

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATION

Dr Ashwini Vatharkar¹

Abstract:

“Educate your women first and leave them to themselves: then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them”.....Swami Vivekananda.

‘Women empowerment’ is the process of enabling and developing ability or potential in women so that they can think and act freely, exercises their choice and control their lives and thereby reducing discrimination and exploitation towards them. It brings about upliftment of women in social, economic and political spheres where they are able to play an equal role at par with men in society. But women who constitute half of the population in India yet they have been subjected to the oppression of patriarchal order and suffered from fewer rights and lower social status than men for centuries. This widespread discrimination and exploitation of women evoke the need for empowerment of women. In spite constitutional guarantees, enactment of laws, initiations of social reformers, efforts by the government through different schemes and programmers and U.N.O.’s directives, the equal status of women in India is not still achieved to the desired goals after 68 years of Independence. According to Census, 2011, 74.04% of the population is illiterate, comprising 65.46% females and 82.14% males. As per report of UNDP, 2013 on Human Development Indicators, women constitute 48% of the population in India of which 29% is national workplace and 26% women have access to formal credit. This situation encourages the present writer to find out the effective measures for women upliftment. Hence an attempt is made to depict the present scenario of women empowerment, its possible determinants and how education can be used as an instrument of women empowerment. This paper attempts to find out the possible problems faced and possibilities ahead in promoting women empowerment through education. Finally, it is realized that education enables women not only to acquire knowledge but also aid to help them to achieve economic security, social status, self- confidence, courage and inner strength to face challenges in life and reduces disparities and exploitation upon them. Lastly, a strategy of broad educational programmer along with favorable attitudes of all concerned has been recommended for women empowerment.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Education, Census, UNDP, U.N.O.

¹Department of Humanities (Economics), IOS, College of Computer Science, Wakad, Pune.

Introduction:

Women empowerment irrespective of cast, creed, religion and gender is a constitutional mandate, a basic human right and a decisive force of national development. “Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power”. Women empowerment is a global issue and it was raised at the International Women Conference T NAROIBI in 1985. Women empowerment is the process of providing rights, powers, opportunities and responsibilities to women so that they are able to develop their potential, think, and act freely at par with men. Equally in society, it is the expansion of women’s ability and freedom to exercise full control over their action. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of social, economic and political status of women and it involves the building up of a society wherein women can live without the fear oppression, exploitation and discrimination that go with being a woman in a traditionally male-dominated society. Although women constitute half of the population and an active agent of social change, yet they are still being oppressed and suffered from fewer rights and lower social status. The widespread discrimination and exploitation upon women evoke the need of empowerment of women and education can be used as an effective instrument for achieving it.

Empowerment has different interpretations. According to **World Bank**, defining “its approach to empowerment of economic growth and poverty reduction, describes empowerment as the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with influence, control and hold accountable institution that affect their lives” This meaning of the empowerment to highlights the dimensions of choice, action and ability to influence institutions. According to **“Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland, empowerment is to strengthening of individual performance based an agency and their ability to change the institutional rules that shape human behavior and social interactions”**

Objectives of the Study: The objectives of the study of women empowerment through education are stated precisely as follows:

1. To know the need of education in women empowerment.
2. To assess the present scenario of women empowerment in India.
3. To know the constitutional provisions and Government efforts for women empowerment.
4. To identify the barriers of women empowerment.
5. To identify the importance of education for achieving women empowerment.
6. To offer suggestions for women empowerment through education.

Structure of the Paper:

The present study is structured in the following manner:

In Section I, an attempt is made to realize the need of education in women empowerment. **In Section II**, it has been focused on the present scenario of women empowerment in India.

In Section III, the Constitutional Provisions and Government efforts for women empowerment in India have been reviewed.

In Section IV, the barriers of women empowerment in India have been identified.

In Section V shows that how education can play as an effective instrument of women empowerment.

Finally, **in Section VI**, the concluding remarks have been made which reflects the author's own evaluation.

Section – I:

Need of Education in Women Empowerment: Women empowerment is a tool of development not only of women but also of whole families and thereby a nation. Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru said, “To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves.”

Education empowers women more effectively which would help to abolish gender inequality, develop their potentials, increase social and economic return, improve the quality of life, produce educated and healthy children and reduce fertility and mortality rates. Education is key to empowering women's participation in decision making in democracy, dynamic transformation of society and shaping the destiny of future generations. Swami Vivekananda said “There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved.” It is education which can do so by empowering women.

Women's position in India The status of Women refers to the position of Women in society in relation to men. Compared with men, women have very limited opportunities in most spheres of economic and social activities. However, there is a close association between various aspects of women's status or position in society and demographic patterns of fertility, mortality and migration. This association is shown to be more pronounced with regard to fertility and the social process associated with it. During the post-Vedic period, women have started losing the status in society, which she attained in the Vedic age. She lost her independence; she became a subject of protection. Manu, the progenitor of Hindu race, stated that “women should be kept day and night in subordination by males of the family; women have to be protected by her father in childhood, by her husband in young age and by the sons in old age. She lost her identity at her marriage. In addition Manu codes are legal authority of the time with respect to Hindu family. He did not treat women at par with man so far as rituals of Vedas are concerned. The Women was not eligible for the study neither of Vedas nor for use of mantras in performing sacraments

expect marriage”

The medieval period proved to be highly disappointing for the Indian Women, for their status further deteriorated during this period. With the coming of Muslim rule, “medieval India witnessed enhanced dependency of Women on men. The Islamic custom of Purdah forced the public world to be separated from the private world, with women confined to the latter” Muslim invasion of India changed the direction of Indian Society. The influx of foreign invaders and the Brahmanical iron laws were main causes for such degradation. However, during the 14th and 15th centuries, the social situation had undergone some change Ramanujacharya organized the first Bhakti movement during this period which introduced new trends in the social and the religious life of women in India. The Bhakti movements tried to restore Women’s status and questioned some of the forms of oppression.

In the latter half of the 18th century, when the British came to India, Women’s status had dropped to the lowest level. It was the worst period in the history of the country because of the Child marriage and Sati system etc. During the British period there were two major movements which affected the position of Women. These were the Social reform Movement of the nineteenth Century.

Dimensions of women empowerment

Empowerment is multi-dimensional as it covers financial independence, social awareness and political consciousness of an individual. These elements can be categorized as economic empowerment, social empowerment and political empowerment.

Economic empowerment India is the world’s largest democracy and fastest growing economy in global world. The country has made good advancements on poverty reduction, education, but progress still needs to be made in reducing inequality and hunger, improving maternal mortality rates and enabling greater access to water and sanitation for the large majority of its people. Women empowerment and economic development are closely related. The meaning of the development can bring down inequalities in Indian society; however, “gender inequalities can only be brought down by ensuring women’s participation. Women’s economic participation is fundamental to strengthen their rights and enable them to have control over their lives.

And establish a place for themselves in society. Women’s economic participation is fundamental to strengthen their rights and enable them to have control over their lives and establish a place for themselves in society. An inclusive development, therefore, can happen if the participation of women is ensured. In the context of discrimination and inequalities against women, Amartya Sen coined the term, missing women, which aptly sums up the society we

live in. These terms focuses on the persistence of gender inequalities in societies” . According to the Global gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum in 2009 “ranked India 114th out of 134 countries for inequality between men and women in the country, politics, health and education. On equal economic opportunities and women’s participation in the labour force, India ranked 127th and 122nd respectively. The number of women in the workforce varies greatly from state to state Delhi 21 percent, Punjab 23 percent, Manipur 65 percent, Chhattisgarh 71 percent, Arunachal Pradesh 76 percent are women are working in labour force. The diversity of women’s economic opportunities between states is due to the cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity of each state”

Economic empowerment encompasses the economic dimension, which has been visible in the policy paradigm in recent times. The Women’s conference in Beijing platform suggested that women’s need economic independence. “It can be said that without economic independence the women cannot be empowered. Only social and political empowerment does not ensure economic empowerment unless the individual has access to the economic goals resources and opportunities. To realize women’s rights and achieve border development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, education, and welfare, it is important to empower women”

Education empowerment

Education is considered as a basic requirement and a fundamental right or the citizens of any nation. “It is a powerful tool for reducing inequality as it can give people the ability to become independent. Education is regarded as an important milestone of women empowerment because it enables to face the challenges; to confront their traditional role and change their life. Education of women is the most powerful tool of changes their position in the society” Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. An education of women can bring change in the attribute of family members and society. It also helps in removing maltraditions 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 woman individualistic. Education maker her an opportunity to choose a career which is best suited for her. Education of women enhances the women empowerment in the following ways”

Every women 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 Balck – Board and Total Literacy programmes etc.

Women and Political participation

The status of the Women in India has seen the difference in since the ancient period to medieval period. In the postindependent India, the status of women regained its strength and has been on the rise ever since. In post independent women have been participating in economic activities, voting for choose better government and also in active politics. Political Women Empowerment in India can be measured three different dimensions; the first one is their participation as a Voter, second, their participation as an elected representative and third dimensions is their participation in the actual decision making process.

Women political participation has been considered a major measure of Women's empowerment. Globally, through histories of the world we have records of very few regents, sovereigns, and active agents in nobility who were women. "Liberalism thinker John Stuart Mill had advocated women's participation in governance by the struggle for women suffrage in the self-avowed liberal west very well illustrates the entrenched nature of patriarchal resistance to Women's empowerment". The participation of women in political sphere is integral to empowerment of women and to build a gender equality in society as well as to speed up the process of national development, Women's political empowerment is premised on three fundamental and non-negotiable principles. The equality between the men and Women;

- To development of potentials women's rights;
- Self-determination and self-representation of the Women's rights Political empowerment

is a process that enables women to increase their confidence and to prevent their isolation in politics. It is also develop their self-confidence and self performance and to establish their public life whereby they participate in decision making in an expending framework of awareness and influence the direction of development. Political equality includes not only equal rights to franchise but also give more importance to access the institutionalized centers of power.

Social empowerment in women

The Social empowerment means a “more equitable social status for women in society because the primary responsibility of any human society is to ensure human dignity to all members. it is often argued that facilitating women’s access to money is not an effective means for achieving Women’s empowerment unless it is linked to other kinds of activities like training on awareness of the impact of women’s subordination, concept of self-esteem and on the meaning and benefits of empowering women” .The social empowerment of women indicates base of gender equality, sex ratios, life expectancy rates and fertility rates which show the general status of women in terms of literacy, economic growth, availability of health care and birth control facilities, educational status of women, age at marriage, literacy rates and participation of women outside the home. When women “gain voice in decision making which is to be stared within the family, they would be in a position to take decision for improving the socio-economic status. However, women’s increased participation at the decision making level can only be said to lead to their increased development and empowerment if such participation enables them to achieve greater control over factors of production, access to resources and the distribution of benefits”

The National Policy of Education (1986) has emphasized the need of women education for their effective participation in social and economic activities. The NPE, 1986 has stated, “Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women.

The National Educational system will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. “The National Policy of Empowerment of Women (1990) has emphasized on education for–

1. Creating an environment to enable women to realize their full potential,
2. Providing all human rights and fundamental freedom to women on equal basis with men,
3. Participation of women in decision-making in every spheres of life,
4. Equal access to health care, quality education, guidance, employment, remuneration and social security,
5. Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girl children.

Section- II:

Women Empowerment: In Present Scenario: Women empowerment and gender equality in India is an alarming issue. Some problems such as dowry, domestic violence, sex selective abortion, female infanticide are still prevalent. As per the 2011 Census, women are subject to disadvantages as compared to men in terms of literacy rates, labor participation rates and earnings. The Census, 2011 reveals that the total literate population is 74.04% comprising 65.46% females and 82.14% males. As per report of UNDP, 2013 on Human Development Indicators, women constitute 48% of the population in world of which 29% is national work force and 26% women have access to formal credit. It is witnessed that in software industry women enjoy equal wages and roles with men, but in other sectors women are mostly ill paid. The percentage of IPC crimes committed against women has increased during the last 5 years from 9.25 in the year 2009 to 11.2% during the year 2013. A woman is raped once in every 10 minutes. Women perform about 2/3 of total hours, get 1/10th of the world's income and own less than 1/100th of the world resources. Women occupied only 10% seats in World Parliament and 6% seats in National Cabinet. India is ranked as the 135th country in the World in imparting free and compulsory education between the age group of 6 to 14 years (Right to Education, 2010). In Indian society, preference is still continuing for a son over the birth of a girl and biased attitude of the parents is seen in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities.

Section- III:

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) Prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15(1))
2. Special provisions to be adopted by the State in favor of women and children (Article 15(3))
3. 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)).
4. Equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)).
5. Maternity relief (Article 42).
6. Promotion of dignity of women (Article 51A©).
7. 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 programmers for welfare and upliftment of women undertaken by the ministries and department. The National Resource Centre for Women acts as a national convergence center for all programmers 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 Programmed 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” (RGSEAG), 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 programmers of “Beti bachao, beti padhao” aims at tackling the low child sex ratio of 918 girl’s 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 non-government organizations for facilitating women empowerment. Yet India has not achieved the expected goals, hence comprehensive programmer 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.

Section-IV:

Barriers of Women Empowerment: The main obstacles that go against the way of women empowerment in India may be summed up as follows:

1. Gender discrimination.
2. Lack of proper educational programmer.
3. Female infanticide.
4. Atrocities on women.
5. Child marriage and dowry system.
6. Financial constraints.
7. Patriarchal order and the subordinate status of women.
8. Lack of health care and safety.
9. Professional inequality, particularly workplace harassment.
10. Inequality in sharing the burden of house hold work.

It is also noted that the gender inequality is related to social and economic structure,

traditional attitude towards women, economic insecurity and negligence of men and lack of sincere efforts of all concerned.

Section-V:

Role of Education in Achieving Women Empowerment: In spite of constitutional guarantees, legislative provisions, judiciary mandate and administrative efforts, the women empowerment in India is still lacking in some areas. Mere enactment of laws and chalking out of schemes are not much effective for women empowerment. Hence education is needed for this. The National Curriculum Framework of Women pointed out, “Education of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and also empowering them to participate in decision making”. Moreover education enables women not only to acquire knowledge but also help them to achieve economic security, self-confidence, vocational and technical skills and guidance, good health and safety, courage and inner-strength to face challenges in every spheres of life and enable them to play equal role as men in nation-building. Education can be used as a tool for reduction of inequalities and gender bias so that women can move from weak position to execute their power or capabilities in society.

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 stated, “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.” Hence some practical steps should be taken as follows:

- Different types of educational institutions should be established exclusively for women in the state.
- Traditional evil norms and practices, such as child marriage child labor, dowry system, child prostitution, polygamy and female feticides should be strictly banned by enforcing laws and creating public awareness.
- The government should provide a package of educational grants, such as “Kanyashri” of women and concessions in the form of providing free books, uniform, mid-day meals, scholarships, cycles and so on for enrolment for more girls and reducing the drop out students, especially from marginalized families of BPL.
- Adult and continuing education, social education, home schooling etc. can be used as a tool of basic change in the status of women. It would help to develop in women entrepreneurial skills and job opportunities. In rural areas mobile library, distance education through the media, non-formal schools should be provided for the life-long education and empowerment

of women.

- Technical and vocational education should be provided particularly to the rural women, such as tailoring and weaving, mushroom farming, bee keeping, fruit pulping etc., for improving their vocational efficiency so that they can be self-appointed and self-supportive. The government will have to offer financial support and teach them how they can earn money by starting business activities.
- The efforts of Govt. and N.G.O.'s will be coordinated in respect of implementation of schemes and programmers for empowerment of women. Better facilities of health care, sanitation and medication should be provided to women. The judiciary should look after the molestation cases with special care and transparency.

Section-VI:

Concluding Remarks:

To conclude the present scenario, it may be said that education is the cornerstone of women empowerment which could be achieved through hearty and co-operative efforts of the Government and NGO's and also eliminating the traditional attitude, norms and practices through proper education and guidance. The efforts of women empowerment by the Government and social reformers will go in vain unless the women are well educated, self-supportive and independent in all spheres of life.

Conclusion

The Women empowerment has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century in not only national level but also at the global world. The development of women empowerment was not sufficient to achieve the goal of the Women rights and government initiatives alone would not sufficient to empowering the Women. In rural India, women were facing the illiteracy, lack of awareness, poverty, caste and class problems. It was not to participate in the decision making and development of her life. Government policies are failure to balance of the gender equality. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of selfdecision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the county with a sense of equality. Empowerment is not going to be change the culture of disregards for women which are so deep-rooted in Indian society. Women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing poverty, promoting education and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

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