

EDUCATION KEY OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract: Women education in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society, as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country. 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 India is poised to becoming superpower, a developed country by 2020. Education of women is the most powerful tool for change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family.

Keywords: History of women Education, Education, Female Literacy Rate, Women Empowerment.

Introduction: "If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered".
- PT. JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right 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 India is poised to becoming superpower, a developed country by 2020

Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power. Education is an essential means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the development process. Sustainable development is only possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunities to reach their potential.

Women and girls experience multiple and intersecting inequalities.

Structural barriers in the economic, social, political and environmental spheres produce and reinforce these inequalities. Obstacles to women's economic and political empowerment, and violence against women and girls, are barriers to sustainable development and the achievement of human rights, gender equality, justice and peace. Across much of the world, either by law or custom, women are still denied the right to own land or inherit property, obtain access to credit, attend school, earn income and progress in their profession free from job discrimination.

Women are significantly under-represented in decision-making at all levels.

While the economic benefits of educating girls are similar to those of educating boys, recent findings suggest the social benefits are greater.

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful.

Ancient period- In *Vedic times*, there was no discrimination of sex in the field of studies. A particular mantra was prescribed to beget a learned daughter in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. In the same Upanishad, we find Gargi and Maitreyi distinguishing themselves in Brahmavidya, the highest knowledge. In the Grihyasutras are found several mantras to be recited by women and the commentary on Gobhilagrihyasutras, states that the female-folk should be taught, for without such studies they cannot perform Agnihotra (Yajnya) sacrifice.

This trend of liberal female education declined in the period that followed. The right of women for initiation to Vedic studies by way of Upanayana seems to have receded slowly, though we find mention of learned women in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. By the time of the Smritis, their education came to be limited to domestic and vocational studies only, by which they could become good housewives.

Women of Buddistic and Jaina faiths had comparatively more freedom to pursue the path of knowledge because womanhood was no bar to salvation as per their respective precepts. From Ashokan times we find women becoming preceptors and nuns and even going outside India for teaching Buddhism. Among the women authors of the Therigatha (stories of nuns) 32 were unmarried women and 18 were married ones. When so large a number of women were leading a life of celibacy, in pursuit of religion and philosophy, it is but natural that the average level of intelligence and education among them must have been fairly high. Hiuen Tsang has observed that Rajyasri, the sister of

Harshavardhana was of great intelligence and distinguished for her knowledge of Sammatiya school of Buddhism. She sat along with the king and seemed to appreciate the learned discourse of Hiuen Tsang on the Mahayana doctrine.

Medieval period- Education in Medieval India was influenced mostly by foreign invasions. Various traders and rulers came to India during the medieval period and brought their own culture and tradition as well as learning process. Indian society imbibed that knowledge and introduced it among the people of the country. However, these foreign conquests resulted in the decline in women's status in the medieval period. The female literacy rate in India was lower than the male literacy rate. Women Education in Medieval India suffered a lot

The medieval societies were subjected to inequalities and they were oppressed too. Historically, the medieval period is attributed as the 'dark age' for women in India. In the medieval India, women were introduced to 'Purdah', (a veil) system. Moreover, several evils started in the society. Social evil practices such as Child Marriage, Sati, Jauhar were restriction on Women Education in Medieval India. Nevertheless, the status of women in Southern India was far better than the North India. Women Education in Medieval India was seen in the south India. Several thinkers emerged at that time such as: Priyaketala Devi, queen of Chalukya Vikramaditya and Jakkiabbe. Furthermore, the evil practices of the societies existed only among the Hindu community. Other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism gave freedom to women. They were given the freedom of education and were offered a more liberal approach. The plight of Indian women during the middle Ages was very intense.

Modern period- Modern age was the time of reformation in India as well as in the whole world. After the Mughals invaded India, the British entered the country with an aim to spread their statute in the whole subcontinent. The British brought with them many new ideas and enlightened the Indians. The status of women in modern India is subjected to inconsistency. The Indian women in modern period outshine in certain areas whereas on the other hand she has to suffer the violence of the men dominated society. 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, Ishwar 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. Peary Charan Sarkar, a former student of Hindu College,

Kolkata and member of "Young Bengal" set up the first free school for girls in India in 1847. Missionaries wives like Martha Maula nee Mead and her daughter Eliza Caldwell nee Mault are rightly remembered for pioneering the education and training of girls in south India.

The condition of Indian women developed in the colonial period. 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.

Thus we can summarize the status of women in different ages as follows:

1. Women in Vedic age were respected, had freedom to choose to lead a family life or Brahmavadinis. This is the golden period for women in India.
2. There were dual thoughts in smritis age at certain places they talked in the praise of women and at others against their freedom.
3. Women were given proper education and freedom during epic age. And the status of women was same as in the Vedic era.
4. During Buddhist age female education was encouraged. It was possible that women could become missionaries and they could remain unmarried.
5. Medieval period is the darkest in the history of Indian women in general. Exploitation of women in the form of early marriage, female infanticide enforced widowhood etc. caused several detrimental effects of women.
6. During British period many Indian reformers along with the help of British government, introduced value systems to eradicate many social evils and thus helped in changing the attitude towards the women.
7. With independence, the constitution of India has brought women on par with men, by eliminating sex discrimination. Education to all women enhanced the status of women.

Women Today: Today we enjoy the benefits of being citizens of a free nation, but we really need to think whether each of the citizens of our country is really free or enjoying freedom, in the true sense of the term. If we consider our country, each Indian citizen is given certain basic rights. 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.

Due to such current situation, it was needed to make women free from all the shackles and to empower them as well. This is nothing but empowerment of women.

Obstacles: Gender discrimination still persists in India and lot more needs to be done in the field of women's education in India. The gap in the male-

female literacy rate is just a simple indicator. While the male literary rate is more than 75% according to the 2001 Census, the female literacy rate is just 54.16%.

Table- 1

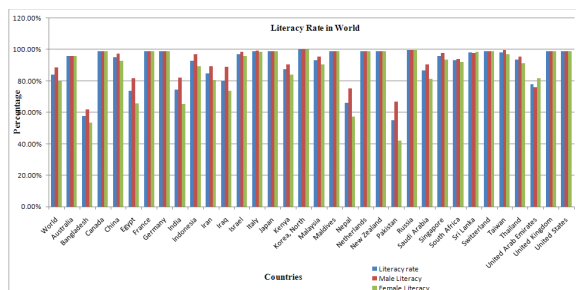
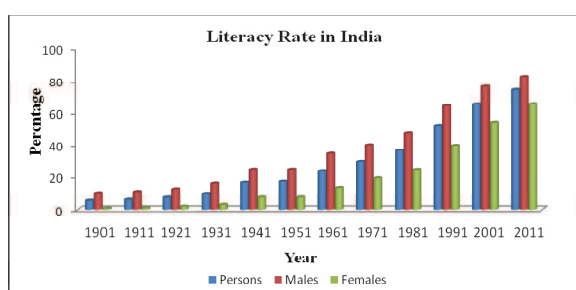


Table-2



Census of India 2011

On observing the above tables, we come to know that at no point could the literacy rate of women match that of men. 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 can't transform the situation due to lack of education. Therefore, women's empowerment can't be effected unless we persuade the importance of women's education.

Importance of Education: 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.

Objectives to Be Achieved Through Women's Education -

- Instead of giving women a secondary position in society, they should be given equal status.
- To change the approach towards women based on sex discrimination.
- To induce the feeling of self-dependence amongst women.

- To make women realize their own potential and to provide guidance to them for developing their potential.
- To create opportunities for them so that they can prove themselves in society and social institutions.
- To create certain roles for women in economic, political and social arena

Women's Empowerment through Education -

Definition: "Women's empowerment is defined as the process in which their spiritual, political, social or economic status is raised".

This also includes the right to raise their level of confidence regarding their own capabilities.

Empowerment includes the following aspects -

- The ability to take their own decisions,
- To take information and have other facilities at their disposal which would enable them to take proper decisions,
- To have wide choices (Only 'Yes/No' and not 'If/Else' choices)
- Firmness while taking collective decisions
- Possessing positive way of thinking regarding the ability to bring about transformation
- The ability to bring about improvement in one's own capabilities,
- The competence to modify other's attitudes in a democratic manner,
- To participate in continuous and self-propagated development process and to take active participation in the transformation process,
- To control on negative factors and build up a positive image of oneself

Women's empowerment is not limited only for the Indian society. If we consider the global aspect in this regard, we see that women are being given equal treatment in developed nations. In fact, if we take a retrospect of history, we come to know that women have always been given secondary position in society, but the difference between men and women created by the Nature is but natural. It is education through which we realize this fact. When

American women realized this; they opposed this injustice which was meted out to them by way of a huge movement, through which they asked for equal rights. For eradicating this injustice, the UNO (United Nations' Organization) framed a Convention / Charter which is called 'The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women'

(CEDAW), which further led to the formation of Women's Commission

Conclusion: From the ancient period to modern era women faced superiority during Vedic Period to inferiority in Medieval Period. Today Empowerment of women becomes a global issue. Empowerment of

women can achieve through education only for this we have a proof in past from Gargi to Razia Sultan and Kadambini Ganguli to Indeera Nuyee. But still the female literacy rate (only half of the female population are literates) is wadding 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 education can help women to understand the Indian's constitutional and legislative provisions that are made to strengthen them. Thus promoting education among women is of great important in

empowering them to accomplish their goals in par with men in different spheres of life.

Acknowledgment: It is my pleasure to be indebted to various people, who directly or indirectly contributed in the development of this work and who influenced my thinking, behavior, and acts during this paper presentation.

I express my sincere gratitude to St. Xavier's D.Ed College, Kolhapur, worthy Institute for providing me an opportunity to undergo this research work.

Lastly, I would like to thank the almighty and my parents for their moral support and my friends and colleagues with whom I shared my day-to-day experience and received lots of suggestions that improved my research work.

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