



EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION: A GLOBAL ISSUE

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Abstract:

The society has become a tough male dominating one so women are always sealed in the four walls of the house. In this whole study we are going to see the other side of the women who not only bear and rear the family but can powerfully spin the economy towards development and steady growth with a bang on healthy environment. Women are very subtle yet mentally strong beings. When they are biologically fit to bear the future, they are equally fit to handle any given situation. With this positive note we are going to have an insight of what is women empowerment and what can a woman achieve if good education is imparted to her. Time is history, where women have shown their valour and brains in all spheres of life, be it battle field, or space, she is fully into it. Here we will throw some light of the concept of women empowerment through education, problems, obstacles and measures and suggestions to improve the subject which is definitely going to have an impact on women.

Key words: women, education, empowerment, environment, economy

Introduction:

Women are no longer a weaker or a deprived section of the society. They have to be treated equally. Women are stronger mentally and physically, its just they are very subtle and patient. They have to be respected equally. When they are strong and equal, they are subject to a healthy diet and provided all necessary medical facilities. Women are subject to the right of the best education they can attain at par equal to men. The day when every person in our country believes in the strength of woman, we will achieve the desired heights of economic and social development of the entire nation. Women Empowerment is my chosen topic which should be reiterated again and again till women do not achieve equal ratios in all the aspects such as health, education, employment and so on. India produces as many strong ladies like Indira Gandhi, KalpanaChawla, Mary Com but they are very few which can be easily counted who shine in different fields, whereas a majority of women fall prey to the mishaps of socio-cultural trauma. As per the latest Census in the year 2011, the total female sex ratio in India is 940 per 1000 males, which is to an extent bearable though not equal. The census-2011 also indicated a 2001-2011 decadal literacy growth of 9.2 per cent, which is slower than the growth seen during the previous decade. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) in 2011 were 82.14 per cent for men and 65.46 per cent for women, is disheartening and non- acceptable. Why is there a difference between men and women. Women should be considered as the key components in many areas like family, society and a nation. So women have to be looked up and join them in their steps when we want our nation to grow. Nation is nothing but the combination of male and female and their thoughts. In a country like India where women cover nearly half of the population, no real development is possible neglecting women. Therefore, it is evident that to ignore women's role is to harm not just women but the entire communities and a nation because women, after all are half of the human race. And when we talk about development of the nation there is no other option except for educating women.

Concept of Women Empowerment:

Now the women in India enjoy a unique status of equality with the men as per constitutional and legal provision. But the Indian women have come a long way to achieve the present positions. as a commodity. History is a witness that women was made to dance both in private and public places to please the man. Secondly, in Indian society, a female was always dependent on male members of the family even last few years ago. Thirdly, a female was not allowed to speak with loud voice in the presence of elder members of her in-laws. In the family, every fault had gone to her and responsible. Forth, as a widower dependence on male members of the family still more increase. Empowerment can be viewed as means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation. It strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996). Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individual to think, take action and control work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's lives. Empowerment includes control over resources (physical, human, intellectual and financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes). (Baltiwala, 1994). It is not merely a feel of greater extrinsic control, but also grows intrinsic capacity, greater self-confidence and an internal transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional Women's empowerment is very essential for the development of society. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercises choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. As per the United National Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), 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 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.

- 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.

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How Education is Essential for Empowerment:

Education is Essential for Empowerment which can bring about a confident attitudinal change of women in the society. It is considered as the justice to protect women's right against all the violence that take place in today's world right from the time she is in the fetus.

Perspectives on Women's Empowerment

One perspective points out improving women's position and equity without radically altering the existing structure of gender relations. This perspective includes the so-called self-reliant model of empowerment. In this context self-reliance means achieving the best one can for oneself within the present system. From this point of view, a woman is "empowered" when she is literate, educated, and has productive skills, has access to capital and self-confidence. This view of empowerment as individual self-reliance is considered not to recognize nor question how a woman can gain increased

access to resources if the hurdles of gender discrimination remain in place. It leaves out the political and ideological dimensions of women's struggle. The other perspective sees women's advancement as necessarily involving the transformation of an excessively male-dominated society. This involves collective action and working as a team towards the goal of ending discriminatory practices and gender inequality. Advocates of this view use the term "gender equity" to denote their ambition for a new form of gender justice within an egalitarian society and are interested in structural transformation to create more justice. They hold the view that women can achieve an equal footing with men only if there is equality of opportunity, which is not the case, as women continue to face systematic discrimination.

According to an Indian writer and activist Devaki Jain, "the positive discrimination of Panchayat Raj Institutions has initiated a momentum of change. Women's entry into local government in such large numbers often more than the required 33 percent, and their success in campaigning, including the defeat of male candidates, has shattered the myth that women are not interested in politics, and have no time to meetings or to undertake all the other work that is required in political party processes. Panchayat Raj Institutions reminds us of central truth: power is not something people give away, it has to be negotiated, and some time wrested from the powerful. In India, the participation of women in politics has actually been declined since the days of freedom movement (10percent). It reached a high of 8 percent in 1984 elections. This figure has not crossed since then.

Status 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 three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 1971 only 22percent of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2001 54.16 percent female were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 14.87 percent as compared to 11.72 percent of that of male literacy rate. As per the latest Census in the year 2011, the total female sex ratio in India is 940 per 1000 males. The census- 2011 also indicated a 2001-2011 decadal literacy growth of 9.2 per cent, which is slower than the growth seen during the previous decade. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) in 2011 were 82.14 per cent for men and 65.46 per cent for women.

Women Empowerment and the Role of Education:

Women Empowerment is although global issue and discussion on women political rights are at the fore front 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 that we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment in India is poised to becoming a superpower, a developed country by 2020. The year 2020 is fast approaching; it is just 3 year away. This can become reality only when the women of this nation become empowered. India presently accounts for the largest number of illiterates in the world. Literacy rate in India have risen sharply from 18.3 percent in 1951 to 64.8 percent in 2001 in which enrolment of women in education have also risen sharply 7 per cent to 54.16 percent . Despite the importance of women education unfortunately only 39 percent of women are literate among 64 per cent of the man. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plan and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in difference spheres. From the fifth five year plan (1974 – 78) onwards has been a 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 73rd and 74th 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.

Challenges and Opportunities of women Education:

In spite of the forceful intervention by a bastion of 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 of women in terms education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons. The 2001 Census report indicates that literacy among women as only 54 percent it is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women India is even much lower to national average i.e., 65.38. The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, the weak, backward and exploited. More-over education is also not available to all equally. Gender inequality is reinforced in education which is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 54 percent against 76 percent of men as per 2001 Census.

Impact of Education on Women

Education is a process of awareness in different sectors of women which strengthen her socio-economic status. In India we find women the feeblest gender which is an unrealistic perspective of the people. Of all the discrimination and denial of opportunity that these women suffer, the most damaging is the denial of the right and opportunity to education. Widespread poverty and discriminatory cultural practices are frequently cited as prime reasons for the persistence of their gender gap in education. Various studies have questioned that if poverty is a major reason for women's low literacy rate, then how do countries like Kenya, Vietnam and Tajikistan, which have a lower per capita income than India but score much better, with literacy rates of 78 percent, 94 percent and 100 percent compared to 52 percent for India (1995). The corresponding literacy rates for these countries are: Kenya 70 percent, Vietnam 91 percent, Tajikistan 100 percent and India 38 percent (Haq and Haq, 1998).

Poverty is not a matter for depriving women's education but we must put down our heads in shame due to culture that brings out the strong odour of gender differences. However it would be very dangerous to limit the analysis of causation to these factors. Valid as these constraints are, they all too often serve to camouflage the political indifference, bureaucratic inertia and social apathy that lie at the core of the problem. The status quo thus becomes a way of life. Breaking this circle requires new forms of realization and mobilization, not just of resources but also of communities themselves. In a wide range of low-income countries, the hold of poverty and negative cultural factors have been broken by concerted political action, genuine people movements or because of a sustained public demand of education. The dawn of the 1980s and 1990s gave birth to new challenges as the market economy expanded with industrialization and globalization which gave rise to increased inequalities, resulting in loss of livelihoods depending on agriculture, erosion of natural resources and with it decreased women's access to water, fuel, fodder and traditional practices of income. It also brought new forms of exploitation-displacement, tourism, sex trade and retrenchment to mention a few. Due to lack of education women are forced to take up jobs which leave them with meager income but are labourious and time consuming. Less educated women are very easily absorbed by various industries, as they accept all the work pressure without uttering a word. It lays a very easy road for exploitation of women work force, leading to ultimate low incomes to women which is termed as "feminization of poverty". The word empowerment in the context of women in the Indian policy was used in 1986-Educational Policy which is known as the "NPE 1986" and the title of the chapter is "Education for Women's Equality and Empowerment". It has actually two aspects — empowerment first means self-empowerment that is women being able to help themselves through whatever knowledge is imparted to them and use them in a productive way leading to high confidence level and channelise financial stability. It may be education, health or so on and the second is that they should be able to help others to become empowered.

Education is like a complete package, where you can choose what is good and ignore what is not required. It equips the person with the skills to work towards achieving the desired goals.

Empowerment of women as a goal of development projects and programs has gained wider acceptance since 1990s. It is not a simple linear process. It has long been argued by various UN agencies that the critical determinant of women's socio-economic status is education, and that education is the key to achieving social development by improving the well-being of the girls and women and thus promoting gender equity. The experience of numerous programs in the government and the NGO sector shows that it is indeed possible. Empowerment of women was one of the nine primary objectives of the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) and every effort was made to create an enabling empowerment

where women could freely exercise their rights within and outside their home as equal Partner with men. Education is one of the most critical factors responsible for the development of a human person. Right to education, therefore, is held as a very important human right. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is the principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. The international community has realized the importance of education for individual and

collective well-being made explicit provisions in several human rights instruments on the rights to education. The Constitution of India was recently amended to provide for the right to compulsory elementary education to children falling between the age group of 6-14 years. Among the world's 900 million literacy people, women outnumber men two to one. Girls constitute the majority of 130 million children without access to primary education (Human Development Report 1995). The illiteracy rate of women is 55.16 percent as against

75.85 percent for men (2001). They can be seen as beggars on road crossing and rag pickers.

Education, in a broad sense, essentially involves penning the mind, enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence, building a sense of positive self-worth, accessing information and tools of knowledge and acquiring the ability to negotiate this unequal and unjust world from a position of strength. No society has ever liberated itself - economically, politically or socially –without a sound base of educated women. Many countries experience around the world have demonstrated that investment in educating women is the most precious investment a society can ever make.

Table-1.1 Literacy Rate in India

Year	Persons	Male	Female
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	24.9	7.3
1961	24.0	34.4	13.0
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Census of India (2011)

According to the Table-1 the pre-Independence time 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 percent to 7.3 percent whereas the literacy rate of men has risen from 9.8 percent to 24.9 percent 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. 25percent in 1951 and 76 percent in 2001. Surprisingly the female literacy rate has increased at a fasterpace than the male literacy during the decade 1981 -2001. The growth is almost 6 times

e.g. 7.9 percent in 1951 and 54 percent in 2001. From this analyze one can infer that still the female literacy rate (only half of the female population are literates) is wading behind

male literacy rate (three fourth of the male population are literates).The rate of school drop outs 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 exploitation and negligence. Only literacy can help women to understand the Indian's constitutional and legislative provisions that are made to strengthen them.

Table – 1. 2

State-wise percentage of Female Literacy in the country(2011 Census)

Sl. No.	Name of the State	Female Literacy (percent)
1	Andhra Pradesh	59.7
2	Arunachal Pradesh	59.6
3	Assam	67.3
4	Bihar	53.3
5	Chattisgarh	60.6
6	Delhi	80.9
7	Goa	81.8
8	Gujarat	70.7
9	Haryana	66.8
10	Himachal Pradesh	76.6
11	Jammu and Kashmir	58.0
12	Jharkhand	56.2
13	Karnataka	68.1
14	Kerala	92.0
15	Madhya Pradesh	60.0
16	Maharashtra	75.5
17	Manipur	73.2
18	Meghalaya	73.8
19	Mizoram	89.4
20	Nagaland	76.7
21	Orissa	64.4
22	Punjab	71.3
23	Rajasthan	52.7
24	Sikkim	76.4
25	Tamil Nadu	73.9
26	Tripura	83.1
27	Uttar Pradesh	59.3
28	Uttarakhand	70.7
29	West Bengal	71.2

Union Territories		
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	81.8
2	Chandigarh	81.4
3	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	65.9
4	Daman & Diu	79.6
5	Lakshadweep	88.2
6	Pondicherry	81.2

Source: Census of India (2011)

According to the Country Report of the Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power". Education of women in the education of women is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. To encourage the education of women at all levels and for dilution of gender bias in providing knowledge and education, established schools, colleges and universities even exclusively for women in the state. To bring more girls, especially from marginalized families of BPL, in mainstream education, the government is providing a package of concessions in the form of providing free books, uniform, boarding and lodging, clothing for the hostilities midday meals, scholarships, free circles and so on.

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