



Literacy: A Tool for Women Empowerment

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to highlight the significance of literacy in the empowerment of women, impact of literacy programmes on women empowerment and also about the women empowerment through vocational and skill development programme in Manipur. Literacy is a human right, a tool for personal empowerment and a means for social and human development. Educational opportunities depend on literacy. Literacy is at the heart of basic educational for all, and essential for eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy. Women literacy is very important and plays an essential role for the progress of the society. Through literacy, women can improve and enhance their personalities and contribute towards the progress of the society. Literacy is the basic need and condition for improving the capabilities and empowering an individual to be efficient in various fields. It is a potential instrument of individual well-being as well as social development and women empowerment is the pivotal part in 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.

Literacy as means of women empowerment can bring about a positive attitudinal change. The constitution of India empowers the state to adopt affirmative measures for prompting ways and means to empower women. The increasing change in women education, the empowerment of women has been recognised as the central issue in determining the status of women. Supporting women in learning, questioning, understanding and challenging the suppression they experience empowers them, but only partially. Creating greater economic and political opportunities to contribute to families, communities and nations also contributes to empowerment. This paper explores how literacy can support women's empowerment and the development of greater equality, benefitting not only individual women, but families, communities and economies too. It describes and reflects upon some of the most promising approaches to developing literacy and learning for women, who form the majority of the world's illiterate adults. Key success factors are identified to inform recommendations for others seeking to support the empowerment of women.

Key words: literacy, women empowerment, literacy programme, entrepreneur, social development.

1.1 Introduction

Literacy is a fundamental human right. It is not only a means of liberation but also an instrument of social change. It is not the mere acquiring of the skill to write a few words, as some people think, or performing some rudimentary legal or economic function. Literacy is kindling a thirst for knowledge, a taste for education and acquiring some basic skills to pursue the search for knowledge. Literacy in fact opens up greater potential of the masses for self -development. It helps inculcate dignity and self- respect among the people and literacy programme is about people developing competences that enable them to live and work in fulfilling ways. It is complex and multi-faceted, and a vital and intrinsic aspect of individual, community and societal development. It includes speaking and listening as well as reading, writing and numeracy. It is not a fixed set of skills but is a vital part of the continuum of lifelong learning. It is also linked to other aspects of learning and development, such as health, maternal care, early childhood education, skills and employment as well as equity and empowerment.

Literacy is seen as an empowering process, particularly for women who constitute most of the world's illiterates. The gender gap in literacy and education is widespread, being especially marked in the less developed countries. The process challenging existing power relations and gaining greater control over the sources of power may be termed as empowerment. It is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater decision making power and control and also transformative action.

The prime target of empowerment must be adult women and, in the context of social justice and transformation. Within this group, authoritarian behaviours by husbands in the home make families and households in general a terrain that serves the maintenance rather than the transformation of unequal gender relations. Women can attain empowerment through different points of departure: emancipator knowledge, economic leverage, political mobilisation. While many poor women work outside the home to support their families and the tasks they perform are exhausting. In the case of mobilisation, it is the action level of empowerment by forging links with the larger women's movement to learn from the successes of women similar strategic action elsewhere and to connect with the wider struggle.

1.2. Empowerment of women through adult literacy programme

Women literacy is very important and plays an essential role for the progress of the society. Through literacy, women can improve and enhance their personalities and contribute towards the progress of the society. Literacy is the basic need and condition for improving the capabilities and empowering an individual to be efficient in various fields. It is a potential instrument of individual well-being as well as social development.

It may be said that, in spite of the expansion that has taken place in the formal educational system, a vast majority of women in Manipur remained beyond the reach of education and their rate of literacy requires to be improved. In the late nineteenth century, a number of social reform programs especially for women were organized in Manipur to give them awareness about their rights in the society. As a result there is upward movement of women in the society which has made them to inter into all walks of public life. In spite of all these, the rate of female literacy appears to be quite low and miserable in Manipur.

As said earlier, in the adult education programme, the Equivalency programme, Individual interest promotion programme, Income generating programme which are meant for the promotion of both vocational and aesthetic skills among its target group especially women so as to equip them with the skills of empowerment.

Equivalency Programmes (EPs)- Equivalency programme can provide an opportunity to adult and out-of school children who have acquired basic literacy skills or who have completed primary education and willing to continue their education for acquisition of competencies. The programme is meant for mobilisation of all possible alternative systems of education formal, non-formal, open schooling and distance education etc. To create opportunities for wider access to all the major target groups especially for women SC/ST and other disadvantaged sections of people. Unlike the formal education system the equivalency programme can have several variants to provide an integral general and vocational education. Through these programmes, the prakruti can revitalize and provoke the inner skills and capabilities of the women so as to make her empowered.

Income Generating Programmes (IGPs)-Income Generating Programmes are the vocational and technical education programmes which will help the neo-literates to acquire or upgrade their vocational skills so as to enable them to increase their income generating activities. The vocational training programmes can also be organized at the convenience of the women/learners so as to make not only the programme successful but also, equip them with necessary skills required for the globalized era and to sustain their livelihoods.

Quality of Life Improvement programmes (QLIPs) - It is especially designed with an aim to equip the clientele and the community with essential knowledge, attitudes, values and skills to enable them to improve quality of life as individuals and as members of the community. QLIPs should be capable of delivery through a multi-sectoral approach because many sectors of programmes covering different elements of quality of life such as family welfare, health, nutrition, drinking water, population education etc., which are mainly, look after by the women who are also caretakers of the entire family. The methods of delivery may include structured courses conducted through learning centres, distance education techniques, self-learning, etc.

Individual Interest Promoting Programmes (IIPPs) - Individual Interest Promotion programmes aim to provide opportunities for individuals to participate and learn about their chosen social, cultural, health, physical and aesthetic interests. The major objective of the individual Interest Promotion Programmes is to provide learning experience to promote and improve individual interests of all adults, but especially, the youth, women and the elderly people in the rural areas. Further, through these programmes, the programme is intended to promote life enrichment skills which are necessary for women in taking care of her family as well as the society as a whole.

1.3. Women empowerment through Vocational Education / Skill development programmes in Manipur

Empowerment is a process of supporting people to become more aware of power relationships and systems and understand that just and fair balances of power contribute to more rewarding relationships, mutual understanding and increased solidarity. Empowerment also means being better equipped to take control of your life, including education. Literacy is a tool of empowerment and constitutes the best alternations. The empowerment of women through literacy learning is only one important part of the total picture. Supporting women in learning, questioning, understanding and challenging the suppression they experience empowers them, but only partially. Creating greater economic and political opportunities to contribute to families, communities and nations also contributes to empowerment. Relationships with brothers, husbands and fathers, as well as community and authority leaders, are at its heart. If empowerment of women is to lead to greater equality, existing systems, authorities, laws and policies must be reviewed and amended.

Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges to confront their traditional role and change their life. Empowerment of women is very much essential to achieve sustainable development. The benefits of literacy programmes on women's empowerment are as follow:

- Increase in self-confidence and personality development
- Heightened social awareness
- Gender equity and women's empowerment
- Status in the family
- Educational equality
- Women as entrepreneurs
- Household savings and access to credit

Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make informed choices and intelligent decision in matters that affect them and their nation, education inspires people to advance on all fronts. It helps individuals to be more aware of their constitutional and legal rights and the opportunities available for them to make their lives better.

Education also helps people evolves as workers, citizens and human beings. Education can serve as a powerful instrument for individuals to achieve upward social and economic mobility and achieve power and status in society. Women have been long neglected in their role as beneficiaries of the process of development their contribution to development in society is often undermined. Women's education is all the more important because of the special problems that women face today. It can serves as an essential input in development. Female education can put a firm step to the missing population. The table given below shows the literacy rate of men and women in India;

Table no.1 Literacy rate of India

Year	Persons	Males	Females
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
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	7.3
1951	16.7	24.8	7.2
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	62.3	76.0	54.0
2011	74.0	82.1	65.5

From the above table, we come to know that the literacy rate of women's is quite low as compare with the males. Educated women more so contributes to social development and economic progress in any country whether developed or underdeveloped could be achieved through social development. As a result, even after 65 years of independence, women occupy a secondary position in our social hierarchy. Inspire of being aware of her position, women cannot transform the situation due to lack of education. Therefore, women's empowerment cannot be affected unless we persuade the importance of women's education. The government has passed many laws so as to empower the women. These rules have empowered them socially, economically, legally and politically. Not only the government but various non-governmental organisations have done a lot so as to improve the status of women in our society and literacy is now regarded not only as a basic necessity of progress, but also as an essential means of removing oppression and deprivation from all sections as well as from all levels of the society. It helps the peoples to improve their standard of living through enhancement of productivity and participation in developmental programmes.

Women literacy is very important and plays an essential role for the progress of the society. Through literacy, women can improve and enhance their personalities and contribute towards the progress of the society. It may be said that, in spite of the expansion that has taken place in the formal educational system, a vast majority of women in Manipur remained beyond the reach of education and their rate of literacy requires to be improved. In the late nineteenth century, a number of social reform programs especially for women were organized in Manipur to give them awareness about their rights in the society. As a result there is upward movement of women in the society which has made them to inter into all walks of public life. In spite of all these, the rate of female literacy appears to be quite low and miserable in Manipur.

According to the figures of 1951 and 2001, along with the increase in the size of population, the number of literate persons also has increased. The literacy rate amongst the females had gradually

increased over the decades. For instance, in 1951 only 6962 females were literate which has increased to 808166 in 2011 which is not a small achievement. This shows the speed in which the women progressed in the field of education. There has always been a wide gap between the rate of literacy among males and females in Manipur.

The adult female literacy rate in 2001 was 57.59 per cent which was lower by about 2.53 per cent points than the overall female literacy rate of 60.53 per cent. In 2011, however adult literacy at 67.69 per cent is lower by 2.57 per cent points than the overall female literacy rate of 70.26 per cent and in case of adult illiterate, the number of adult illiterate in 2001 in the state was 0.44 million including 0.31 million females (70%), 0.01 million SCs (2.27%) and 0.17 million (38.64%) STs. In 2011, number of adult illiterates in the state is 0.48 million including 0.32 million females (67%), 0.02 million SCs (4%) and 0.2 million (47%) STs. On the other hand, Basic Literacy needs to be linked with the third objective of Saakshar Bharat " Skill Development/ Vocational Education" which will provide more motivation and interest among the adult learners specially the women to join the literacy programme because of various skill development trainings provided to them which may enable the learners to improve their living and earning conditions and may help them to become Entrepreneur.

In fact, Vocational Education/skill Development programmes in adult literacy programme can be the ways and means which certainly helps the adult learners to become Entrepreneurs and also empower beyond the improvement of their living and earning conditions. But at the present trend, the question of Entrepreneurship under adult literacy programme in Manipur State is gloomy and still doubtful. It is because no clear pictures of follow up activities after going through skill development trainings can be properly seen even though wide option is being left open for the adult women learners to become entrepreneurs in the future.

1.4. Strategies for the promotion of women empowerment through adult literacy programme

The following are some of the strategies adopted for the promotion of women empowerment through adult literacy programme:

- The prerak must be provided with training so as to organise all the vocational training programmes and also other activities of the centre which the programme is launched.
- The functionaries of the JSS have to be linked with the university departments of ACEE for family support, co-operation and co-ordination of the programme and also orienting the functionaries at field level.
- The University Department should have to undertake extensive research works to identify the need based vocations, the ways and means for creating awareness among the women for promoting their empowerment.
- The mass media should be utilised effectively for the promotion of interest, skills and abilities among the women so as to encourage them to imbibe required qualities for their empowerment.
- Skill development to be done in Adult Education Centres (AECs), women's polytechnics and industrial training institutes. Skills are put to work in training-cum-production workshops.

- Educational institutes should tie up with various government and non-government agencies to assist in entrepreneurship development mainly to plan business projects.

1.5. Conclusion

It can be said that today we are in a better position wherein women participation in the field of empowerment is increasing at a considerable rate. Efforts are being made at the economy as brought promise of equality of opportunity in all spheres to the Manipuri women and laws guaranteed equal rights of participation in political process and equal opportunities and rights in education and employment were enacted. But unfortunately, the government sponsored development activities have benefited only a small section of women i.e. the urban middle class women. Adult learners / Neo-literates are usually poor and live in rural areas on hills as well as in valleys. The improvement of their economic conditions is a band and important need. They need to learn new skills/upgrade their old skills and be acquainted with ways and means of utilizing the provisions made in different schemes and projects, informing them of procedures for getting assistance from credit institutions and cooperatives. They also need to learn skills of entrepreneurship and marketing, self-employment and how to start business with neighbouring Districts / States. These needs are related to women who undergo Adult Literacy programme in the State. They also need to know how women may earn additional income, form self-help groups, became entrepreneur to improve the economic status of family. As such, more efforts needed to up lift women of all walks of life especially rural areas, weaker sections and minorities because until and unless all are counted there may not be collective development in the Society. At this juncture, literacy plays important role and it is indeed very much necessary in empowerment of women and can help in better participation in skill development programmes and skill development programmes interns enable women to venture in the different areas of entrepreneurship. In this direction, more effective steps are needed to provide entrepreneurial awareness, various orientations and skill development programmes to women through the adult education programme so that adult women learners can also have equal opportunity to venture Entrepreneurship beyond their improvement in living and earning conditions. Only realisation of women empowerment can resolve this which will bring a societal empowerment as started by Kofi Annan

“When women thrive, all of society benefits and succeeding generations are given a better start in life.”

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