through different ages. It explains the history of women education from its development to the status that it is at the present.

## **RESEACRH OBJECTIVES**

- To identify the role of education in empowering women and in the overall development of a nation
- To examine the responsibility of the Government in adopting measures in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio-economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The present paper will examine the education of women for empowerment where we will discuss different issues related to women education in India. The main research question that would be addressed through this study is that how far government has been concerned related to the development of the conditions women in India. Education being one of the main factor for the growth of awareness among them, have the efforts of the Government through various schemes and programmes been successful in uplifting of the plight of women in terms of Education is still in the state of an enigma for several reasons.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATABASE

The proposed study would mainly be built upon the information collected from the reports and journals related to the issues of women. The research study thus draws upon several sources of data, published as well as unpublished, available at the national and state levels. The preceding secondary study will be supported by economic and statistical information contained in official reports and records, journals and other literature sources.

The data thus collected will be subjected to suitable statistical analysis to draw conclusions through proper processing and tabulation. Editing, coding and decoding of the collected data will also be done simultaneously, avoiding irrelevant and unreliable information. The tabulated data will be analyzed and described according to the aims and objectives of the study, using simple statistical techniques.

## DISCUSSION

Since the “UN declaration of the decade of women in 1975, attention and action on women’s concerns have steadily increased and education, whether it be in the form of consciousness raising or skills acquisition was one of the areas in which the whole world focused on. Education for women needs to go well beyond mere “enabling”. It has to view women as society’s active members who need education to participate, effectively and meaningfully in any activity and as equal partners of men. Women education is a “process in which women gain control over their own lives of knowing and claiming their rights at all levels of society at the international, local and household levels. Educating women means that women gain autonomy and are able to set their own agenda and are able to set their own agenda and are fully involved in economic, political and social decision-making processes.

Through proper impartment of education to women and the resulting curricula and materials help prepare women for self development as active members of their family, community and nation. They seek overall personal development and account for the notorious double responsibility that women shoulder as economic producers and as mothers and wives.

Educating the women helps in polishing the following components:

- 1) **Cognitive Component:** Knowledge about the moral values of society.

- 2) **Psychological Component:** Confidence in women's ability to make decision about moral and business issues.
- 3) **Economic Component:** Ability to exercise advocacy for issues which assure women's autonomy.
- 4) **Political Component:** Ability to participate in actions to promote change in the traditional gender relations.

Education should be imparted in such a manner that it helps in the empowerment of women. Conceptually it is important to distinguish between literacy that empowers and literacy which domesticates. Traditionally, literacy programs have focused on acquisition of literacy skills should not be discounted, the fact remains that in the case of women, such literacy often times merely reinforces their domestic role and does not bring about any change in social relations within the family or outside. Literacy that empowers on the other hand seeks to combine both consciousness raising and participation so that women not only understand the causes of oppression but also take steps to ameliorate their conditions.

In spite of the forceful intervention by a female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programmes over the last 62 years and above all, the United Nation's enormous pressure with regard to the uplift of the plight women in terms of education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons. The 2011 Census report indicates that literacy among women is only 65.46 % which is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women in India is even much lower to national average i.e. 74.04. The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, weak, backward and deprived. Moreover education is also not available to all equally. Gender inequality is reinforced in education which proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 65.46% against 82.14% of men as per 2011 Census.

**Table no. -1 Literacy Rate in India**

Year	Persons	Male	Female
1901	5.3	9.8	0
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8

1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	0.3
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
1961	24	34.4	13
1971	29.5	39.5	18
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76	54
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

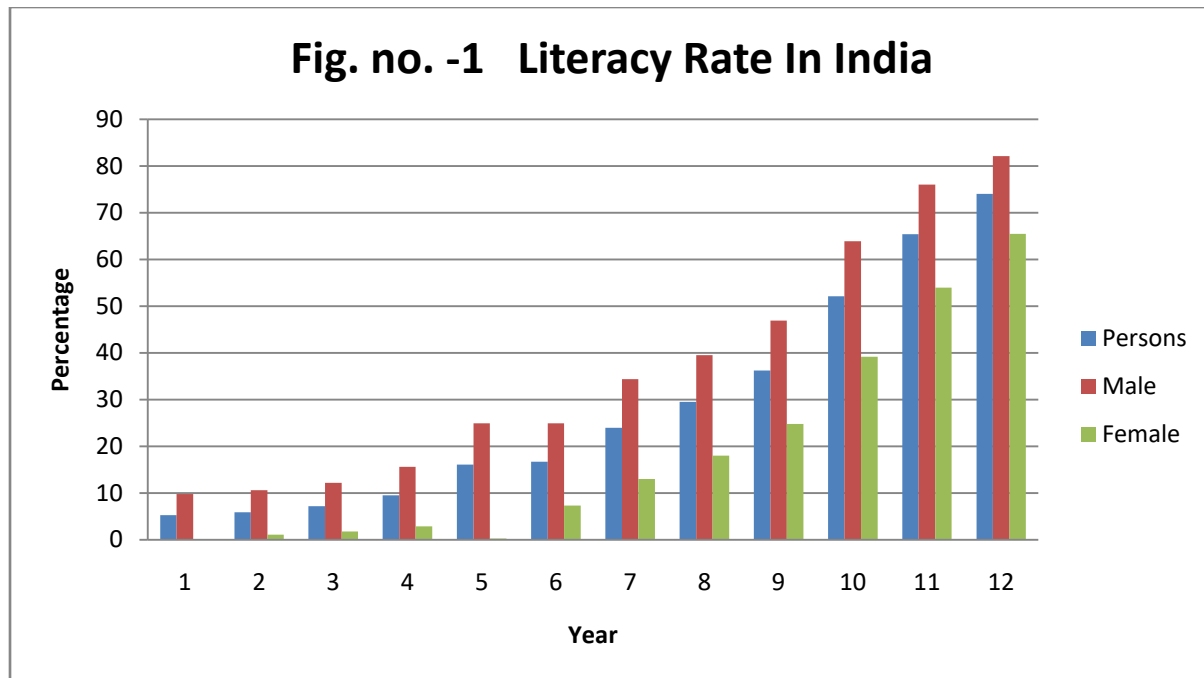
*Source: Census of India (2011)*

According to the table no 1, during the pre Independence time, the literacy rate for women had a very poor spurt in comparison to literacy rate of men. This is witnessed from the fact that literacy rate of women has risen from 0.7% to 7.3% where as the literacy rate of men has risen from 9.8% to 24.9% during these four decades. During the post independence period literacy rates have shown a substantial increase in general. However the literacy rate of male has almost tripled over the period e.g. 25% in 1951 and 76% in 2001. Surprisingly the female literacy rate has increased at a faster pace than the male literacy during the decade 1981 to 2001. The growth is almost six times e.g. 7.9% in 1951 and 54% in 2001. From this analysis one can infer that still the female literacy (only half of the female population are literates) is wadding behind male literacy rate (three fourth of the male population are literates). The rate of school dropouts is also found to be comparatively higher in case of women. This higher rate of illiteracy of women is undoubtedly attributing for women dependence on men and to play a subordinate role. The lack of education is the root cause for women's exploitative and negligence.

Thus promoting education among women is of great importance in empowering them to accomplish their goals in par with men in different spheres of life.

The figure below represents the literacy rate in India.





### PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages face by them. Fundamental Rights among others ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law: prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment.

**Article 14** corners on men and women equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic and social spheres.

**Article 15** prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc.

**Article 15(3)** makes a special provision enabling the State to make affirmation discriminations in favour of women.

**Article 39(a)** further mentions that the State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens, men and women equally, the right to means of livelihood.

**Article 39(b)** ensures equal pay for equal work.

**Article 42** directs the State to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Above all, the Constitution imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen through **Article 15(A)** (e) to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

### **GOVERNMENT PLANNING FOR GIRLS EDUCATION**

❖ The **National Plan of Action for Women (NPA)** adopted in 1976 became a guiding document for the development of women till 1988 when National Perspective Plan for Women was formulated.

❖ The **National Perspective Plan for Women (NPP) (1988 - 2000)** drafted by a core group of experts is more or less a long term policy document advocating a holistic approach for the development of women.

❖ ‘**Shram Shakti**’ The report of the **National Commission on Self employed Women and Women in the informal sector (1988)** examines the entire gamut of issues facing women in the unorganized sector and makes a number of recommendations relating to employment, occupational hazards. Legislative protection, training and skill development, marketing and credit for women in the informal sector.

❖ The **National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (NPA) (1991-2000)** is an integrated multi sectoral decadal Plan of Action for ensuring survival, protection and development of children with a special gender sensitivity built for the girl child.

❖ In addition to these, there are many other women related policies like **National Policy of Education (NPE) 1966**, **National Health Policy (NHP) 1983**, **National Commission for Women’s Act (NCW) 1990**, which have been influencing the welfare and development of women and children in the country.

### **EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA)**

**Education for All (EFA)** means not only having access to schooling but also having quality of education for all children. The **Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (2001)** programmes of the Government of India is providing quality education for children between 6 and 14 years has increased the literacy rate of girls and boys in the past two decades, women’s participation in primary, middle and secondary level has increased considerably. The **District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)** of the Central Government has reduced dropout rates to less than 10%% and reduced gender gaps to less than 5%. One of the main objectives of the **Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (2001)**

was to bridge gender gaps in primary and secondary education by 2010. Since even after secondary education girls may not continue, “Extension Education, a policy providing job related knowledge was introduced for those unable to proceed with formal secondary level. The **National Literacy Mission (NLM)** was set up in 1988 aimed to mobilize dropouts, introduce mass and functional literacy and involve the community in educating women to the secondary level.

### **CAUSES FOR LOW LITERACY AMONG WOMEN IN INDIA**

Women education is a multi dimensional phenomenon. No single factor or cause can be held responsible for very low literacy rate of women in India. Subsequently it is associated with combination of many factors including social, cultural, economic, educational, demographic, political and administrative and so on. The following are some of the important factors which could be attributed for the present poor state of affairs of women folk in education.

1. **The Lower Enrolment:** The lower enrolment of girls in schools is one of the foundational factor which stand as stumbling block for women empowerment in India. Reliable sources indicate that more than 50% of non starters (those who have never been to school) are girls. According to the latest statistics, two out of every ten girls in the age group of 6 to 11 are still not enrolled in schools.
2. **Higher drop-out rate among girls from schools:** The incidence and prevalence of drop outs among girls especially in rural, tribal and slum areas seem to be quite high. According to available sources, occurrence of drop out and stagnation amongst girls is nearly twice that if boys all over India.
3. **Girl Child as second mother:** In many families girl child play the role of second mother by shouldering the responsibilities of household work such as looking after the sibling, fetching water, collecting firewood, bringing fodder for cattle and cooking etc. In rural India, especially in poor families this traditional sex role makes the girl child handicapped and conditioned by the attitude of mother and the family and discourages her to go to school as it becomes secondary and unimportant. Hence, the girl child is getting deprived of her basic and fundamental right of education and freedom.

## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside.

Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. It is true that the greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. It is indispensable that education enables women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside of her shell and home but helps her to get status, positive self esteem and self confidence. It imparts necessary courage and inner strength to face the challenges in life. Apparently it also facilitates them to procure a job and supplement the income of family and achieve social status. Education especially of women has a major impact on health and nutrition as an instrument of developing a sustainable strategy for population control. Moreover educated women can play an equally important role as men in nation building. Thus there is no denying fact that education empowers women. For example the different organs of the United Nations and experts on women's liberation argue for women education as the basic step to attain equality with men. (Saraswati Mishra, Status of Indian Women, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2002)

Thus the study found that despite of the women education being a very important issue, the female literacy rate lags behind the male literacy rate. The drop-out rate of the female is more compared to the male. The lack of education opportunity for the women has been the main reason for their being neglected and deprived in the male dominated society.

Women who are educated can make profound choices in the matter of health, nutrition and basic upbringing of a child. There is a great impact on infant mortality, health, fertility, productivity and a child's academic performance if women are educated. 'There is considerable evidence that women's education and literacy tend to reduce the mortality rates of children' (Amartya Sen, Development as freedom, 2000, pg. 195). Hence, we can say that education for women not only helps to empower the women and make them at par with men but it also acts as building a way towards the progress and upliftment of the society and nation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ The Government should provide measures to bring about awareness regarding the importance of education in a women's life especially in the rural areas.
- ❖ Proper financial help should be provided to the children from weaker financial backgrounds. This will encourage them to continue their education system and gain quality education, and decrease the drop-out rate of the girl child.
- ❖ The Government has started different policies and schemes regarding the education of women, but these programs should be implemented properly so that every rural and poor girl child will get the opportunity to educate herself.
- ❖ The measures should be taken to provide quality education, like the IIT so that the parents get encouraged to send their children to school.
- ❖ The public should be made aware regarding the value of a girl child, and help them to participate in female awareness programmes related to women health, hygiene, nutrition and education.

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