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Importance of Education in Empowerment of Women in India

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Abstract

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said: "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". When women who contribute almost half of the population are empowered it will strengthen the national economy. Education is considered as a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their lives. Increasing access to education notwithstanding, gender discrimination still persists in India and lot more needs to be done in the field of women's education in India. Women have so much unexplored potential which has never been tapped. As education is both an input and input of human development, educational equity will ensure enabling and entrepreneurial development. Today, the female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 census are 65.46% where the male literacy rate is over 80%. Even beyond literacy there is much that education can do for women's rights, dignity and security. Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom for development. Eileen Malone Beach sees education, health care, and income as a blessed trinity because they are so closely related. This paper discusses the impact of education on empowerment of women as well as the challenges and changes that we must have to deal with during the process. We call for a renewed emphasis on relevant, quality and holistic education to ensure the desired results.

Keywords: Education, empowerment, women.

Introduction

Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. The rise of feminist ideas has, however, led to the tremendous improvement of women's condition through out the world in recent times. Access to education has been one of the most pressing demands of these women's rights movements. 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 considered as a basic requirement and a fundamental right for the citizens of any nation. It is a powerful tool for reducing inequality as it can give people the ability to become independent. Women, who come across discrimination in many spheres, have a particular need for this. 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 NAROI in 1985.

Education is regarded as an important milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to face the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. Education of women is the most powerful tool of change their position in the society. Still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, backward, weak, and exploited. Education also reduces inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. Empowerment and capacity building provides women an avenue to acquire practical information and learning for their improved livelihoods. India can become a developed nation only if women contribute to the best of her capacity and ability which is possible when she is educated and empowered.

Women Education Status

The constitutional directive to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years has remained unfulfilled till now. Educational experts admit that this failure is mainly due to the slow progress of education among girls. Literacy and educational levels are increasing for Indian women still there is gap between male and female literacy rate which can be seen in the following Table.

Table 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)

In 2011 the percentage of educated persons increased to 74.04% of which male percentage was 82.14% and female percentage was 65.46% respectively. Literacy rate among rural women is only 58.8 percentage as per 2011 census.

Female literacy was at a national average of 65.46 % whereas the male literacy was 82.14%. Within the Indian states, Kerala has shown the highest literacy rates of 90.02% whereas Bihar averaged lower than 50% literacy, the lowest in India.

India is the world's largest democracy where billions of people live and of course almost of half of these are women. So how does women education effect India's development? If girls are not educated, families suffer too. Educated mothers use their knowledge to improve the health of their children and other family members. Their knowledge about health risk protects their families against illness. Child mortality rate is much higher where mothers lack education than in families where mothers are educated. Girls education emerging as one of the top priorities of Indian society "Educating girls is not an option, it is a necessity". We all want to elimilnate gender disparities in education.

Adi Shankaracharya, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekanand, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru spoke against the inhuman oppression and crimes perpetrated on woman in the name of tradition and warn out religious section. Margaret

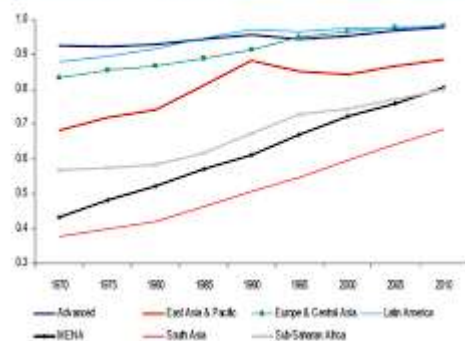
Cousins, worked hard to elevate the status to create social awareness and to increase legal and constitutional rights of women. Annie Besant, Mutthulakshmi Reddy, Kamla Devi Chattopadhaya, Durga Bai Deskmukh, Sarojini Naidu are the other prominent crusader for equality of women's rights.

Barriers of Women Education

In Indian families especially rural areas, girl children play the role of second mother by shouldering the responsibilities of household work such as looking after the sibling, fetching water, collecting wood, cleaning and cooking etc. and discourage girl child to go school.

The second social evil is bonded labour system, which quite discouraging phenomenon which stand as barrier for girls education for the underprivileged families of washer man and agricultural labour.

Chart 11: Ratio of female to male schooling around the world (Average years)



Dowry system and other social practices act as main causes of the neglect of the girl child and discrimination against girl child. In many families especially poor and down-trodden think that if their daughters are educated more, they have to accumulate more assets and properties to provide as dowry in The lower enrolment of girls in school is one of the foundational factors which stand as stumbling block for women education. In India, more than 50% of the girls are non-starter. According to the year, every ten girls in the age group of 6-11 are still not enrolled in schools.

The incidence and prevalence of Dropouts among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas seem to be quite high. The main reason was poor academic record of the trainees which difficult to cope up with the subjects and mere not able to concentrate on the practical's.

The second reason was that some of the trainees were able to get job before the completion of the course. The third reason was the teachers did not teach well and also students poor economic background. According to available sources, occurrence of Dropout and stagnation amongst girls are nearly twice that of boys all over India.

In India, the school environment for girls is not really interesting and encouraging. The methods of teaching are mostly outdated, rigid and uninteresting. There are many schools with poor basic facilities such as drinking water, latrine and toilet facilities, no good infrastructure and no experienced teachers especially female teachers preferable for any parents for safety of their girl children.

According to the UN sources, India is the most child labour populous nation in the globe with more than 50 million child labourers worked in carpet making, domestic works, beedi works, glass bangles, construction etc. In most of their industries girl children are preferred for high productivity and low cast. In many Poverty stricken families, children especially girls are considered as economic assets as they bring income for livelihood as well to save from economic crises due to death or incapacity of parents.

Need of Women Education in Women Empowerment

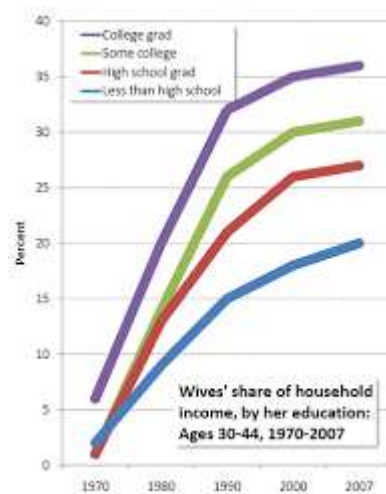
The concept of Women empowerment is a recent one. The first year of New Millennium 2001 was declared as "WOMEN EMPOWERMENT YEAR". Education of a women leads to a better family and ultimately an ideal society to a progressive nation. A progressive nation is one where all the people of the country in respective of sex, religion, caste, creed and color are economically, socially, culturally, politically and through all thoughts are independent.

New UNESCO data proves education transforms development. It says:

- If all children enjoyed equal access to education, per capita income would increase by 23% over 40 years.
- If all women had a primary education, child marriages and child mortality could fall by a sixth, and maternal deaths by two-thirds.

UNESCO's new analysis proves that:-

- **Education empowers women.** Educated girls and young women are more likely to know their rights and to have the confidence to claim them.
- **Education promotes tolerance:** Education helps people to understand democracy, promotes the tolerance and trust that underpin it, and motivates people to participate in the political life of their societies.
- **Education equality improves job opportunities and increases economic growth:** If all children, had equal access to education, productivity gains would boost economic growth. Over 40 years, per capita income would be 23 per cent higher in a country with equality in education.



- **Education is part of the solution to environmental problems.** People with more education are more likely to use energy and water more efficiently and to recycle household waste.
- **Educating women avoids early marriages:** If education is provided to more number of women it will be helpful in avoiding child marriage.

LEARNING LESSENS EARLY MARRIAGES

Child marriages for all girls by age 15 in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia



- **Education saves mother's lives.** In some countries, many women still die because of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Education can prevent these deaths.
- **Some child diseases are preventable but not without education.** Simple solutions, such as malaria nets and clean water, can prevent some of the worst child diseases, but only if mothers are taught to use them.
- **Education saves children's lives.** Education helps women recognize early signs of illness, seek advice and act on it. If all women in poor countries completed primary education, child mortality would drop by a sixth.
- **Education fights hunger.** The devastating impact of malnutrition on children's lives is preventable with the help of education.

Education of women enhances the women empowerment in the following ways:

An education of women can bring change in the attribute of family members and society. It also helps in removing mal-traditions like Sati-Pratha, Early marriage, Dowry etc. Education plays an important role in removing economic poverty by opening various job avenues for her so that she can work hand in hand with man and give support to the family. Education promotes team work rather than making a women individualistic. Education makes her an opportunity to choose a career which is best suited for her.

- Every woman has got her own aspiration which may be high or low, but education helps to maintain a balanced aspiration knowing her interest, ability and potential which further helps her to choose a correct field of her work.
- Education helps in balanced personality development by giving due weight to various aspects of personality.
- Education of women also plays an important role in teaching her expression of feeling or through effective communication which can solve disputes and adjustment problems of any level.
- An educated women is a guiding light for the children, family members, society and nation, she knows how to have a happy family and balanced and healthy relations with others.
- Education gives power to a women to become strong physically by giving her knowledge about sports, exercise, health- related aspects and good physical health; this will

definitely benefit her mental health.

- Education helps to improve the sex ratio and in controlling population.
- Education encourages women especially the rural women to take advantage of the various schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Operation Black-Board, and Total Literacy Programmes etc.

Constitutional Provisions, Special Laws And National Policies in Support of Women Empowerment

The importance of women as an important human resource was recognized by the Constitution of India which not only accorded equality to women but also empowered the State. A number of Articles of the Constitution repeated towards the socio-economic development of women and participation decision making. These are:

- ❖ *Article 14 Men and women to have equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic and social spheres.*
- ❖ *Article 15(1) Prohibits discrimination against any citizens on the grounds of religion, race, sex, caste etc.*
- ❖ *Article 16 Equality of opportunities in matter of public appointments for all citizens.*
- ❖ *Article 39(d) Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.*
- ❖ *Article 42 The state to make provision for ensuring first and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.*
- ❖ *Government has also enacted specific laws to safeguard the interests of women and for up gradation of their status. These are:*
- ❖ *The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 which provides for women the right to parental property.*
- ❖ *The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 which declares the taking of dowry an unlawful activity and thereby prevents the exploitation of women.*
- ❖ *Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 which provides payment of remuneration equal with men for work of equal value.*
- ❖ *The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 which legalizes abortion conceding the right of a women to go for abortion on the ground of physical and mental health.*
- ❖ *The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983 which seeks to stop various types of crimes against women.*
- ❖ *The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 which prohibits the Vulgar*

presentation of women in the media such as- newspapers, cinema, T.V. etc.

- ❖ *The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 provides for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family.*

The goal of National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The policy states that: "Equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured. Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize, education, eradicate illiteracy and create gender sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of vocational or technical skills of women. Reducing gender gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus area. Specific time targets in existing policies will be achieved, with special focus on girls and women, part curly those belonging to weaker sections including the SC/ST/OBC/Minorities."

Conclusion

To conclude the present scenario, it may be said that woman in the modern hi- tech society which is moving very fast under the shadow of population explosion, conflicts, chaos and corruption can mold the personality of the adolescent and youth in a proper direction and perspective, provided the woman are themselves in power.

There is a positive relationship between education and woman empowerment. Another important aspect in this regard is that, in these societies the issue of women empowerment has been facing certain serious challenges, which are outcome of some certain evil norms and attitude such as child labour, child marriage, illiteracy, superstition, partial attitude of the parents, female feticides, etc. and in such a situation women empowerment is an urgent necessity. In order to promote women's empowerment, it is necessary to create an environment that will allow women to participate in educational programs and share the benefits. The educational and other policies for women empowerment should be implemented in reality for empowering women in the world.

The evils of poverty, unemployment and inequality cannot be eradicated by man alone. Equal and active participation of women is obligatory. Unless women are educated they will not be able to understand about their rights and their importance. Empowerment of women aims at

striving towards acquiring higher literacy level and education, better health care for women and their children, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of their rights, improved standard of living and to achieve self-reliance, self-confidence and self-respect among women. Recently the Government has launched *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* scheme which aims at making girls independent both socially as well as financially and which will help in generating awareness and improving the efficiency of delivery of welfare services meant for women. Such schemes should be implemented nationwide to bring the desired changes. What should never be forgotten is that women like men need to be proactive in the process lifelong learning. That is true empowerment. From “women for development” the time has come to shift focus to “women in development”, with the cooperation of men through group engagement and management. That will indeed be a ‘quality’ change for equality. While being attracted by modernisation and globalisation we must be confident to say no to marginalization.

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