



WOMEN EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT- PATHWAY TOWARDS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: AN OVERVIEW

Dr. R. Uma Devi, (M. Com., M.Phil., MBA, Ph. D.)

Assistant Professor of Commerce

Dr. S. R. K. Govt. Arts College

Pondicherry University

Yanam – 533464, Puducherry (UT), India

“If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered”.

– Sri Jawaharlal Nehru

ABSTRACT

Today women play a leading role in development of the economy and without their active contribution there won't be any growth. Though women play an important role in the family and society, they are discriminated in all essential areas of life such as education, income, partner choice, inheritance laws, property rights, decision-making processes, community organization, or access to leadership positions in education, business, or politics etc. The need for empowerment of women thus arises from this harsh social scenario. Women can be empowered only when they are literate and women education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom for development. It is the most powerful tool of change of their position in family and society by reducing the inequalities. On this backdrop, the present study is undertaken to overview the role of education in women empowerment in particular and the nation as a whole.

Keywords: Women Education, Female Literacy Rate, Discrimination and Women Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION:

“Woman is an incarnation of ‘Shakti’- the Goddess of Power. If she is bestowed with education, India’s strength will double. Let the campaign of ‘Kanya Kelavni’ be spread in every home; let the lamp of educating daughters be lit up in every heart”

- Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi

Education is the most important requirement and the fundamental right for any citizen. It helps the individual to reduce inequality and play a central role in the overall socio- economic development. Higher level of literacy and education leads to better attainment of health, nutritional status, economic growth, population control, empowerment of the weaker sections and community as a whole.

Of Indian women today, the female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 Census have been 65.46% where the male literacy rate has been over 80%. Being literate or having only primary education is not enough to enhance productivity or to obtain better-paying jobs but it is essential for women to pursue the higher education. Even beyond literacy there is much that education can do for women’s rights, dignity and security. 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. Education is the milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. India is poised to becoming superpower, a developed country by 2020 and education of women is the most powerful tool to change the position in society. Hence women education in India has been a need of an hour, as education is a foundation stone for the empowerment of woman. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family and develops the concept of participation.

Empowerment 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. The empowerment strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996). Empowerment is the process of enabling or

authorizing individual to think, take action and control work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's lives.

In fact, women are the most important factor of every society, but they occupy secondary position in the society and deprive of their basic rights which led to the need for empowering women. Empowering women has become the focus of considerable discussion and attention all over the world as the inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women are an age-old issue all over the world. Thus women quest for equality with man is a universal phenomenon. Women should equal with men in matters of education, employment, inheritance, marriage, and politics etc. Their quest for equality has given birth to the formation of many women's associations and launching of movements. Empowerment allows individuals to reach their full potential, to improve their political and social participation, and to believe in their own capabilities.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

As empowerment of women has emerged as an important issue in recent times, several studies have been undertaken by various research scholars, policy makers and both Government and Non-Government Organizations on various aspects of women empowerment in India as well as in abroad. An attempt is made here to put together some of the closely related research findings in the area.

The empowerment of women in India has been obstructed for centuries owing to various reasons amongst which the initial blow was in the form of depriving women from basic educational facilities. Beginning with the Rig Vedic period (Singh, 2004) Indian women were denied political powers. The denial of many basic rights continued to plunge downward during the later Vedic period, with further plummeting through forthcoming centuries. Staples (1990) defined the term empowerment as means (a) to gain power (b) to develop power; to take or seize power; (c) to facilitate or enable power and (d) to give or grant or permit power. Sandbergen (1991) while assessing the impact of a small scale irrigation project had shown indications of contribution to potential empowerment of women in the form of enlargement of freedom of movement of women. Sen (1997) stressed the importance of empowerment of women which is about change in favour of those who previously exercised little control over their lives. This change has two components, the first is control over resources (financial, physical and human) and the second is

control over ideology belief, values and attitudes. Sunita Roy (1999) reported that empowerment of women should focus on aspects like (a) direct involvement of women in programming and management, (b) effective collaboration with community organizations, (c) organizing and strengthening of women's self-help groups, (d) sensitization and advocacy for gender justice in society, (e) identifying women's need and priorities while generating employment, (f) organizing women in different groups to undertake certain productive activities to earn their livelihood and (g) elimination of violence and discrimination against women at physical, mental, domestic or societal level. Amartya Sen (1999) makes a compelling case for the notion that societies need to see women less as passive recipients of help, and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation, suggesting that the education, employment and ownership rights of women have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment and contribute to economic development.

Hemantha (2001) has comprehensively given the parameters of empowerment of women as follows:

- Enhance self-esteem and self-confidence in women.
- Build a positive image of women by recognizing their contribution to the society and economy.
- Develop in them an ability to think critically.
- Faster decision-making action through collective process.
- Enable women to make informed choices in areas like education, employment and health especially reproductive health.
- Ensure equal participation in development process.
- Provide information, knowledge and skill for economic independence.
- Enhance access to legal literacy and information related to their rights and entitlements in the society with a view to enhance their participation in all areas.

Malhotra (2002) constructed a list of the most commonly used dimensions of women's empowerment such as economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. The effect of women's empowerment creates a powerful influence on family, community norms and values and finally the laws that govern these communities (Page & Czuba, 1999). Thus, women's empowerment is a vital strategy for development efforts.

Malhotra, Schuler and Boender's (2002) has measured women empowerment in two dimensions: economic participation and decision-making and political participation and decision-making. According to President Bill Clinton at Clinton global initiative (2009) Women perform 66 percent of the world's work, and produce 50 percent of the food, yet earn only 10 percent of the income and own 1 percent of the property. Whether the issue is improving education in the developing world, or fighting global climate change, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, empowering women is a critical part of the equation. According to Duflo (2011) Women empowerment and economic development are closely related in one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women in the other direction, empowering women may benefit development.

3. DATABASE & METHODOLOGY:

In order to provide equal status in the society women need to be empowered. The Government of India (GOI) formulated many policies for women empowerment in various sectors including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation and so on. Even then there are pertinent gaps between policy formulation and actual implementation at the community level. Hence the GOI considered that women can be empowered only when they are literate and educated. On this backdrop, the study "*Women Education and Empowerment – Pathway towards Economic Development: An Overview*" has been undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To overview the present status of woman in the society
2. To analyze the need for /importance of women empowerment
3. To analyze the role of education in women empowerment
4. To review the challenges and constraints in empowerment.
5. To evaluate the role of women empowerment in the overall development of the economy.

In order to accomplish the objectives of the study, secondary data from various sources such as census data, Govt. publications & bulletins, journals and magazines etc. has been used. The collected data has been presented in tables and charts and simple techniques such as ratios and percentages have been used for analysis and interpretation of the data.

4. ANALYSIS:

Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power. Education is an essential means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the development process. Sustainable development is only possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunities to reach their potential.

Women and girls experience multiple and intersecting inequalities. Structural barriers in the economic, social, political and environmental spheres produce and reinforce these inequalities. Obstacles to women's economic and political empowerment, and violence against women and girls, are barriers to sustainable development and the achievement of human rights, gender equality, justice and peace.

Women are significantly under-represented in decision-making at all levels. While the economic benefits of educating girls are similar to those of educating boys, recent findings suggest the social benefits are greater. Women have the potential to change their own economic status and that of their communities and countries in which they live yet usually women's economic contributions are unrecognized, their work undervalued and their promise undernourished. Unequal opportunities between women and men hamper women's ability to lift themselves from poverty and secure improved options to improve their lives.

Education is the most powerful instrument for changing women's position in society. Investing in women's and girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Education is considered as a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their lives. Increasing access to education notwithstanding, gender discrimination still persists in India and lot more needs to be done in the field of women's education in India. Women have so much unexplored potential which has never been tapped. As education is both an input and input of human development, educational equity will ensure enabling and entrepreneurial development. Even beyond literacy there is much that education can do for women's rights, dignity and security. Eileen Malone Beach views that education, health care, and income as a blessed trinity because they are so closely related.

In order to provide equal status in the society women need to be empowered. Empowerment is a process of acquiring knowledge and awareness which enable them to move towards life with greater dignity and self assurance. Women empowerment includes women awareness of their

rights, self-confidence, to have a control over personal and professional lives and their ability to bring a change in the society. Empowerment has many elements i.e. *economic, social, political and personal*. Economic empowerment means to give woman her rights in the economy. Social empowerment means status of woman in the society should be equal to man by eliminating injustice and inequity. Political empowerment means women should have seats in provincial and national assemblies and giving one woman right of one vote. Personal empowerment means women should have freedom in their personal matters. Women contribute to their families, societies and countries financially. This brings overall development in the economy.

Education and literacy empowers women. The only way a society or nation can move forward, and aspire to economic growth and development is not just through education, but especially education among the women citizens.

4.1. Role of Education in Women Empowerment:

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.

According to UNESCO's new analysis, education to Women 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.
- **Education liberates:** Education liberates the mind. Therefore, an educated woman will also be a liberated woman.
- **Education breaks down barriers:** Education enables us to break down all barriers- religious, linguistic, cultural, political, gender and geographical. An educated woman will not discriminate others on the basis of these barriers- she will treat everyone the same, and work with them.
- **Education allows the privilege of choice:** Education will teach women to discriminate between wrong and right, and make the correct choices in life.
- **Education mobilizes:** Education will galvanize women into fighting against the social evils such as dowry, bride-burning, marital rape; rape in general, molestation and sexual harassment, and objectification of women which still plague Indian society. She will also fight misogyny and patriarchy.
- **Education fosters independence:** Most young, educated women of today are coming into their own being. They know about their autonomy over their lives- they no longer

bow down to moronic societal diktats. They live life on their own terms. Moreover educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population.

- **Education helps choose a career and gets financial independence:** Education, today, is enabling women to go beyond professions considered traditionally good for them- like medicine, nursing, teaching, librarian etc. Today, women are becoming models, actors, fighter pilots, gym instructors, cops, writers, engineers, architects, journalists, scientists, corporate, law, film making and whatnot- they are breaking the glass ceiling.
- **Educated women contribute to economy:** Educated women contribution will enhance the output, and therefore, the economy will develop. This will contribute greatly to the advancement of any society, both culturally and economically, and also help its human development indicators.

Apart from these reasons, there is a much deeper reason that women must be educated, and they must be encouraged to learn as much as they want. Paraphrasing a popular saying here – “educate a man and you will educate one person, educate a woman and she will educate a whole family. And educating a woman can, in fact, educate more generations”.

4.2. Women empowerment through Education

Women empowerment is the pivotal part in any society, state or country. 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. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at NAROIBI in 1985. 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. As per united national development fund for women (UNIFEM) the term women 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.

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

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

- Education helps to maintain a balanced aspiration knowing women's interest, ability and potential which further helps her to choose a correct field of her work.
- Education helps in balanced personality development by giving due weight to various aspects of personality.
- Education of women also plays an important role in teaching her expression of feeling or through effective communication which can solve disputes and adjustment problems of any level.
- An educated women is a guiding light for the children, family members, society and nation, she knows how to have a happy family and balanced and healthy relations with others.
- Education gives power to a women to become strong physically by giving her knowledge about sports, exercise, health- related aspects and good physical health; this will definitely benefit her mental health.
- Education helps to improve the sex ratio and in controlling population.
- Education encourages women especially the rural women to take advantage of the various schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Operation Black-Board, and Total Literacy Programmes etc.

4.3. Women Empowerment in India:

Over the last few years India has emerged as one of leading nations for international business and it has been estimated that by 2020 it will be 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 as very 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. Women have the potential to change their own economic status, as well as that of the communities and countries in which they live. Yet more often than not, women's economic contributions go unrecognized, their work has been undervalued and their promise un nourished. Gender Gap Index 2012 (GGI) measures the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories – economic participation & opportunity, educational attainment, health & survival and political empowerment. India ranks among the lowest 105 in 135 Countries.

Table 1: Details of Gender gap Index of India in 2012(out of 135 countries)

S. No.	Gender Gap sub indices	Rank	Score
1	Economic Participation & Opportunity	123	0.4588
2	Educational Attainment	121	0.8525
3	Health & Survival	134	0.9312
4	Political Empowerment	17	0.3343
Overall Index		105	0.6442

Source: World Economic Forum (2012) Global Gender gap Index 2012.

Table1 depicts the status of low level of attainment of women in the varied field of their attainment. The Political Empowerment ranks quite high may be due to the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments of India providing greater opportunity to women to take part in active politics. This mirrors the status of women in India and gender discrimination in all aspects of life-education, economic activity and empowerment.

4.4. Literacy and Education:

Literacy and Education are important indicators in a society and play a central role in human development that impacts overall social-economic development. Higher levels of literacy and education lead to better attainment of health and nutritional status, economic growth, population

control, empowerment of the weaker sections and community as a whole. Also higher literacy rates improve development indicators consistently. As per the provisional figures of Census 2011, in India 77,84,54,120 persons have been counted as literates. Among all literates, 33,42,50,358 are females, whereas 44,42,03,762 are males.

Table 2: Literacy Rate in India during 1901 to 2011

Year	Persons	Male	Female
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
1961	24.0	34.4	13.0
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: *Census of India* (2011)

In 2011 the percentage of educated persons increased to 74.04% of which male percentage was 82.14% and female percentage was 65.46% respectively. Literacy rate among rural women is only 58.8% as per 2011 census. Within the Indian states, Kerala has shown the highest literacy rates of 90.02% whereas Bihar averaged lower than 50% literacy, the lowest in India.

4.5. Barriers of Women Education

In Indian families, especially rural areas, girl children play the role of second mother by shouldering the responsibilities of household work such as looking after the sibling, fetching water, collecting wood, cleaning and cooking etc. and discourage girl child to go school. The second social evil is bonded labour system, which quite discouraging phenomenon which stands as barrier for girls' education for the underprivileged families of washer man and agricultural labour. Dowry system and other social practices act as main causes of the neglect of the girl child and discrimination against girl child. In many families especially poor and down-trodden think that if their daughters are educated more, they have to accumulate more assets and properties to provide as dowry.

In India, more than 50% of the girls are non-starter. According to the year, every ten girls in the age group of 6-11 are still not enrolled in schools. The incidence and prevalence of Dropouts among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas seem to be quite high.

- The main reason was poor academic record of the trainees which difficult to cope up with the subjects and mere not able to concentrate on the practicals.
- The second reason was that some of the trainees were able to get job before the completion of the course.
- The third reason was the teachers did not teach well and also students poor economic background. According to available sources, occurrence of Dropout and stagnation amongst girls are nearly twice that of boys all over India.

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

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

5. CONCLUSION:

Education of a girl is essential for every nation as it is one of the most powerful tools to change the position of women in the society. Educating a woman brings about self-esteem and confidence. It also promotes active participation in her society. Women need to be more involved in educational policy decision making process.

It is a woman who plays a dominant role in the basic life of a child. Women are an important section of our society. It takes collective effort of the government and society in creating equal opportunities for education, and increasing the enrolment of the girl-child into schools. This in

itself reduces poverty. In the long run, an educated woman will actively play a better role in directing her child (ren) through life's journey.

Education and literacy empowers women. The only way a society or nation can move forward, and aspire to economic growth and development is not just through education- but especially education among the women citizens. A highly educated, liberal-minded, independent and professionally successful and sensible woman will educate her kids, and make them into wise, responsible citizens, who will push forward their kids, and so on.

Only a society that educates, empowers and respects its women can become an advanced society. Education is a woman's birthright- and her parents and society better start acknowledging that.

References:

1. Bhaisakhee Bhattacharjee (2015). Impact of Education on Women Empowerment, EPRA International Journal of Economics & Business Review, Vol. 3, Issue 10, pp. 169-173
2. Baruah, Arunima. (2003). *Women in India*. New Delhi, India: Anmol.
3. Concept Paper on "Women Empowerment: A Challenge of 21st Century"
4. Desai, Meera, Takkar, Usha, (2001). *Women in Indian Society*, New Delhi: National Book Trust.
5. Deopke and Tertilt (2011) Does women empowerment promotes economic development available at http://thred.devecon.org/papers/2011/2011-038_Doepke_Does-Female-Empowerment.pdf
6. Dr Kadam Namdkumar, (2014) Women In Higher Education: Position And Prospects, Wamayug Research Journal, www.Wamayug.Com
7. Duflo. (2011). Women's Empowerment and Economic Development. NBER Working paper No. 17702.
8. Hashemi, S. M., Schuler, S. R., & Riley, A. P. (1996). Rural credit programs and women's empowerment in Bangladesh. *World Development*, 24(4).
9. Hemalatha Prasad, 1995, Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas: Successful Case Studies. *Journal of Rural Development*, 14 (1): 85-87.
10. Indiresan, J., 1999, Empowering Women, Challenge to Educational Institutions. *National Conference on Empowerment of Women for National Development*, Dhule, Pp. 15-19.

11. Khushboo Singh (2016). Importance of Education in Empowerment of Women in India, *Motherhood International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development*, Volume I, Issue I, pp. 39-48
12. Malhotra, A., Schuler, S. R., & Boender, C. (2002). Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development. Retrieved May 7, 2004, from <http://www.planetrepair.org/LeadershipandDemocracy/upload/MeasuringWomen.pdf>.
13. Mridula, B. (1998). Targeting women for Development, *University News*, 36(47):1-6.
14. Niranter. (2007). Examining Empowerment, Poverty Alleviation, Education within Self Help Groups; a qualitative study, Uttarakhand, New Delhi.
15. Sen, 1997, Empowerment as an Approach to Poverty. *Background Papers For Human Development Report*, Pp. 96.
16. Sharma and Afroz (2014) Women Empowerment Through Higher Education, *International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies (IJIMS)*, Vol 1, No.5, 18-22
17. Singh, Nirula. (1999). *Women Problems and Their Oppression*, New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation.
18. Snehalatha, M. And Reddy, M. N., 1998, Impact Of Thrift And Credit Groups In Income Generation Of Rural Women. *Journal of Extension Education*, 9(2): 2031-2032.
19. Staples, 1990, *Powerful ideas about empowerment*. *Administration in Social Work*, 14(2):29-42.
20. Suguna (2011). Education and Women Empowerment In India, *Zenith International Journal Of Multidisciplinary Research*, Vol.1 Issue 8, December 2011, ISSN 2231 5780.
21. Sunitaroy, 1999, Women empowerment. *National Conference on Empowerment of Women*, New Delhi, November 1999, p. 115.
22. UNDP 1997. Report of Development Programme: Capacity development: Technical Advisory Paper Management *Development and Governance Division, UNDP*: Geneva.