
EMPOWERING THE WOMEN THROUGH THE EDUCATION

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Abstract: Women empowerment is very much necessary in the nation's growth be it economically, politically or socially. In India this is yet to meet the requirements despite reforms. Little has been achieved in the area of women empowerment, but for this to happen, this sector must experience a chain of reforms. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. Drawing the strength from the constitutional commitments, the Government of India has been engaged in the continuous endeavour of concretely translating all the rights, commitments and safe guards incorporated in the Indian Constitution for women from *de jure* to *de facto* status. 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. The persistent low educational participation of girls till recently has had adverse impact on women's quality of life and empowerment. The present paper highlights on the role of education in empowering the women.

Keywords: Empowerment, Women's Empowerment, Education and Women Empowerment, Facilitating Factors for Women Empowerment

Introduction: The most critical component of women's empowerment is found to be education. It leads to improved economic growth, low fertility rate, health and sanitation and an awareness of factors that disempowered women. Work participation rate and political participation also grows in women's education. 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 throughout the world in recent times. 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. India is poised to emerge as one of the most developed nations by 2020, more literate, knowledgeable and economically at the forefront. No doubt, women will play a vital role in contributing to the country's development. Women power is crucial to the economic growth of any country. In India this is yet to meet the requirements despite reforms. Little has been achieved in the area of women empowerment, but for this to happen, this sector must experience a chain of reforms. Though India could well become one of the largest economies in the world, it is being hindered due to a lack of women's participation. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental

Duties and Directive Principles. The constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different 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. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels. Among the many development indexes used as a yardstick for measuring societal growth, the most important is education. Even today, 68% of girls are still illiterate as discrimination against them plagues the country and extreme patriarchy has robbed women of justice and equality, which only education and enlightenment can secure. Society's history of denying opportunities for women to seek knowledge has obstructed their path to empowerment. The National and International Community, having realized the importance of education for individual and collective well being, organized an International Conference on Population Development (ICPD -

1994) to eliminate gender any bias in educational materials that enforces or reinforces inequalities between men and women. The World Conferences culminated in the Fourth Summit at Beijing (1995) to reaffirm Governments' commitments to intensify efforts guaranteeing gender free education and universal access to the tools of knowledge. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979); The Copenhagen Declaration (1995) and The Millennium Goals (2000) have formulated Action Programs to establish gender equality in education to empower women for social justice and to accelerate better social transformation.

Empowerment: There was consensus among the participants that "empowerment" has become one of the most widely used development terms. Yet it is one of the least understood in terms of how it is to be measured or observed. It is precisely because this word has now been one of the fashionable concepts to include in policies/programmes/projects that there is a need to clarify and come up with tentative definitions.

It can be viewed as means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation. It strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996).

It is not merely a feel of greater extrinsic control, but also grows intrinsic capacity, greater self-confidence and an internal transformation of one's consciousness which enables one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional ideology (Pinto, 2001).

Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercises choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. As per the *United National Development Fund for women (UNIFEM)*, the term empowerment means:

- *Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.*
- *Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.*
- *Gaining the ability to generate choices exercise bargaining power.*
- *Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.*

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individual of groups of making choices

and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (World Bank, 2006).

Thus, empowerment means a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights. It is a multi level construct referring to individuals, organizations and community. It is an international, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to the control over these resources.

Women's empowerment: The concept of women's empowerment was introduced at the International Women's Conference in Nairobi in 1985 where Empowerment was stated to be '**a distribution of social power and center of resources in favour of women**'. Women empowerment is very much necessary in the nation's growth be it economically, politically or socially. The term '**empowerment of women**' refers to the process of strengthening the hands of women who have been suffering from various disabilities, inequalities and gender discrimination. The term of "empowerment of women" could also be understood as the process of providing equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and power positions to women so that they are able to play a role on par with men in society. "**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. The National Policy on Education-NEP (1986) has laid a Program of Action-POA(1992) for its implementation. This POA spells out the meaning of women empowerment by saying "women become empowered through collective reflection and decision making". The POA has clearly declared the following parameters of empowerment, namely.

- *Building a positive self image and self confidence*
- *Developing ability to think critically*
- *Building up group cohesion and fostering decision making action*
- *Ensuring equal action in order to bring about change in the society.*
- *Encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society.*
- *Providing the wherewithal for economic independence.*

Constitutional provisions for women empowerment: Women as an independent

group constitute 48.46% of the country's total population as per the 2011 Census. The importance of women as important human resource was recognised by the Constitution of India which not only accorded equality to women but also empowered the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in their favour. A number of Articles of the Constitution specially reiterated the commitment of the constitution towards the socio economic development of women and upholding their political right and participation in decision making.

- *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 citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc.*
- *Article 15(3) - Special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discriminations in favour of women.*
- *Article 16 - Equality of opportunities in matter of public appointments for all citizens.*
- *Article 39(a) - The State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens men and women, equally, the right to means of livelihood.*
- *Article 39(d) - Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.*
- *Article 42 - The State to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.*
- *Article 51 (A)(e) - To renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.*

Drawing the strength from the constitutional commitments, the Government of India has been engaged in the continuous endeavor of concretely translating all the rights, commitments and safe guards incorporated in the Indian Constitution for women from *de jure* to *de facto* status. The State enacted several women-specific and women-related legislations to protect women against social discrimination, violence and atrocities and also to prevent social evils like child marriages, dowry, rape, practice of Sati etc. The recently notified Prevention of Domestic Violence Act is a landmark law in acting as a deterrent as well as providing legal recourse to the women who are victims of any form of domestic violence. Apart from these, there are a number of laws which may not be gender specific but still have ramifications on women.

- **Hindu Marriage Act of 1955** amended in 1976 which prohibits polygamy, polyandry and child marriage and concedes equal rights to women to divorce and to remarry.
- **Hindu Succession Act, 1956** which provides for women the right to parental property.

- **Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956** which gives childless women the right to adopt a child and to claim maintenance from the husband if she is divorced by him.
- **Special Marriage Act, 1954** which provides rights to women on par with men for inter caste marriage, love marriage and registered marriage. The Act has also fixed the minimum age of marriage at 21 males and 18 for females.
- **The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956** as amended and renamed in 1986 makes the sexual exploitation of male or female, a cognizable offence. It is being amended to decriminalize the prostitutes and make the laws more stringent against traffickers.
- An amendment brought in 1984 to the **Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961** made women's subjection to cruelty a cognizable offence. The second amendment brought in 1986 makes the husband or in-laws punishable, if a woman commits suicide within 7 years of her marriage and it has been proved that she has been subjected to cruelty. Also a new criminal offence of 'Dowry Death' has been incorporated in the Indian Penal Code.
- **Medical Termination Pregnancy Act of 1971** legalises abortion by qualified professional on humanitarian or medical grounds. The maximum punishment may go upto life imprisonment. The Act has further been amended specifying the place and persons authorized to perform abortion and provide for penal actions against the unauthorized persons performing abortions.
- **Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1976** raises the age for marriage of a girl to 18 years from 15 years and that of a boy to 21 years and makes offences under this Act cognizable.
- **Equal Remuneration Act of 1976** provides for equal pay to men and women for equal work.
- **Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983** which seeks to provide justice to women who get involved in family disputes.
- **Family Court Act, 1984** which seeks to stop various types of crimes against women.
- **Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act of 1986 and the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987** have been enacted to protect the dignity of women and prevent violence against them as well as their exploitation by presenting in the media such as newspapers, cinema, TV etc.
- **73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts 1993** - which empower women and seek to secure greater participation of women at all the levels of the Panchayat System.

- **Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994** which regulates investigation for sex determination of foetus.
- **The Marriage (Amendment) Act, 2001** amended the Hindu Marriage Act, Special Marriage Act, Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, the Code of Criminal Procedure providing for speedy disposal of applications for maintenance; the ceiling limit for claiming maintenance has been deleted and a wide discretion has been given to the Magistrate to award appropriate maintenance.
- **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 and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. It provides for immediate and emergent relief to women in situations of violence of any kind in the home.

Education and women empowerment: 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. The persistent low educational participation of girls till recently has had adverse impact on women's quality of life and empowerment. This educational backwardness has cost both the individual and national advancement, producing a skewed national progress. Education will lead to empowerment securing the means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions for social and individual transformation. It strengthens innate ability through knowledge, power and experience enabling an individual to think, act and control human, intellectual and financial resources. It develops intrinsic capacity, inner transformation of one's consciousness to overcome barriers, access resources and change traditional ideologies. Empowerment therefore is possible only with access to education as a fundamental right. It would be important to reorient the teachers on gender issues so that overall gender sensitization in the educational system could be brought about. In concrete terms, this would mean:

- reorienting and reeducating policy makers;

- securing equal access for boys and girls in education;
- holding workshops/seminars for teachers;
- revising teaching materials;
- producing materials in local languages;
- implementing special programmes for women in the field of Adult Education;
- incorporating issues such as tradition, race, ethnicity, gender sensitization, urban and rural contexts in the programmes;
- raising awareness on the necessity for health care;
- politicizing women to show them how macro level mismanagement is responsible for their loss of jobs; and
- Focusing on parents as role models.

The constitutional provisions and the *National Policy of Education (NEP) -1986 and Program on Action (POA) -1992* act as the guiding force to influence both the qualitative and quantitative indicators regarding the need for empowerment of women. The NPE 1986 states that –

“Education will be used as agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past; there will be a well conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education system will play positive, interventional role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbook, the training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrator, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social; engineering Women's studies will be promoted as a part of various courses and educational institutions encouraged taking up active programmes to further women's development”.

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. Taking an account of this background, we come to know that women's empowerment has now become a topic of global discussion. Education as means of empowerment of women can bring about a positive attitudinal change. It is therefore, crucial for the socio-economic and political progress of India. The Constitution of India empowers the state to adopt affirmative measures for prompting ways and means to empower women. Education significantly makes difference in the lives of women. The situation faced by women in India is one of the bleakest in the world. Of all the discrimination and denial of opportunity that these women suffer, the most damaging is the denial of the right and opportunity to education. Widespread poverty and discriminatory cultural practices are frequently cited as prime reasons for the persistence of their gender gap in education. Education is one of the most critical factors responsible for the development of a human person. Right to education, therefore, is held as a very important human right. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is the principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. The international community has realized the importance of education for individual and collective well being made explicit provisions in several human rights instruments on the rights to education. The Constitution of India was recently amended to provide for the right to compulsory elementary education to children falling between the age group of 6-14 years.

Among the world's 900 million literacy people, women outnumber men two to one. Education, in a broad sense, essentially involves penning the mind, enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence, building a sense of positive self-worth, accessing information and tools of knowledge and acquiring the ability to negotiate this unequal and unjust world from a position of strength. No society has ever liberated itself - economically, politically or socially -without a sound base of educated women. Many countries experiences around the world have demonstrated that investment in educating women is the most precious investment a society can ever make. Seeing all the aspects of this discussion, we will realize that education is the only means for empowerment of women. Therefore, literacy should spread amongst women. We, as a nation, dream of becoming a Super Power by 2020. For becoming a Super Power, each element of our society/ nation should contribute in the nation building process. But women, who are a major factor of this society, aren't literate then we can't expect to become a Super Power. Therefore, it is urgent for us to know the importance of women's education, which would, in turn, give an impetus to the process of women's empowerment. 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. As a result women's literacy rate has grown over the six decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 2001 only 54.16% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2011 65.46% female were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 11.30% as compared to 6.29 % of that of male literacy rate.

Year	Persons	Males	Females
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	16.7	24.9	7.3
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	62.38	76.0	54.16
2011	74.4	82.14	65.46

Table No. 1 : Literacy rate in India

While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since its independence where education is

concerned, the gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated,

only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India.

In spite of the UN Charter of Human Rights and the provisions of the Indian Constitution, women continue to be victims of exploitation. The view that the future generation of a family is carried on and preserved by boys-only has degraded the position of women in society. Similarly, it is noticed that majority of the women are lacking in the spirit of rebellion. If careful attention is not paid and major steps are not taken, the situation will become extremely critical. Eradicating this gap and educating women about their real place in the world is a step that will largely set this entire movement rolling down the hill to crash and break the wall of intolerance, negligence and exploitation. On observing the literacy rate table, 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. In spite 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.

Objectives to be achieved through women's education

1. Instead of giving women a secondary position in society, they should be given equal status.
2. To change the approach towards women based on sex discrimination.
3. To induce the feeling of self-dependence amongst women.
4. To make women realize their own potential and to provide guidance to them for developing their potential.
5. To create opportunities for them so that they can prove themselves in society and social institutions.
6. To create certain roles for women in economic, political and social arena.

Facilitating factors for women empowerment:

Empowerment through education is ideally seen as a continuous holistic process with cognitive, psychological, economic and political dimensions in order to achieve emancipation. Given the complexity of political, societal and international interrelations, one has to systematically think about the strategies and concrete proposals for future action if one hopes to achieve such a goal. The following are the list of facilitating factors faced while implementing the women empowerment program.

- **Freedom to take decision and make choices :** Women should have freedom to

decide whether to marry or not to marry; and after marriage, the freedom to decide as to how many children that they should have and so on.

- **Access to education and employment :** Women can become stronger only with educational and economic power. Mere expectations cannot help. Conditions must be created in such a way that women get easy access to education and later on become employed. Sufficient economic freedom is a must for women to lessen their dependence on men.
- **Acknowledging Women's Rights :** Society should recognize that like men, women are also entitled to equal rights.
- **Existence of women's organizations and Networking :** Giving opportunity to frame group of like minded women for upliftment under privileged women. Allowing the groups to interconnect for establishing the network.
- **Opportunities for political participation :** If women's voice is to carry more weight they must be given political power. They must be free to take part in the administrative process.
- **Availability of support systems for women :** Establishing the support system for giving guidance and counseling to women. The support may be from government or private sector.
- **Availability of women-specific data and other relevant information :** Always we have to keep ready the present status of women empowerment in particular area with the help of survey.
- **Availability of funds :** The special provision of funds has to be made for the implement of projects related to women empowerment.
- **Dignity of labour :** In working environment the society has to treat equally men and women in giving wages and workload.
- **Favorable policy climate :** The government or NGO should develop or frame the policy implementing for women empowering programs.
- **Education for all :** The government or NGO has to provide the opportunity for all to get the education from pre-primary level.

Conclusion: Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. The greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. It is indispensable that education enable women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside her hearth and home but helps her to get status, positive self esteem and

self confidence, necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Apparently it also facilitates them to procure a job and supplement the income of family and achieve social status. Education especially of women has a major impact on health and nutrition as an

instrument of developing a sustainable strategy for population control. Moreover educated women can play an equally important role as men in nation building. Thus, there is not denying fact that education empowers women.

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