

EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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"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"

-Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru

Abstract

Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training or research. The education strives to awaken people from their darkness so that they may realize their empowered status. The importance of education in promoting and sustaining both individual and national development is well known. If education has an empowering effect on women in terms of socio-cultural, economic, interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological domains, investing in education is worthwhile not only from an individual but also from a national perspective.

Keywords: *Education, empowerment, women, social change, knowledge.*

INTRODUCTION

Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the hegemonic 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. Access to education has been one of the most pressing demands of these women's rights movements. 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.

Empowerment is a means for creating social environment in which vital decisions may be taken and choice could be taken to bring social transformation. It strengthens the innate ability through acquiring knowledge, power, and experience. The empowerment of women has become one of the important issues of current period. It is considered that women should stand equal to men in terms of education, livelihood, health, and all other parameters. The education of women plays an important role in the advancement of society. Education is a milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their

traditional role and change their life. It assists in bringing equality and works as a means to improve their status within family, society and politico-economic system.

Empowerment of women is directly linked with education. Women are the agents of social change. Education is considered a key instrument for the change which is responsible for national development. It is true to the saying, "If you educate a boy, you educate an individual, but if you educate a girl, you educate a family, society and ultimately the nation". The National Policy on Education 1986 states, "Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favor of women. The National Education System will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrators.

Why Is There a Need for Women Empowerment?

As per United National Development Fund for Women the term women's empowerment means:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.
- Gaining the ability to generate choices exercise bargaining power.
- Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Women's rights have been breached all over the world no matter where they live as a woman in every country are fighting their own battles as in some countries women don't have a right to vote whereas in some countries women are fighting for gender equality, the world has been a male dominant and woman have always been suppressed since ancient period to modern world the battle for equality continues for woman's and that's why Girls empowerment is a need of an hour and education is a tool which will help create an environment such as :

- Where Girls can live their life freely with respect and dignity
- Have the right to make decisions
- Can participate in religious, social, political activities
- Gets opportunities for an education
- Have a comfortable and safe working environment
- Have complete control of life inside and outside of home and workplace.

Education plays a critical role in Women's Economic Empowerment. It takes the centre stage, but for a long, most women especially in the rural areas have been denied this right and have been subjected to very degrading practices and responsibilities. Education empowers girls to achieve more in their social, career, economic and family lives. Several studies have revealed that uneducated women have high-level morality, low potential for earning, poor dietary status and little independence in the household. The lack of education also has a drastic effect on the health and well-being of the kids. In India, the infant mortality rate was

negatively related to the mother's educational level. In addition, the absence of education can bring a negative change in the country's development.

Women's education is a multi-faceted factor that can be held responsible for the low rate of education among women in India. The factors like social, demographic, political and economic are the backbone of low or high literacy rate. The low acceptance of girls in schools is one of the main reasons, which hurdles in the way of women's liberation in India.

Women empowerment is a pivotal part of any society, state or country. It is a woman who plays a dominant role in the basic life of a child. Women are an important section of our society. Education as a means of empowerment of women can bring about a positive attitudinal change. It is, therefore, crucial for the socioeconomic and political progress of India. The Constitution of India empowers the state to adopt affirmative measures for promoting ways and means to empower women. Education significantly makes difference in the lives of women.

Reasons behind the backwardness of Women Empowerment

“It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing” said Swami Vivekananda emphasizing that the world would progress only when the condition of women improved. Confirming this, experience over the years shows that women, despite facing many socio-economic barriers have been making invaluable contributions to the society. Some of the reasons for the backwardness of women are:

- **Illiteracy:** In India still illiteracy existed, especially in rural areas some women are unable to empower due to lack of literacy.
- **Family Customs:** India has followed rich heritage and culture. Due to these reason women are unable to come out from them.
- **Social Evils:** Day to day social evils are increasing at a higher level, parents are not accepting to their children to go far places for study or job purpose. Ragging increasing at a higher rate. So, government has been taking a lot of precautions to control it.
- **Financial problem;** Income inequality is a basic feature of developing economies. It is also an important reason to low level of women empowerment in India

Women Education Status

The constitutional directive to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years has remained unfulfilled till now. Educational experts admit that this failure is mainly due to the slow progress of education among girls. Literacy and educational levels are increasing for Indian women still there is a gap between male and female literacy rate. In 2011 (According to censuses of 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.

Educational Position of Rural Women

In rural areas particularly, the condition of women's education is still depressing and deplorable. In some bigger rural establishments, some elementary schools for them have been established; but they will function under inadequate staff and equipment and indifferent management and inspection. There is absolutely no provision for their secondary, higher and technical education in rural areas. Boys from rural areas can avail themselves of higher education in towns but it is quite difficult for girls to get any such benefit. Mass poverty is a stumbling-block in the way of women education. Consequently, a major fraction even of boys remains without education let alone the question of girls' education.

Factors Responsible for Poor Female Literacy

- Gender based inequality.
- Social discrimination and economic exploitation.
- Occupation of girl child in domestic chores.
- Low enrolment of girls in schools.
- Low retention rate and high drop out rate.

Education-A Tool for Empowerment

Education can be an effective tool for women's empowerment, the parameters of which are:

- Enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence of women.
- Developing ability to think critically.
- Fostering decision-making and action through collective processes.
- Ensuring equal participation in developmental processes.
- Providing information, knowledge and information relating to their rights and entitlements in society with a view to enhance their participation on an equal footing in all areas.

Role of ICT in Women Education for Empowerment

Today, women are emerging as leaders in the field of aeronautics, medicine, space, engineering, law, politics, education and business. In this decade, women are entering into the job market in increasing numbers. They are showing their skills even in non-traditional sectors like police, defense, administration, media and research fields. The best gift which women can give to their children is quality education through Information and Communication Technology. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) was first establishing Technology Information Centre's in eleven districts of Gujarat. Members of SEWA are able to access government schemes and tap into new markets. In the second phase, the center will also support the education of women. ICT-Enabled Social Net project explored the use of ICT as an empowerment tool for women in India through the establishment of an ICT Seva Kendra. The Seva Kendra caters exclusively to women, in an effort to encourage participation, build capacity and support their work towards social transformation. The Ministry of Labour runs computer training for unemployed women. The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development has a project to enhance ICT skills of girl students from elementary to high school. The Ministry of Gender Equality has organized programmes at twelve Korean universities for women who

want to work in an e-business or to start Home Office. Asian Pacific Women's Information Network Center (APWINC) at Sookmyung University trains women to work in IT, and in their own businesses. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry encourages the use of ICT by women farmers through onsite and mobile computer education and technical support services. The website also operates a shopping mall for agricultural products.

Constitutional Provisions, Special Laws and National Policies in Support of Women Empowerment

The importance of women as an important human resource was recognized by the Constitution of India which not only accorded equality to women but also empowered the State. A number of Articles of the Constitution of India repeated towards the socio-economic development of women and participation decision making. These are:

- **Article 14** Men and women to have equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic and social spheres.
- **Article 15(1)** Prohibits discrimination against any citizens on the grounds of religion, race, sex, caste etc.
- **Article 16** Equality of opportunities in matter of public appointments for all citizens.
- **Article 39(d)** Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- **Article 42** The state to make provision for ensuring first and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Government has also enacted specific laws to safeguard the interests of women and for up gradation of their status. These are:

- The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 which provides for women the right to parental property.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 which declares the taking of dowry an unlawful activity and thereby prevents the exploitation of women.
- Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 which provides payment of remuneration equal with men for work of equal value.
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 which legalizes abortion conceding the right of a women to go for abortion on the ground of physical and mental health.
- The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983 which seeks to stop various types of crimes against women.
- The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 which prohibits the Vulgar presentation of women in the media such as- newspapers, cinema, T.V. etc.
- The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 provides for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family.

CONCLUSION

Education has empowered the women and due to education women all over the world are starting to become more active in all fields of life like political, administrative, judiciary etc. Women have taken up big responsibilities and delivered great results. Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the forefront of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. Education is the milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. Hence, we cannot neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment. To see the development in women education India is supposed to be the upcoming superpower of the world in recent years. With the increasing change in women education, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. Thus, empowerment means a psychological sense of personal control or influence and concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights. It is a multi-level construct referring to individuals, organizations and community. It is an international, ongoing process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to control over these resources.

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