
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS.

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Abstract: Research shows that Women's economic empowerment that is, their capacity to bring about economic change for themselves is increasingly viewed as the most important contributing factor to achieving equality between women and men. But economically strengthening women – who are half the world's workforce – is not only a means by which to spur economic growth, but also a matter of advancing women's human rights. When governments, businesses and communities invest in women, and when they work to eliminate inequalities, developing countries are less likely to be plagued by poverty. The world has recognized the vital importance of education as a main aspect of human security and as a means to empower women. Women in India constitute 50 per cent of the country's human resource and their contributions are vital for the nation's progress. Even though the education system expanded very rapidly, the gender gap in literacy remains noticeable by its presence. The impact of social, cultural and economic disparities across various states in India on the enrollment of women varies from state to state. In spite of various developmental programs, protecting laws and policies by the Central and State Government the plight of women in terms of education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons. This paper seeks to discuss the position of women in India against the above background.

Education is the primary means for Empowerment. The correlation between the indicators of education and empowerment are very much positive and in many instance they are identical. Without basic education, empowerment is an impossible vision. The discrepancy in the education of women compared to men is the most convincing proof for gender discrimination. A considerable investment is required to enhance the educational level of women in India. Imparting literacy and elementary education to women have positive impact upon the physical and mental health of the children. Subscribing for the education of women is nothing but subscribing for a prosperous nation in the future. Research shows that the status of women in the educational parameters is very low to that of men. Education of women results in improved productivity, income, economic development and a better-nourished population. At the same time, it is clear that education empowers women, providing them with increased autonomy in every sphere of their lives. Moreover, education is important for all kinds of demographic behavior, affecting mortality, health, fertility, and contraception.

Keyword: Education, Gender Discrimination, Women Empowerment.

Introduction: Women Empowerment is a 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 a milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. As we can't neglect the importance of education with reference to women empowerment India is poised to becoming a superpower, a developed country by 2020. The year 2020 is fast approaching; it is just 5 years away. This can become reality only when the women of this nation become empowered. India presently account for the largest number of illiterates in the world. Literacy rate in India have risen sharply from 18.3% in 1951 to 64.8% in 2001 in which enrolment of women in education has also risen sharply from 7% to 54.16%. Despite the

importance of women education unfortunately only 39% of women are literate among 64% 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. 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. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Moreover educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population.

Education is a basic requirement and a fundamental right for the citizens of a free nation. It is also of increasing strategic importance in the new environment of knowledge and information technology based globalized economy. Education plays a catalytic role in a country's socio-economic development and is one of the principal means available for a deeper and harmonious form of human development reducing poverty, ignorance and exclusion. Higher Education, which is a training ground for a professional, research-based, career-oriented future, must be respected as a potential instrument for bringing about social transformation and ensuring the success of democracy. Education must be provided to all categories of citizens by breaking down constraints and barriers. Once students have completed primary and secondary education, attention must focus on increasing participation of men and women equally in the field of Higher Education. The Indian National Policy of Education recognizes this when it states 'Wider women's access to vocational, technical and professional education at all levels, breaking gender stereotypes, will ensure better financial stability for women and lead to national development'.

Gender discrimination has been a major obstacle in granting equal opportunity for women in Education. It has been identified as a crucial category and deserves attention in the education-equality paradigm. Today, women's education has become an issue of debate within which it is now necessary to shift the focus from women's intellectual development to women's autonomy in decision-making, freedom of expression and control over resources. Empowerment is the manifestation of a redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology, transforming the institutions that reinforce or perpetuate gender discrimination. The parameters of empowerment have been identified as Developing ability for critical thinking, Fostering decision-making and action through collective processes, Ensuring equal participation in developmental processes, Enhancing self-esteem and self confidence in women. The time has arrived to realize the relevance, in a rapidly developing country like India, of education for leadership-building, especially for women –something which can be achieved only through Education.

Challenges and prospects: There are several constraints that check the process of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structures in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. One of such norms is the continuing

preference for a son over the birth of a girl child, which is present in almost all societies and communities. The hold of this preference has strengthened rather than weakened and its most glaring evidence is in the falling sex ratio. The society is more biased in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India with an exception in Meghalaya. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural, thus inflicting an injustice upon them. Poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority of women in India. It is another factor that poses challenge in realizing women's empowerment. In a poor family, girls are the main victims; they are malnourished and are denied the opportunity of better education and other facilities. But if they are financially independent or they have greater control over the resources then they exhibit greater autonomy both in the household and in public sphere and are no longer victims of poverty. Lack of awareness about legal and constitutional provisions and failure in realizing it, is another factor that hinders the process of empowerment. Most of the women are not aware of their legal rights. Even women who are aware lack the courage to take the legal step. The legislation which affects women most is their situation in marriage and inheritance. As far as the rights of inheritance are concerned, women generally do not try to inherit land left by their parents if brothers are alive (Seth, 2004). The traditional belief that land should not go outside the patriarchal family operates. The provision of Act like (1) Child Marriage Resistance Act, 1930, (2) The Suppression of Immoral Trafficking of Women Act, 1987 and (3) The Indecent Exposure of Women Act, have not led to the suppression of practice indicated in them. Of these three, the first one is by and large successful in restraining child marriage. The legislation almost failed in case of immoral trafficking and indecent exposure to women. There are numerous incidence of indecent exposure of women in all forms of media with hardly any prosecution. Although the legal rights are in place to create an enabling atmosphere these have not been very successful in realizing women's empowerment.

But the Indian women are facing some major constraints like lack of confidence, socio-cultural barriers, motivational factors, knowledge in Business Administration, awareness about the financial assistance, exposed to the training programs, identifying the available resources etc. So, highly educated, technically sound and professionally qualified women should be

encouraged for managing their own business, rather than dependent on wage employment outlets. The unexplored talents of young women can be identified, trained and used for various types of industries to increase the productivity in the industrial sector.

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. Moreover 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% against 76% of men as per 2001 Census.

For better prospect of women empowerment Government has introduced a new scheme called BetiBachao, BetiPadhao, which will help in generating awareness and improving the efficiency of delivery of welfare services meant for women with an initial corpus of Rs 100 crore. The government would focus on campaigns to sensitize people of this country towards the concerns of the girl child and women. The process of sensitization must begin early and therefore the school curriculum must have a separate chapter on gender mainstreaming. Under this scheme 50 girls would be benefitted in which 50% of scholarship will be provided by the college and rest 50% will be financed in shape of Education Loan by on Engineering and Diploma Courses. This is to enable the financially constrained girls to explore their potential in engineering and technology fields who either are choosing short term and courses. Those girls who want to avail this scholarship can take benefits. Unfortunately, girls still face discrimination in our society. Son preference has led to various abhorrent practices including female feticide. New initiatives have, therefore, become necessary to give the girl child her due, and to empower her for a life of equality and dignity. Emphasis of this scheme is on especially female education. KanyaKelavaniAbhiyan is an educational initiative

by the Government of Gujarat focused exclusively on educating the girl child. Launching the 10th statewide 'KanyaKelavaniAbhiyan' to ensure cent per cent enrolment in primary schools and encouraging girls' education, Narendra Modi said that the state should erase by this tenth year of the campaigns the blot of widespread illiteracy and malnutrition, perpetuated due to complacency and irresponsibility of the previous rulers during the previous fifty years. In 2012, this flagship program of the Government entered the 10th year encouraging formal education with special focus on girls. The journey that began a decade ago shows continuous signs of success with 0% drop out rate attained in various districts and a marked increase in literacy across the State. Shri Modi, education is the most precious gift, and hence, he donates the gifts and souvenirs he receives from his national and international trips for auctions, the proceedings of which go to KanyaKelavaniNidhi, the fund raised for girl child education. Till 2011, Shri Narendra Modi donated more than Rs.10 crore through the auctioning of the gifts he received. Moreover, this special fund has got a huge response from the people of the state and they have poured more than Rs.65.04-crore into the fund so far on various occasions.

To give fight to women harassment Gujarat government had also launched Padkar. It is basically for Empowering women with Powerful Self Defense. Padkar will provide girls the basic techniques of defending themselves against any attack and counter them. Gujarat Government aims to empower women across Gujarat through basic training in self defense. Padkar was launched in 71 talukas across the 33 districts of Gujarat and over 150000 girls have registered for the event.

Conclusion: Thus, the attainment in the field of income/employment and in educational front, the scenario of women empowerment seems to be comparatively poor. The need of the hour is to identify those loopholes or limitations which are obstructing the realization of empowerment of women and this initiative must be started from the women folk itself as well as more importantly policy initiative taken by the state and society. Let us take the oath that we want an egalitarian society where everybody whether men or women get the equal opportunity to express and uplift one's well-being and well-being of the society as a whole.

According to the Country Report of the Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power." 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 bicycles and so on.

Education of women plays a crucial role in releasing their energy and creativity and enabling them to meet the complex challenges of the present world. In acknowledging them as potential human resources, investment must be made in developing their capacity in terms of education, skill development, and technology transfers through technical training. Special emphasis needs to be given to Research and Development of appropriate scaled-down occupations engaging women in large proportions. Illiteracy and cultural barriers need to be removed without any further delay. For women to make personal strides forward, a synergy of effort, concentration, planning and cohesive functioning at the Education level will create possibilities of a different future. By extending women's visibility and their self-sustaining ability, Education must train them to become leaders with decision-making capacities to achieve the best for themselves and the country.

Whether education is viewed as an asset in raising earning capacity, as a gateway to knowledge and information, or as a spur to inculcate values of concern for social transformation and establishment of gender justice for women education is a primary necessity. Elementary Education empower women by providing information and confidence, while higher education emboldens them so that they are confident about entering in any field or profession not previously open to women. However, access to education does not depend upon will but on availability of educational institutions, familial support and quality of education. The future trend seems to be that while there will be a growing demand for girl's education, the high cost of living will force families to turn their daughters towards short-term courses or correspondence courses which in the long run may deprive the girls of vital interaction available in educational institutions. It seems that the strategy of lowering the cost of girls' education will have to be given serious thought so that girls may not be the victims of gender discrimination. It is indeed a sad situation when a mother would like her daughter to go to school /collage but is unable to send her because the child must help in the housework. In the 19th century , we pleaded for the education of women to make her a better partner for her husband; in the last century , education was for her empowerment , and today we are pleading for her right to education as a citizen.

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