

Women Education in India - Importance & Government Initiatives

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ABSTRACT

Women education in India has 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. This paper attempts to analyze the status of Women Education in India and highlights the Issues and Challenges of Women Education. Today the education of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically women education is still an illusion of reality. We observe in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social evils. Women Education is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. Education of women is essentially a step of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the most needed arm for guarding them against all forms of fears. The study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by Government. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. The study concludes by an observation that access to Education, Employment and Change in Social Structure are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment.

Keywords: Education, Women Empowerment, Socio-Economic Status, UNESCO

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 throughout 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.

The women in India have faced several crucial problems in the fields of education, employment, health, hygiene, family, marriage and so on. Due to these factors the problems of women could not be solved wholly but were expanded and intensified. The root cause of problems faced by women in these fields is less emphasis on imparting basic education to them. Women could play a major role in these fields, only when they are fully educated. But unfortunately, if we look into the present scenario of India, women still are far from men in educational field. No, doubt government has provided various facilities like free education, free uniforms, free books, free meals etc. for improving education standard of women herein. But unfortunately some sections of our society still consider women inferior to men and therefore do not bother about their education.

The Indian government has expressed a strong commitment towards education for all. However, India still has one of the lowest female literacy rates in Asia. In 1991, less than 40 percent of the 330 million women aged 7 and over were literate, which means there are over 200 million illiterate women in India. This low level of literacy not only has a negative impact on women's lives but also on their families and on the country's economic development. Numerous studies show that illiterate women have high levels of fertility and mortality, poor nutritional status, low earning potential and little autonomy within the household. A woman's lack of education also has a negative impact on the health and well being of her children. For instance, a recent survey in India found that infant mortality was inversely related to mother's educational level.

Additionally, the lack of an educated population can be an impediment to the country's economic development.

As we are known to the fact that women play a major role in the development of a nation. So, a nation can only be strong and developed when its women are educated. The future of a society is secure only when its future generation is advanced enough to create opportunities and stand firm in their decisions. But the future generations get this strength only if the women in our homes are educated because it is the mother who is the first school of the child.

IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

Women empowerment is the pivotal part in any society, state or country. It is a woman who plays a dominant role in the basic life of a child. Women are an important section of our society. Education as means of empowerment of women can bring about a positive attitudinal change. It is therefore, crucial for the socioeconomic 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. Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. 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 we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment. To see the development in women education India is supposed to upcoming super power of the world in recent years. The increasing change in women education, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. As per united national development fund for women (UNIFEM) the term women's 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.

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. Let's see the difference in the literacy rate between men and women in given table are as under:

WOMEN EDUCATION STATUS IN INDIA

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 No. 1

Literacy Rate in India

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
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	62.38	76	54.0
2011	74.04	82.1	65.46

Source: Census of India (2011)

On observing the above 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. 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.

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.

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.

BARRIERS OF WOMEN EDUCATION

There are several challenges that are plaguing the issues of women's right in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India:

Education: While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since 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. The gender bias is in higher education, specialized professional trainings which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field.

Poverty: Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to this, women are exploited as domestic helps.

Health and Safety: The health and safety concern of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country and is an important factor in gauging the empowerment of

women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned.

Professional Inequality: This inequality is practiced in employment and promotions. Women face countless handicaps in male customized and dominated environs in Government Offices and Private enterprises.

Morality and Inequality: Due to gender bias in health and nutrition there is unusually high morality rate in women reducing their population further especially in Asia, Africa and China.

Household Inequality: Household relations show gender bias in infinitesimally small but significant manners all across the globe, more so, in India e.g. sharing burden of housework, childcare and menial works by so called division of work.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS AND GOVERNMENT EFFORTS FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

A. Constitutional Provisions: The constitution of India has given provisions for empowering women. Some of these are as follows:

1. Equality before law for all persons (Article-14).
2. Prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15(1)).
3. Special provisions to be adopted by the State in favor of women and children (Article 15(3)).
4. Equality of opportunity for employment to any office under the State (Article 16), right to secure adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally (Article 39(a)).
5. Equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)).
6. Maternity relief (Article 42).
7. Promotion of dignity of women (Article 51A©).
8. Reservation of not less than one third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies (Articles 343(d) & 343(T)).

B. Government Efforts: The government has taken initiatives for women empowerment through enacting laws and implementing several schemes operated by different departments and ministries. The National Commission of Women was set up by an act of parliament in 1990 for safeguarding the constitutional right and legal provisions for women. The reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women has been provided by the 73th and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution which is needed for socio-political empowerment. The Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) under the MHRD was established to implement various schemes relating to women advancement. The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) 2010 has emphasized to facilitate the process of integrating all programmes for welfare and upliftment of women undertaken by the ministries and department. The National Resource Centre for Women acts as a national convergence centre for all programmes for women. The National Literacy Mission is being set up towards eradication of literacy in the age group of 15-35 years. The Functional Literacy for Audit Women (FLAW) was started in 1975-76 to provide illiterate adult women to gain functional skills and to awaken desired awareness for health, hygiene and children practices.

Government Schemes: The Government of India has undertaken different schemes for welfare upliftment and security of the women. Some of these may be noted here:

‘Rastriya Mahila Kosh’ (RMK) 1992-93, ‘Mahila Samridhi Yojana’ (MSY) 1993, ‘Indira Mahila Yojana’ (IMY) 1995, ‘Swa Shakti Group’, ‘Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women’ (STEP), ‘Crèches/Day-care Centre for the Children of working and ailing mother’, ‘Hostels for working women’, ‘National Mission for Empowerment of Women’, ‘Integrated Child Development Services’ (ICDS), ‘Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Employment of Adolescence Girls’ (RG SEAG), 2010, ‘Women’s Development Corporation Scheme’ (WDCS), ‘Working Women’s Forum’, ‘Indira Priyadarshini Yojana’, ‘NGO’s Credit Schemes. The present Prime Minister Modi Government has launched the programmes of ‘Beti bachao, beti padhao’ aims at tackling the low child sex ratio of 918 girls child in resources and savings of a family which is helpful to meet the expenses of higher education and marriage. The first year of New Millennium (2001) was declared as “Women Empowerment Year”. It is necessary to supplement Government efforts by

nongovernment organizations for facilitating women empowerment. Yet India has not achieved the expected goals, hence comprehensive programme for empowering women is still demanding.

C. Legislative Provisions: The Government of India has also enacted specific laws to safeguard the interests of women and uplift their status in society. Some of the notable legislations are as follows:

- The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 which provides women the right to parental property.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 which declares the taking of dowry an unlawful activity.
- Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 which provides the payment of equal remuneration with men for equal value of work.
- The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983 which prohibits various types of crimes against women.
- The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 which prohibits the vulgar presentation of women in the media.
- The protection of women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 protects women from domestic violence committed against them.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013.

These legal provisions would help women to gain socio-political empowerment.

D. U.N.O. Directives: The third Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of the United Nations Development Program has directed to the Indian context–

“Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education by no later than 2015”. India is nearly on track. The MDG Report 2009 pointed out, “Participation of women in empowerment and decision making remains far less than that of men and the disparity is not likely to be eliminated by 2015”. However, the opportunity of women to labor market has marginally increased from 13% to 18% between 1990-91 and 2004-05.

CONCLUSION

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 circles and so on.

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