

Role of Education in Women Empowerment

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*“Women are the largest Untapped reservoir of talent in the world”
--Hillary Clinton*

ABSTRACT

Empowerment is a multi- faceted, Multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women’s empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of resources both human and non-Human. It is nothing but movement from powerlessness to powerfulness. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. It also helps to bring a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family and develops the concept of participation. In spite of the several efforts made by government of India through five year plans and other means, Women empowerment became a mirage in India. Even though status of women in India is improved, there is a lot to be attained. Women rights and issues have always been a subject of serious concern for researchers and policy makers. Educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country. There is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors and women oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walks of life. Education is a weapon to fight against all sorts of discrimination and inequalities.

Key words: Education, Empowerment, Gender equality, status of women

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The empowerment strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996). The inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women are an age-old issue all over the world. Thus women quest for equality with man is a universal phenomenon. Women should equal with men in matters of education, employment, inheritance, marriage, and politics etc. Their quest for equality has given birth to the formation of many women's associations and launching of movements. The Constitution of our nation doesn't discriminate between men and women, but our society has deprived women of certain basic rights, which were bestowed upon them by our Constitution. Empowerment allows individuals to reach their full potential, to improve their political and social participation, and to believe in their own capabilities.

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 means modification of behavior in every aspect, such as mentality, outlook, attitude etc. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children.

Education helps women to acquire knowledge and understand the gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed. Education develops a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life. Through education they develop the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. Thus, empowerment means a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a 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 centered 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 the control over these resources.

Education has been regarded both as an end in itself and as means of realizing other desirable ends. It develops the personality and rationality of individuals, qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions, and there by improve their socio-economic status. It has been recognized as major instrument which societies can use to direct the process of change and development towards desired goals.

The movement improving women's status all over the world has always emphasized education as the most significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in the society. The aim was to use education to make women more capable of fulfilling their traditional roles as wives and mothers and to make them more efficient and active units in the process of socio-economic or political development. Education helps to create right attitude towards life –

individual and social by imparting useful knowledge for various aspects of life. It helps to develop good personal habits. It inculcates a sense of social awareness and a spirit of services to society. It develops ability to earn their livelihood by developing vocational and professional skills. It gives them courage to face the real life challenges. Educational enables the individual to develop social cultural and aesthetic values and to possess problem solving skills.

The education of women is even greater importance than that of men because of the following reasons: In the modern world the role of women goes much beyond home and the bringing up of children. Now women are adopting a career of their own and sharing equally with men the responsibility of the development of society in all its aspects. Equal partnership must be allowed to continue in the fight against hunger, poverty, ignorance and health. The importance of higher education for women forms the higher steps of the hierarchy ladder on which the lower ones very much depends on and draw inspiration and support for its effectiveness. Education would lead to healthy, social, economic and political changes that are indispensable for improvement of the position of women in the society. Women would be able to utilize their full potential to play constructive roles in the family and community. In contemporary India, women are both citizens and home-makers and thus they have to perform both these functions efficiently and effectively. Higher education as a major catalyst of social change is badly lacking for the majority, more so for the lower socio-economic status and rural women in comparison with their counterparts.

Parental perception is also not very positive as majority of the parents have negative perception of higher education, especially for girls. They have a feeling that higher education, especially for girls. They have a fear and strong suspicion of pre-marital sex bad company in the colleges and universities. Another wrong conception in our society is that the daughter is the property of someone else after marriage. So why invest on her by sending her to college. It is high time to break this myth. Merely free ship and reservation are too meek a solution for these complicated problems of women's education. This problem can only be solved by bringing educational awareness and attitudinal changes amongst masses in general and parents of girl in particular.

Education is regarded as an important milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to face the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. Education of women is the most powerful tool of change their position in the society.

Education empowers women more effectively which would help to abolish gender inequality, develop their potentials, increase social and economic return, improve the quality of life, produce educated and healthy children and reduce fertility and mortality rates. Education is key to empowering women's participation in decision making in democracy, dynamic transformation of society and shaping the destiny of future generations. Swami Vivekananda said "There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved." It is education which can do so by empowering women.

The National Policy of Education (1986) has emphasized the need of women education for their effective participation in social and economic activities. The NPE, 1986 has stated, "Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. The National Educational system will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. "The National Policy of Empowerment of Women (1990) has emphasized on education for creating an

environment to enable women to realize their full potential, Providing all human rights and fundamental freedom to women on equal basis with men, Participation of women in decision-making in every spheres of life, Equal access to health care, quality education, guidance, employment, remuneration and social security, Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girl children.

Gender equality became one of the major issues on the global agenda in twenty first century. The UN decade for women, which ended in 1985, initiated the integration of women into development, triggering the formation of thousands women's organization and networking them across the world. In many places, most women's lives remain wretched. Indicators of well being ranging from literacy and longevity, to labour force participation and poverty rates, and child morality and schooling all reveal persistent disparities between women and men.

Many governments have signed international conventions pledging themselves to equal opportunities in political representation, and political leaders, official bodies, and administrative agencies have often declared themselves in favor of this principle, along with group in civic society like trade unions and parties, yet in the world as a whole, women remain far from parity at the apex of power as heads of state at prime minister and presidential levels in the executive branch as ministries and as senior public officials, and in national parliaments.

In most parts of India, today women constitute a disproportionate share of the chronically poor population. As in other parts of the world, Indian women face gender discrimination throughout their life within the family, society and at work place that runs common across the country along all class, caste and religion with varying degrees. Gender division of labour prevails in all sectors of employment. Gender discrimination starts from the fetus, in terms selection of sex, childrearing, feeding, education, employment, control over property and resources, participation and influencing decision- making in public and political spheres etc

Economic growth and legal- institutional reforms are both important in any long-term comprehensive strategy to promote gender equality. Perception of the appropriate division of roles in the home and family, paid employment and the political sphere are shaped by the predominant culture- the social norms, beliefs and values existing in any society- that in turn rest on levels of societal modernization and religious traditions. Gender refers to socially constructed roles and learned behavior of women and men associated with the biological characteristic of females and males. In many societies, rigid gender roles determine the rights, resources and powers of women and men, notably the division of labour in the home and workplace. In others, men and women's roles are more interchangeable, and innate biological differences lead to fewer social expectations.

Economic independence of women is important as it enhance their ability to take decisions and exercise freedom of choice, action, thought , etc. many of the working women, who control their own income , do contribute towards the economic needs of family as and when required. They often participate in discussions at their work place and their views are given due weightage before any final decision.

India is the first among countries to give women equal franchise and has a highly credible record with the regard to the enactment of laws to protect and promote the interests of women, but

women continue to be denied economic, social and legal rights and privileges. Yet they remain subjected to repression, marginalization and exploitation. It has been advocated by many researchers that independent earning opportunities reduce the economic dependence of woman on men and increase her bargaining power in the family. This bargaining power depends on the nature of work she is employed in. but the income earning activities increase the work load of a woman.

In terms of government policies on women's education, it was observed that while there is no explicit discrimination by gender in most places, neither is there a real commitment to provide sustainable programs for women.

The actual working and living conditions of women also prevent many of them from meaningful participation in women's education programs/projects. The increasing impoverishment of women makes it necessary for them to focus on income-generating activities simultaneous with the performance of household chores. This therefore limits their time and energy to get involved in education programs.

Empowerment is a process to change the distribution of power, both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society. As formal agency, the government of India wanted to improve the living conditions of women at different times. Here education played an important role for women empowerment. The activities of the missionary societies in the field of women's education have brought about tremendous changes in the society

Empowering women is very necessary in our society because unless and until women are empowered, there can be no progress. They should be made strong, alert and aware of their equal status in the society. Women empowerment will be more relevant if and only if women are educated. Improvement of female literacy is the only key to development. But to educate the women is not an easy task as there are many problems of women education. However in accordance with our constitution, Government will have to take initiative regarding women education. Since Independence, many committees, commissions have been formed in this regard. However main emphasis will have to be given over the successful implementation of universalisation of elementary education as per the Article 45 of our constitution. Because this basic education is the birth right of every individual. And unless and until this is fulfilled, higher education cannot be thought of. In case of higher education, effort should be made to see that women have successfully participated in various streams of education, rather than only Arts and Sciences. In our society, truly the women are now entering into various fields of education and are successfully managing their family as well as occupation, but there is regional and class distinctions. These disparities will have to be removed and everybody will have to focus on a vision where women are equal partners like men. For this along with education, other aspects of women empowerment will have to be taken into consideration. Like, health concern for women, protest against the crimes against women, land and property rights of women, protest against dowry, female infanticide etc. if this can be done, then only empowerment can hold any meaning in a true sense of terms. According to Paten(2002), women's development can be attained by improving her status and bargaining power in the economy. Cushman Sashay(1998) argues that approaches and strategic for women empowerment could be possible by outlining the mechanisms and tools that till influence for women empowerment. Decisions making process,

multi-dimensional process that is enabling women to realize their full identity and powers in all walks of life.

One of the major aspects of women empowerment in India is to change the attitude of the society towards women. Indian society never worked on the premise of gender equality from a long long time. In India still women are considered to be only worthwhile of house hold activities and caring the children. Women have never been part of the main stream society. If we observe the female literacy rate, sex ratio, political participation in local panchayats, assemblies and Indian Parliament, the percentage gives us the idea about the status of the Indian women.

Empowering the women is the key element in the development of any key economy. Today India is a force in the global economy, with a high demand of talent. The key source of talent is educated Indian women. The percentage of women in managerial positions is very low. As social values change, Indian women are entering different work force, yet the figure is not encouraging. Indian organizations lack sensitivity about the gender issues and under estimate the talents and capabilities of women. As majority women lack assets that contribute to their empowerment and well-being, economic independence through self-employment and entrepreneurial development must be paid attention. Empowerment includes cognitive and psychological elements. It requires the understanding of the self and the cultural and the social expectations.

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