



The Role of Education in the Empowerment of Women

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Abstract

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said: “ If you educate a man, you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered” . When women who contribute almost half of the population are empowered it will strengthen the national economy. Education is considered as a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their lives. Increasing access to education notwithstanding, gender discrimination still persists in India and lot more needs to be done in the field of women's education in India. Women have so much unexplored potential which has never been tapped. As education is both an input and input of human development, educational equity will ensure enabling and entrepreneurial development. Today, the female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 census are 65.46% where the male literacy rate is over 80%. Even beyond literacy there is much that education can do for women’ s rights, dignity and security. Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom for development. Eileen Malone Beach sees education, health care, and income as a blessed trinity because they are so closely related. This paper discusses the impact of education on empowerment of women as well as the challenges and changes that we must have to deal with during the process. We call for a renewed emphasis on relevant, quality and holistic education to ensure the desired results.

Definition:

"Women's empowerment is defined as the process in which their spiritual, political, social or economic status is raised". This also includes the right to raise their level of confidence regarding their own capabilities.

Empowerment includes the following aspects -

1. The ability to take their own decisions,



2. To take information and have other facilities at their disposal which would enable them to take proper decisions,
3. To have wide choices (Only 'Yes/No' and not 'If/ Else' choices)
4. Firmness while taking collective decisions,
5. Possessing positive way of thinking regarding the ability to bring about transformation,
6. The ability to bring about improvement in one's own capabilities,
7. The competence to modify other's attitudes in a democratic manner,
8. To participate in continuous and self-propagated development process and to take active participation in the transformation process,
9. To control on negative factors and build up a positive image of oneself.

History of women education in India

Although in the Vedic period women had access to education in India, they had gradually lost this right. However, in the British period there was revival of interest in women's education in India. During this period, various socio religious movements led by eminent persons like Raja Ram Mohan 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. 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 six decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 2001 only 54.16% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2011 65.46% female were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 11.30% as compared to 6.29 % of that of male literacy rate.

Importance of Education:

If it is said that education is the key to all problems, then it won't be improper. Thinkers have given a number of definitions of education but out of these definitions, the most important definition is that which was put forth by M. Phule. According to M. Phule, "Education is that which demonstrates the difference between what is good and what is evil". If we consider the above definition, we come to know that whatever revolutions that have taken place in our history, education is at the base of them. It is through education that one realizes what is



good and what is bad, what is proper and what is not (just and unjust etc.). It is education which gives a vent/ voice to injustice. The 3-fold formula which Dr. B. R. Ambedkar gave to Indian society includes the most important thing to be education. In other words, he has emphasized education.

Barriers of Women Education

In Indian families especially rural areas, girl children play the role of second mother by shouldering the responsibilities of household work such as looking after the sibling, fetching water, collecting wood, cleaning and cooking etc. and discourage girl child to go school.

The second social evil is bonded labour system, which quite discouraging phenomenon which stands as barrier for girl' s education for the underprivileged families of washer man and agricultural labour. Dowry system and other social practices act as main causes of the neglect of the girl child and discrimination against girl child. In many families especially poor and down-trodden think that if their daughters are educated more, they have to accumulate more assets and properties to provide as dowry in the lower enrolment of girls in school is one of the foundational factors which stand as stumbling block for women education. In India, more than 50% of the girls are non-starter. The incidence and prevalence of Dropouts among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas seem to be quite high. The main reason was poor academic record of the trainees which difficult to cope up with the subjects and mere not able to concentrate on the practical' s.

The second reason was that some of the trainees were able to get job before the completion of the course. The third reason was the teachers did not teach well and also students' poor economic background. According to available sources, occurrence of Dropout and stagnation amongst girls are nearly twice that of boys all over India. In India, the school environment for girls is not really interesting and encouraging. The methods of teaching are mostly outdated, rigid and uninteresting. There are many schools with poor basic facilities such as drinking water, latrine and toilet facilities, no good infrastructure and no experienced teachers especially female teachers preferable for any parents for safety of their girl children. According to the UN sources, India is the most child labour populous nation in the globe with more than 50 million child labourers worked in carpet making, domestic works, beedi works, glass bangles, construction etc. In most of their industries girl children are preferred for high productivity and low cost. In many Poverty-stricken families, children especially



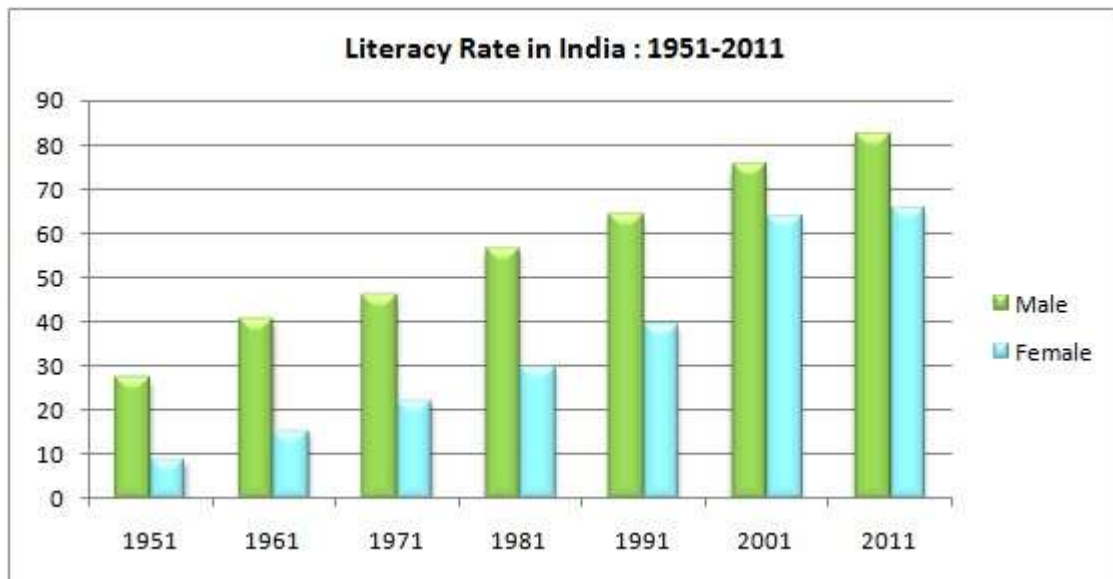
girls are considered as economic assets as they bring income for livelihood as well to save from economic crises due to death or incapacity of parents.

Importance of Education in women's Empowerment:

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.

Women's empowerment is not limited only for the Indian society. If we consider the global aspect in this regard, we see that women are being given equal treatment in developed nations. In fact, if we take a retrospect of history, we come to know that women have always been given secondary position in society, but the difference between men and women created by the Nature is but natural. It is education through which we realize this fact. When American women realized this, they opposed this injustice which was meted out to them by way of a huge movement, through which they asked for equal rights. For eradicating this injustice, the UNO (United Nations' Organization) framed a Convention / Charter which is called 'The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women' (CEDAW), which further led to the formation of Women's Commission. Taking an account of this background, we come to know that women's empowerment has now become a topic of global discussion. Seeing all the aspects of this discussion, we will realize that education is the only means for empowerment of women. Therefore, literacy should spread amongst women. The literacy rate amongst the women in the post- Independent Era is not as per the expectations. We, as a nation, dream of becoming a Super Power by 2020. For becoming a Super Power, each element of our society/ nation should contribute in the nation building process. But women, who are a major factor of this society, aren't literate then we can't expect to become a Super Power. Therefore, it is urgent for us to know the importance of women's education, which would, in turn, give an impetus to the process of women's empowerment.

Table 1. Literacy rate in India



On observing the above table, we come to know that at no point could the literacy rate of women match that of men. In 2011 the percentage of educated persons increased to 74.04% of which male percentage was 82.14% and female percentage was 65.46% respectively.

Literacy rate among rural women is only 58.8 percentage as per 2011 census. Female literacy was at a national average of 65.46 % whereas the male literacy was 82.14%. Within the Indian states, Kerala has shown the highest literacy rates of 90.02% whereas Bihar averaged lower than 50% literacy, the lowest in India. As a result, even after 65 years of independence, women occupy a secondary position in our social hierarchy. In spite of being aware of her position, women can't transform the situation due to lack of education. Therefore, women's empowerment can't be affected unless we persuade the importance of women's education.

The concept of Women empowerment is a recent one. The first year of New Millennium 2001 was declared as "WOMEN EMPOWERMENT YEAR". Education of a women leads to a better family and ultimately an ideal society to a progressive nation. A progressive nation is one where all the people of the country in respective of sex, religion, caste, creed and color are economically, socially, culturally, politically and through all thoughts are independent.



New UNESCO data proves education transforms development. It says:

- If all children enjoyed equal access to education, per capita income would increase by 23% over 40 years.
- If all women had a primary education, child marriages and child mortality could fall by a sixth, and maternal deaths by two-thirds.

UNESCO's new analysis proves that: -

- Education empowers women. Educated girls and young women are more likely to know their rights and to have the confidence to claim them.
- Education promotes tolerance: Education helps people to understand democracy, promotes the tolerance and trust that underpin it, and motivates people to participate in the political life of their societies.
- Education equality improves job opportunities and increases economic growth: If all children had equal access to education, productivity gains would boost economic growth. Over 40 years, per capita income would be 23 per cent higher in a country with equality in education.
- Education is part of the solution to environmental problems. People with more education are more likely to use energy and water more efficiently and to recycle household waste.
- Educating women avoids early marriages: -If education is provided to more number of women it will be helpful in avoiding child marriage.
- Education saves mother's lives. In some countries, many women still die because of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Education can prevent these deaths.
- Some child diseases are preventable but not without education. Simple solutions, such as malaria nets and clean water, can prevent some of the worst child diseases, but only if mothers are taught to use them.
- Education saves children's lives. Education helps women recognize early signs of illness, seek advice and act on it. If all women in poor countries completed primary education, child mortality would drop by a sixth.
- Education fights hunger. The devastating impact of malnutrition on children's lives is preventable with the help of education.



Education of women enhances the women empowerment in the following ways:

An education of women can bring change in the attribute of family members and society. It also helps in removing mal-traditions like Sati-Pratha, Early marriage, Dowry etc. Education plays an important role in removing economic poverty by opening various job avenues for her so that she can work hand in hand with man and give support to the family. Education promotes team work rather than making women individualistic. Education makes her an opportunity to choose a career which is best suited for her.

- Every woman has got her own aspiration which may be high or low, but education helps to maintain a balanced aspiration knowing her interest, ability and potential which further helps her to choose a correct field of her work.
- Education helps in balanced personality development by giving due weight to various aspects of personality.
- Education of women also plays an important role in teaching her expression of feeling or through effective communication which can solve disputes and adjustment problems of any level.
- An educated women is a guiding light for the children, family members, society and nation, she knows how to have a happy family and balanced and healthy relations with others.
- Education gives power to a woman to become strong physically by giving her knowledge about sports, exercise, health- related aspects and good physical health; this will definitely benefit her mental health.
- Education helpsto improve the sex ratio and in controlling population.
- Education encourages women especiallythe rural women to take advantage of the various schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Operation Black-Board, and Total Literacy Programmes etc.

OBJECTIVES TO BE ACHIEVED THROUGH WOMEN'S EDUCATION

India is the world's largest democracy where billions of people live and of course almost of half of these are women. So how does women education effect India's development? If girls are not educated, families suffer too. Educated mothers use their knowledge to improve the health of their children and other family members. Their knowledge about health risk protects their families against illness. Child mortality rate is much higher where mothers lack



education than in families where mothers are educated. Girls' education emerging as one of the top priorities of Indian society "Educating girls is not an option, it is a necessity". We all want to eliminate gender disparities in education.

1. Instead of giving women a secondary position in society, they should be given equal status.
2. To change the approach towards women based on sex discrimination.
3. To induce the feeling of self-dependence amongst women.
4. To make women realize their own potential and to provide guidance to them for developing their potential.
5. To create opportunities for them so that they can prove themselves in society and social institutions.
6. To create certain roles for women in economic, political and social arena.

CONCLUSION

Taking an overview of all the above aspects, we come to know that the transformation is very much needed, accepting at the same time that its pace may be less than the desired pace. For giving this process a momentum, education is indispensable. Hence, if women's empowerment is to be affected, it can be carried out only through the medium of education. Hence, it is of foremost importance to raise the level of education amongst women.

To conclude the present scenario, it may be said that woman in the modern hi- tech society which is moving very fast under the shadow of population explosion, conflicts, chaos and corruption can mold the personality of the adolescent and youth in a proper direction and perspective, provided the woman are themselves in power. There is a positive relationship between education and woman empowerment. Another important aspect in this regard is that, in these societies the issue of women empowerment has been facing certain serious challenges, which are outcome of some certain evil norms and attitude such as child labour, child marriage, illiteracy, superstition, partial attitude of the parents, female feticides, etc. and in such a situation women empowerment is an urgent necessity. In order to promote women's empowerment, it is necessary to create an environment that will allow women to participate in educational programs and share the benefits. The educational and other policies for women empowerment should be implemented in reality for empowering women in the world. The evils of poverty, unemployment and inequality cannot be eradicated by man



alone. Equal and active anticipation of women is obligatory. Unless women are educated they will not be able to understand about their rights and their importance. Empowerment of women aims at striving towards acquiring higher literacy level and education, better health care for women and their children, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of their rights, improved standard of living and to achieve self-reliance, self-confidence and self-respect among women. Recently the Government has launched Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme which aims at making girls independent both socially as well as financially and which will help in generating awareness and improving the efficiency of delivery of welfare services meant for women. Such schemes should be implemented nationwide to bring the desired changes. What should never be forgotten is that women like men need to be proactive in the process lifelong learning. That is true empowerment. From “women for development” the time has come to shift focus to “women in development”, with the cooperation of men through group engagement and management. That will indeed be a quality change for equality. While being attracted by modernization and globalization we must be confident to say no to marginalization.

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