



Education and Empowerment: Redefining the Status of Women in India

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ABSTRACT

“There cannot be an educated people without educated women. If general education had to be limited to men or to women, that opportunity should be given to women, for then it would most surely pass on to the next generation.”-university education commission report (1948-49) addressed opportunities for women and stressed that the education of women was vital for the full development of the nation's resources. Education gives women the means to earn a livelihood, making them financially independent and capable of supporting their families. Education empowers women to understand their rights, make independent choices, and participate actively in family and community matters.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of women education and empowerment is not something new, women in India constitute almost half of its population, but yet it remains to be a very neglected and oppressed segment of the society.

Even in Indian society, on one hand women are worshiped as goddesses in the form of Durga, Kali, Saraswati, Laxmi and many others, on the other hand women are tortured, raped, burnt to death for dowry, molested, sexually abused by their male counterparts in almost all spheres of life, yet we find that women still have to fight for justice and there is a great cry for women empowerment all over the world.

KEYWORDS: Women empowerment; Education; Equality; Gender; Literacy; Economic; Self determination; Freedom from violence;

MEANING OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Generally empowerment is considered as development of skills to make a person more confident, self-reliant & to develop ability to take self decision. Empowerment refers broadly to the expansion of freedom of choice & action to shape one's life. It implies control over resources & decisions. Empowerment refers to enabling people to take charge for their own lives.

Women empowerment does not mean shouting for rights for women, it means making them able to take the right decision at the right place at the right time. It also means to develop in them the ability to judge what is right or wrong. It also enables women to make the rightful adjustment to the situation. An empowered woman is self-confident & recognises her own potentialities. It also help in making her conscious of her financial contribution to the house & the society at last.

To empower women literally speaking, is to give power to women. Power here does not mean a mode of domination over others, but a sense of internal strength & confidence to face life. Empowering women requires the removal of formal & informal institutional barriers that prevent them from taking action to improve their well being individually or collectively.

Human development & women empowerment, both are mutually reinforcing. Infected empowered women can contribute to human development through house hold & community activity & at the same time progress in human development is expected to promote women empowerment through improved health, nutrition, education ,social security ,political freedom, availability of employment & a decent standard of living. So the concept of empowerment was introduced at the international women's conference at Nairobi in 1985. And define it "a redistribution of social power & control of resources in favour of women ." according to Gandhi " women empowerment was Sarvodaya the welfare of all through cooperation & truth chief in the economic sphere , equal participation in the political sphere & aid in the social sphere without regard to cast or class or Gender." According to UNESCO gender empowerment index "a person becomes empowered when she is able to make decision for herself & for others, socially & politically, for the feminist believed the personal is political.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Concept a need of empowerment in the country may be more simplified through a study of its historical background. Throughout the ages Indian women had been treated as a backward class in general. During the Vedic period there was no social restriction to women. In the Buddhist period however women were not allowed to enter into the Sangha for their education. During the Muslim period use of purdah system had debarred the women in general from getting education in school.

During the British rule a sense of renaissance of the European culture, literature & science had overpowered the Indian mind. A group of social reformers like Vidyasagar & Rajammohan Rai had come forward to Plead for women empowerment. In the subsequent period Gandhiji had inspired the cause of women & their education. A sense of new realisation & new outlook had started to develop in mind of the Indian women towards their social emancipation. Many women reformers such as Pandita Ramabai also helped the cause of women upliftment.

In India right from the wood despatch (1854), Hunter commission (1882), Hartog committee (1939), the national women commission was set up in 1956 to develop women's education. The Kothari commission (1964-66) & national policy on education (1986) also give special emphasize on women education. After the independence the % of women 's literacy in the country was found to be as low as 12.8% as against men's % of

29. Indian constitution makers had therefore tried to remove the disparity through making certain provisions for women's education, on maintenance of status & employment. The constitutional provisions were followed by setting up of a number of national committees for recommendation on women's & development. For the empowerment of women the Mass media & NGO's also have important roles to play beside the government agencies. The government of India declared 2001 as the "year of women empowerment". Women in independent India now participate in all activities such as education, sports, politics, media, art & culture, service sector, science & technology etc.

NEEDS

Noble prize winner Prof. Amartya Sen, emphasized during his recent trip to our country, that unless women are empowered issues like health, literacy, & population will remain unsolved problems of the developing countries in this part of the sub-continent. Empowerment of women is attempted to address two important issues:

(A) Reducing gender inequalities (B) Building equality in nation's development

Various people have felt the need of educating & empowering women. As Jawaharlal Nehru had said, "to awaken the people, it is women, who must be awakened, once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves & the nation moves. Amartya Sen said that it is in the interest of the whole community to empower women. The issue of women empowerment has gained worldwide importance because of the reasons mentioned below:

1. **Parental attitude**-due to parental attitude women suffer a lot and maintain a status far below that of males. Empowerment of women is necessary to change the traditional attitude of parents.
2. **Social customs & belief**-through properly planned education & wide publicity attempt should be made to remove such attitude & bring about positive change regarding the status of women.
3. **Economic dependence**-women are generally dependent on male member of the family. Therefore women are deprived of economic independence. Empowerment will help them to be fully dependent on their own capacity.
4. **Atrocities against women**-women in old walks of life discriminated against by men. They have become the victim of atrocities in many ways as injustice, oppression, deprivation & cruelty.
5. **Low statuses in family**-usually women occupy an inferior position in the family & are debarred from decision making.
6. **Illiteracy**-wide spread illiteracy among women especially in rural areas is a big problem. In order to bring about change in the status of women it is necessary to develop and to raise the literacy rate of females. It is known that according to 2011 census report the literacy rate of Indian women is 65.46 % against the literacy rate of men 82.14%.
7. **Health problems**-poor health has also added to women's weakness. This is mostly true in case of rural women. Surveys & studies have revealed that traditional importance towards the male children is a cause of neglecting the health of the female children.

OBJECTIVES

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of women. It often involves the empowerment, developing confidence in their own capacities. The objectives of women empowerment are –

1. To develop the ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making.
2. To have access to information regarding education, employment & health.
3. To have positive thinking on the ability to make change.
4. To have the ability to change other's perception by democratic means.
5. To enhance self-respect & self confidence in women.
6. To make women participate actively in the growth processes of the society & nation.
7. To develop the ability to learn skills for improving one's personnel or group power.

PROGRAMME & POLICIES

1. Women empowerment is an important program of developmental plan all over the globe. The following measures constitute to implement for the empowerment of women:

- Building a positive image of woman by arranging programmes that will highlight the contribution of woman to the society
- Encouraging neo-literate woman to step out of the household and involve themselves in some enterprise
- Formation of woman self-help for engaging woman in different types of economic activities
- Establishment of women's hostels for the working women in various places
- Passing of the women's reservation bill for political security and strength of women
- Organisation of meeting, seminars, cultural programs for speeding the message of women empowerment
- Encouraging women especially the rural women to take advantage of the various schemes like Sarva Siksha Aahyan, Operation Black Board, total literacy programme etc.

2. UGC said that following measures for women empowerment

- To provide scholarship to the girl student studying in university
- To provide assistance in imparting women specific technical education
- To establish a cell for curbing sexual harassment in any form in university
- To facilitate science education for women

3. National education policy (1986) has adopted certain programs or steps for women empowerment. They are:

- 33% seats are reserved for women
- Provide opportunity to poor and liberate women in setting self employed by promoting self-help group
- Reserve 30% of Govt. jobs and contract jobs for women
- Increase in maternity leave to 135 days instead of 90 days
- Establishment of women bank where will have the privilege to get engaged in all types of activities
- To pass women reservation bill in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha ensuring political protection and empowerment

4. Documents for empowerment of women:

- The UN declaration of 1975 as the women's year to chalk out elaborate programme for the development of women
- The Nairobi conference of 1985 (international women conference) declared that an important means of women empowerment and highlighted the women participation in politics and reservation of 35% of the total seats for women
- The 73rd constitution amendment act of 1993 contained the provision that women should be given special powers in Panchayati Raj.
- National policy of education 1986 and revised in 1992 defined education in terms of women empowerment and doing away with all the injustice against women
- The world conference at Beijing 1995 also highlighted the factors which are responsible for hindering the progress and the empowerment of women

PRESENT SCENARIO

A definite proposal of the government towards empowering the women has been to give 33% reservation to women in the parliament and in the legislature. Women are known as "the better halves". This is a respectable term for any women. No doubt about that. But history reveals a different story. Sita and Draupadi of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are examples of the women suffering. One was put through Agni pariksha and the other was given to the opponent as a Pawn of the dice.

The literacy rate of female in India was 54.16% in 2001 & 65.46% in 2011 whereas male literacy rate was 75.85% & 82.14%. In Assam it is for male 73.18% & for female 67.27%. There are many educated women in India. Today colleges even Universities & institutions for women got started. We can see on the national scene. Political leaders of the like of Sarajoni Naidu, Bijaylaxmi Pandit, Pratiba Singh Patil, Meera Nair, Jaya Lalita, Mamata Banerjee, Kiran Bedi, Sonia Gandhi etc. Poetess of repute like Mahadeeva Verma, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Musicians and dancers, Professors, Vicechancellors, Chief Ministers, Governors, Judges of the High court and Supreme Court.

Indira Gandhi become the Prime Minister of India, Najma Heptulla was VP of Rajya Sabha.

There are several ladies who are member of the parliament or member of Legislature; there are Artists, Film Actress who have achieved international fame in their own field. Recently Deepa Mehta's name came into limelight as her latest movie "WATER" has been nominated for "OSCAR AWARD". In today's new era like male missile man in India, i.e. the missile women of India is Tessy Thomas from Kerala. All these shows how the women folk and science of India is emerging out of social confinement and signing out.

Despite all these women are still subjected to domination of their husband. They are subjected to all sorts of misbehaviour including eve teasing, abduction, rape in the train in offices which are evident from the head news published in the daily Newspapers.

ROLE OF EDUCATION

In a completely free society, there would be no gap between men & women in categories that are not based on gender opportunity and access to resources would be the same for both men and women. There has been a growing realisation among the world community that without the active participation of women side by side along with men, the goals of national development would remain at dream. Several ways have been devised to overcome the gender inequalities and to empower women. The following are some of the ways and means to empower women:

- Education
- Employment opportunity
- Legislation
- Development of income generating skills
- Enhancing state of women
- Reducing gender inequalities through change in attitudes
- Capacity building etc.

Over and above all visualised the only strong means to empower women which can also influence to strengthen the other ways of women empowerment mention above is "EDUCATION"

Education is identified as a powerful means or source of empowerment of men and women. It may remove the darkness of illiteracy and ignorance, Sense of conservatism and narrow mindedness from mind. It may give the women their much needed social status, from positive outlook and attitude and develop self confidence in mind on their own capacity for development. Education may only develop their individuality and the sense of capability for psycho-physical development. Education and entitlement may empower the women for their self-realisation in establishment of their social personality. That can be understood as the true implication of the term women empowerment

In a democratic country like India such condition should be created in which women voices are heard. Their needs are recognised and their participation in every social issue is required. Such condition through only

education.it also brings about reduction in-equalities in the societies presuming that education leads to equalisation of status between individuals belonging to different socio economic levels

Education leverage from the clutches of inequalities. Education is a force to reduce gender inequalities and excess to mobility, share in decision making and contribution to national development. Greater schooling of the mother appears to leads better hygiene;improve nutrition practices and greater effectiveness in caring for the family's health.Mothers schooling is also improve her own health status. One reason for these is that more schooling since to accord her greater control over the frequency and spacing of child bearing.

Mother's education improves the educational attainment of her children particularly that of daughter's .Educating women support or enable the exercise of their rights and obligation.Education empowers women in two ways:Direct and indirect. Directly it can be observed in enhance productive,wider employment opportunity and lifetime earnings. Indirectly education among women is widely known to have a strong depressant effect on child bearing.They tend to be more knowledgeable about family planning and their fore this keeps the population under control and the economic development process accelerates.

Education of women leads to their empowerment since it removes some of the obstacle to economic and social development. Knowledge increase the power of reasoning and the ability to analyse and relate facts and events in their proper sequence to draw inferences and to apply the conclusion to give or new situation, Education of women also enhances the access to modern ideas and social science.

Empowerment of women is not subject of concern only for the people connected with education. Society also has to play a role in this regard. The following steps can be taken at the school and university level to help women and their empowerment. And to develop an attitude of accepting in the male student:

- The ideal of respect of womanhood should be develop in the minds of the student
- Gender studies should be introduce as a compulsory subject at the undergraduate level
- Universities should lead education with a vacation to enable women to generate sustain income
- Universities should take up research on topics related to the status of women in society
- To give the students an elementary knowledge about the rights and lows especially friend for women
- The girl students should be encourage to take equal parts in all the co-curricular activities
- Stories based on the lives of women who have performed great tasks should be taught to the students.

Again Longwel(1990)has given the following five level of empowerment of women:

1. **Welfare**:Concerns meeting the basic needs without attempting to solve the underlying structural causes
2. **Access**: Access to the resources such as education opportunity land and credit
3. **Conscientization**: Recognition of structural and institutional discrimination as the cause for low socio economic status and of women's own role in reinforcing the respective system
4. **Participation**: through mobilising collective action women gained increased empowerment to make decision alongside men
5. **Control**:Being able to make decision on all affairs concerning themselves their families, political level and be recognised and appreciated for their contribution

CONCLUSION: Hope in Change

Let the women experience the great unfolding power of human being who when they are given the opportunity and freedom to analyse their situation to take corrective action will always come up with most realistic solution. It is time we took women seriously put them first and let them act . Education of women benefits individual, families and communities. By educating women, A country can reduce poverty,improve productivity, its population pressure and offer its children a better future.Recent studies show that the economic and social returns to the family as a result of education for women are greater than those for men.Educated mothers and fathers have better educated children and maternal education stands to influence a girls; education in particular. As each generation of women is educated, so are the long term rewards for the society to build quickly. So in order to reap all these benefits, empowerment of women is essential through education.Pt.Jawarlal Nehru rightly emphasised that “Education of boy is the education of one person, but Education of girl is the Education of the entire family”. So If wants to have an educated generation, one must take care of women and educate them properly. They can bring about renaissance in the country.

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