

## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

KARLAPUDI JANAKI DEVI

**Abstract:** Women Empowerment through Education In India, women have faced too many restrictions for a long period under feudal and patriarchal traditions, where women had to bear the brunt of it all. The way to help it out has been through education, as education as is always “an enabling tool”. Education in the broader vision means the opening of minds, adding sense of self-worth, self-esteem, self-confidence and independence. Education can be said as a tool, a vehicle which acts as an enabling force that allows one to take on the world. Earlier higher education for women was in a narrow beaten path, whereby women went in for only a few types of courses which were considered female centric or female oriented. With globalization, many changes are taking place and career choice for women is no longer restricted. Education brings about changes in the lives of individuals and society, as it improves the quality of life of everyone. It also imparts the ability to tackle and negotiate injustice and inequalities. So naturally what follows is: education as an empowering weapon and a means of inclusion – socially, economically, culturally, politically etc... A Sanskrit quote says “Yatra naryantu pujiyante, ramanta tatra devataha” which means “the Gods reside in the place where women are respected and taken care of. Modern education and skills seem to reinforce a majority of women students. The major objective of women education is to make them equal partners. Studies on the behavioral changes indicate that education boosts ones self-confidence and self-esteem. It is the quantitative aspect of education, leading to this transformation given equal opportunities in schooling to empowered women in the parliament is the most daunting of all. Education makes oneself to be the best judge, in any given situation and gives greater control over adverse circumstances.

**Introduction:** In India, women have faced too many restrictions for a long period under feudal and patriarchal traditions, where women had to bear the brunt of it all. The way to help it out has been through education, as education as is always “an enabling tool”. This symbiotic relationship of educated women-empowered women can be traced through our modern history. During the period of colonization of India, changes came for the betterment of women due to the self-less and enthusiastic work done by social-reformers who include Dr. Durgabhai Desmukh, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Mahatma Jyothiba Phule, Maharshi Karve, Raja Rammohan Roy and many others helped to pave the way for the wellness of women. Globalization was another factor which unleashed a chain of events towards empowerment. In the way to empowerment and independence of women education is the main driving factor. Literacy is the tool by which education is quantified. Education is not only being literate but it deals with empowerment, better opportunities for livelihood, development and lots more. Education in the broader vision means the opening of minds, adding sense of self-worth, self-esteem, self confidence and independence. Arthasasthra and the laws mentioned by Manu ages ago are still immutable in most homes. The real freedom of women is restricted even today. To quote some lines of Manu are: “She should do nothing independently even in her house, In childhood subject to her father, in youth to her husband, After husband’s death to her sons, She should never enjoy independence”

Education also bestows the ability to tackle and negotiate injustice and inequalities, the emphasis ought to be on education in a broader sense and not figures of literate population. When a family subsisting in hard difficulties faces the choice of sending son or daughter to school, the choice between “the son and daughter” would be “only son” who gets to attend school. Due to this gender disparity in education, i.e. literacy levels may be one of the factors for gender disparities in incomes earned. Earlier higher education for women was in a narrow beaten path, whereby women went in for only a few types of courses which were considered female centric or female oriented. With globalization, many changes are taking place and career choice for women is no longer restricted. When it is concerned with higher education of women is, there has been a shift away from traditional subjects, as more women are getting professional education. There has been a significant drop of women opting for teacher education, despite all this; there is still a fair amount of regional and caste-wise disparities in the disciplines offered for women. Education brings about changes in the lives of individuals and society, as it improves the quality of life of everyone. Universalisation policy of primary education is underway throughout the country; however it is not much successful, as its failure is causing gender inequalities. In previous times around 1000BC the system prevailing of those times were Gurukuls, where in pupils continued their studies staying with their learned tutors. Gargi and Maithreyi were the most noted Vedic scholars of those times. These

Gurukuls were run by Rishis and Rishi-pathni, the wife of the learned scholar, would preside over the establishment. Rishi-pathni used to be like a parent guardian to the students residing with them. She played the role of friend, philosopher and guide not only to the students but also to her husband and his acquaintances. The Rishi-pathnis were a pro at all the knowledge of the Vedas, shastras (studies) and kalas (arts). In the Vedic times, sons and daughters were given same opportunities in education. It is hard to believe, but it is a fact that at least twenty women were among the composers the Rig-veda hymns. Scholarship of woman can be judged from this fact. But unfortunately after the Vedic period, life of women and opportunities for their education became very limited. Even in the Buddhist period women experienced greater freedom and equality of opportunities. Women in those days had the right to choose their husband, as in the case of the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, whereby they chose them by Swayamvara. A Sanskrit quote says "Yatra naryantu puhyante, ramanta tatra devataha" which means "the Gods reside in the place where women are respected and taken care of. Woman symbolizes the mother Goddess-Adi Sakthi, the creator and nurturer, sacred and holy was personified as mother Goddess. During the Mahabharata times there were kingdoms or Sthree rajyas where in the entire executive, judiciary and other political functionaries were all women. The most famous of them were ruled by Ulupi and Chithrangadha. The whole point behind stating these is to underline the status of empowerment enjoyed by women through times immemorial. Education can be said as a tool, a vehicle which acts as an enabling force that allows one to take on the world. Bestowing the correct education, whether it be vocational, professional or academic makes them self-sufficient and self-reliant. The major objective of women education is to make them equal partners. So naturally what follows is: education as an empowering weapon and a means of inclusion - socially, economically, culturally, politically etc... The rich Indian traditions did lot more to begin with, but gradually things went downhill and we entered the dark middle ages. The medieval India did not bespeak of all that noble freedom. Due to a variety of reasons women were confined to the kitchen and were rated only a step above slaves. The Stree-dhana instead of being an enabler became a cause for much woe and sorrow both for the bride and her parents. There were innumerable dowry deaths, the heinous instances of Sati, where a widow was burnt alive on the funeral pyre of her husband. The widows those who did not commit Sati, had to lead a life of absolute misery, totally at the mercy of their in-laws. The root cause can be safely seen as slow degeneration in education

system. Once women were pushed out of the education system, they lost the cutting edge of first supremacy and then equality. They lost the most precious weapon, their empowerment enabler. There is an interesting quote by Sanskrit scholars about education, "Na chor Haryam, na raja haryam, na bhrathru bhajyam, nach bharakari, vyaye kruthe vardhithe towa nithyam, vidhya dhanam sarva dhana pradhanam" which means education is such kind of a wealth that thieves can't steal, the king can't tax, can't be divided amongst brothers and It is the greatest kind of wealth. This continued till the colonization of India and the subsequent rise of the Reformist Movement. In the year 1828, Lord William Cavendish Bentinck, who took charge as the governor general of India, banned and abolished Sati. Sati was to be considered a criminal offence. The prominent and most important name that comes to one's mind is of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He not only tried to ban Sati, but also campaigned for property rights of women and denounced Sati, polygamy, child marriages and even female infanticide. In the year 1856, the Widow Remarriage Act was passed. Thanks to the efforts of Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar. In the year 1848, Mahatma Phule started the first school for girls in Pune. He even stopped the monstrous and wicked practice of shaving the heads of widows. He was a supporter of widow remarriage. Governments across the world have recognized and declared that education of women is the key to development, in the last two decades and especially since the Cairo conference. Policy makers may argue that women's empowerment is a desirable long-term goal, but improving the quality of primary health care and enhancing the basket of contraceptives in the short run could turn the tide. The next best policy of the government would be to promote women's education, employment, income generation, and credit savings and so on. Literacy drives which mechanically transfer reading skills have been shown to have little impact on the overall development of women. The newly acquired skills are forgotten quickly in the absence of a large literate environment. Newspapers, story books and other reading materials should be easily available. Women's empowerment and freedom is not a simple linear process. Education, if understood in a broad sense, essentially involves opening the minds, enhancing self-esteem and self confidence, building a sense of positive self-worth. Seen in this light, education goes beyond literacy and schooling. Linking education to survival issues of the poor, especially of women, has remained a challenge. The meaning of 'education' in English is 'drawing out'. That means a task to develop our latent talents. Hence 'education' can also mean 'unfoldment' to spread out. True education is something different. Man is made of three

constituents, the body, mind and spirit. Of them, spirit is the one permanent element in man. The body and the mind function on account of it. Hence we can call that education which reveals the qualities of spirit. Studies on the behavioral changes indicate that education boosts one's self-confidence and self-esteem. Education makes oneself to be the best judge, in any given situation and gives greater control over adverse circumstances. Education facilitates communication; illiteracy and poverty are strongly linked. Education is a necessary condition but not the only condition to empower women. Attitude towards women and social norms play an important role in empowerment of women. Studies on the behavioral changes indicate that education boosts one's self-confidence and self-esteem. Education makes oneself to be the best judge, in any given situation and gives greater control over adverse circumstances. Education facilitates communication; illiteracy and poverty are strongly linked. Education is a necessary condition but not the only condition to empower women. Attitude towards women and social norms play an important role in empowerment of women. Education has always been an important facilitator which has helped in socio-economical transformation. Women have always been at the receiving end of exclusion, more so in a patriarchal society. It has several versions but most glaring is the low status enjoyed by women which is a composite result of a variety of factors put together. India has posted a very pathetic figure of 47.8 percent for female literacy, which is almost half of the corresponding figures of the ASEAN countries. Education is the key to financial self-reliance, independence and consequently empowerment. It is the much necessary tool with which women can battle the shackles of dependence. Education imparts the skills for economic independence and financial self-reliance. Empowerment and inclusion come later, the process begins with literacy. In fact literacy figures are the first crucial step towards education of women. A look at the gender empowerment indicators is in order, as it gives the extent of inclusion which can be attained by education. Three important assumptions of Thomas are Feminist sociological perspectives on women's educational experience have highlighted several dimensions e.g. their under participation, underachievement and under representation. They observed that the numbers of girls are taking humanities and arts, while boys are into sciences at the school level. This imbalance needs to be redressed to remove this inequality. Girls tend to opt for specific subjects because of their socialization which relates feminine roles to feminine subjects. In India, the decision to make science compulsory up to the 10<sup>th</sup> standard ensures that all girls will read science. Three

important assumptions by Thomas regarding the reflection of the balance of power between the sexes are: The first is the demarcation between physics from biology and science from arts. In her view physical science is different from humanities and biological sciences. The third assumption relates to the belief that science is good. In higher education program the subjects are categorized into humanities, science and social sciences. Pure sciences on one hand and professional courses such as engineering, medical science, teacher education, agriculture, law etc., on the other. They also divided into feminine and masculine disciplines. In India woman as in Asian countries, patients prefer to go to women doctors. This demand for medical doctors gave way for woman to enter the medical profession. Literacy of women was 32.4 percent even in 1950-51, it is now 50.6 percent. In medicine their proportion was 16.3 percent in 1950-51 and is now it is 44.7 percent. The proportion of women in 2002-03 in arts was 44.2 and has been increasing steadily since 1970-71. As a result the proportion of men's literacy has decreased gradually during the same period, from 83.9 percent to 54.6 percent. In teacher education, another feminine discipline the proportion of women has gone up from 32.4 to 50.6 percent. A science degree requires longer investment of time and resources and was therefore, not desirable. The daughters of city base professional parents, especially if they don't have brothers, have undergone a sea change in their socialization. The parents are giving the best education to their daughters and expect them to be independent and follow careers. In this changed situation, the priorities of women also have changed. Total enrollment of women in higher education is in an interesting direction. The slightly higher percentage at the graduate level indicates that more women are transiting from under graduate to the next higher level courses. It may have something else to do with the popularity of masters programs in computers and IT, fashion technology, marketing, media etc. which are popular in the metros. Kerala has the highest enrolment and even now it is 60%, i.e. there are more women than men in higher education. In India, girl's academic performance is generally at par with the boys when they finish school. Schemes to provide facilities like school books, mid-day meals for better nutrition and introducing innovative learning materials have made some contribution in improving number of girls attending schools. To achieve success in millennium development goals, achievement of gender parity in elementary education is one of the indicators. To bridge this yawning gap, what is required is a whole range of measures that will ensure a social environment that offers the chances for girl children to attend school, to access teaching methods and curriculum that are

free from gender stereo types, as well as academic counseling and orientation and unaffected by gender bias. A climate is required in which education would result in creating equal opportunities in higher education in the job market, equal wages for equal work, and last but not the least, create leadership

qualities that make for their equal participation in the national parliament. It is the quantitative aspect of education, leading to this transformation given equal opportunities in schooling to empowered women in the parliament is the most daunting of all. Education does have this potential to achieve this.

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Karlapudi Janaki Devi Assistant Professor,  
Chalapathi Institute of Engineering & Technology, Lam.