

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

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Abstract

Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power. Education is an essential mean of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self confidence necessary to fully participate in the development process. Sustainable development is possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunities to reach their potential. 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. Across much of the world, either by law or custom, women are still denied the right to own land or inherit property, obtain access to credit, attend school, earn income and progress in the profession free from job discrimination. Education is mile stone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. We can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment. The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, weak, backward and exploited. Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations.

Key words: Empowerment, Education, women, Economic, Development

Introduction

Empowerment in the literature refers to the act of bestowing power and authority on someone. Thus, women empowerment refers to the conferring of leverage to women who are otherwise deprived. This includes granting to women effectual decision-making power/authority and power to influence others decisions along with economic, social and civil freedom. Empowerment by its very definition implies an increase in the ability to exercise power. In India, as in most developing countries women are believed to be treated inferior to men. Women education can play a key role in the social and economic development of the country. Educating a woman uplifts her life as well as the quality of her life and her entire family. It is a fact that any educated woman will definitely support the education of her children especially a girl child and provide a better guidance to her children. An educated woman will easily imbibe an independent and progressive outlook in her children. 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. Investing in women's and girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. India is going 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.

Women Education in India

Although in the Vedic period women had access to education in India, they had gradually lost this right. However, in the British period there was revival of interest in women's education in India. During this period, various socio religious movements led by eminent persons like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar emphasized on women's education in India.

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 three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 1971 only 22% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2011 65.46% female were literate.

In Asia, India has the lowest rates of female literacy. This is attributed to the fact the country has a biased outlook towards the education of women. The Indian society feels that a woman is a liability who will one time get married and will not contribute to the economic and social development of the family. The society perceives a woman as somebody who cannot do other duties apart from her traditional duties of cooking and housekeeping. As a result, the society considers home training more important as compared to formal education.

Another contributing factor is the rapid growth of the population. Most Indian households have a number of children whose needs are much higher than their earning capacity. This leads to the neglect of the girl education and put more emphasis on the education of the boy child. In this instance, marriage is taken more seriously as opposed to education hence a number of Indian girls are married at a younger age. This becomes as an impediment in the education of the Indian woman.

WOMEN'S EDUCATION PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGS

“Educate one man you educate a person but educate a woman you educate a whole civilization.”

Mahatma Gandhi.

Literacy and educational attainment are vital indicators of development in a society. Attainment of universal education is one of the Millennium Development goals of United Nations to be achieved by 2015. Literacy rate and educational development are considered to be key variables affecting demographic indicators like fertility, mortality (especially infant mortality) rate and migration. Higher level of literacy and educational development lead to greater awareness on one hand and help people in acquiring skills on the other hand. In spite of the forceful intervention by a bastion of female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and

sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programmes over the last 62 years and above all, the United Nation's enormous pressure with regard to the uplift of the plight of women in term of education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons. The 2011 Census report indicates that literacy among women is only 64 percent it is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women in India is even much lower to national average i.e. 74percent .The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, the weak, backward and exploited. Moreover education is also not available to all equally. Gender inequality is reinforced in education which is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 64% against 84% of men as per 2011 Census. An extremely positive development in the percent decade is that the gap of 21.59 percentage point recorded between male and female literacy rates in 2001 has reduced to 16.68 percentage points in 2011. Table 1 presents the literacy rate for the country by persons, males, females and the male female gap since 1951.

Table-1: Literacy rate in India: 1951-2011

Census year	persons	Males	Females	Male-Female Literacy gap
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.3	40.4	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.95	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: census- 2011

From this table one can easily infer that still the female literacy rate is wadding behind male literacy rate .The rate of school drop outs is also found to be comparatively higher in case of women. This higher rate of illiteracy of women is undoubtedly attributing for women dependence on men and to play a subordinate role. The lack of education is the root cause for women's exploitation and negligence. Only literacy can help women to understand the Indian's

constitutional and legislative provisions that are made to strengthen them. Thus promoting education among women is important in empowering them to accomplish their goals as par with men in different spheres of life.

TABLE -2 STATE-WISE PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE LITERACY IN THE COUNTRY AS PER 2011 CENSUS

Sl. No.	Name of the State	Female Literacy
1	Andhra Pradesh	59.7%
2	Arunachal Pradesh	59.6%
3	Assam	67.3%
4	Bihar	53.3%
5	Chhattisgarh	60.6%
6	Delhi	80.9%
7	Goa	81.8%
8	Gujarat	70.7%
9	Haryana	66.8%
10	Himachal Pradesh	76.6%
11	Jammu and Kashmir	58.0%
12	Jharkhand	56.2%
13	Karnataka	68.1%
14	Kerala	92.0%
15	Madhya Pradesh	60.0%
16	Maharashtra	75.5%
17	Manipur	73.2%
18	Meghalaya	73.8%
19	Mizoram	89.4%
20	Nagaland	76.7%
21	Orissa	64.4%

22	Punjab	71.3%
23	Rajasthan	52.7%
24	Sikkim	76.4%
25	Tamil Nadu	73.9%
26	Tripura	83.1%
27	Uttar Pradesh	59.3%
28	Uttarakhand	70.7%
29	West Bengal	71.2%
Union Territories		
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	81.8%
2	Chandigarh	81.4%
3	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	65.9%
4	Daman & Diu	79.6%
5	Lakshadweep	88.2%
6	Pondicherry	81.2%
All India		65.46%

Source: Census of India – 2011

According to the table -2 the state wise female literacy rate had an average of 65.46% on all India basis in 2011 census. The highest literacy rate is 92.0% in Kerala and least literacy rate is 52.7% in Rajasthan in 2011 census. Literacy rate of female has increased to 11% in 2011 census i.e. from 54.16% to 65.46%. Women's are growing well in the last 10 years. Government of India has taken various steps and formulated plans especially for women in every planning process.

Table-2: Percentage of literacy according to Age-Group

Age Group(Years)	Men	Women
15 - 19	89	74
20 - 24	84	64
24 - 29	81	55
30 -34	76	48
35 – 39	70	43
40 – 44	69	40
45 - 49	68	38

Source: NFHS - 3

Education is much more than reading and writing. It is an essential investment countries make for their futures, a crucial factor in reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development. Table – 2 age group -wise literacy shows that in the older age group of 45 -49 years, 38 percent women and 68 percent men are literate. There is an improvement in the younger age group. As of 2005 -06, 75 percent girls and 89 percent boys in the age group of 15 – 19 years are literate. Though literacy is an important factor in improving the awareness, the level of literacy and the number of years that an individual spent on education plays an important role in the conversion of the services into capabilities and improved capabilities and improved choices.

Other findings of the NFHS – 3 shows that 41.50 percent of women and 21.9 percent men in the country have no education at all and 18.10 percent women and 20.90 percent men have spent less than 5 years in school. Only 7.60 percent women and 13.20 percent men in India completed 12 or more years in education. Women's empowerment is particularly hard to achieve within a generation because it is driven not only by information about choices, but also by the acceptability of these choices. Communities are often governed by strict social norms. Educating the girl child is now an integral part of the Right to Education Act in force which should, therefore, significantly enhance the women literacy level at par with men in a five year time frame. This apart adult literacy programmes should be initiated in villages to contribute to the education in female literacy. Only education can help girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them.

Conclusion

As the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals approaches, a number of processes are under way among UN Member States, the UN system, academia, policymakers and civil society to reflect on the post-2015 development framework. A growing number of states are reviewing and prioritizing the lessons learned that need to be incorporated into the post-2015 framework. The most recent (2012) Millennium Development Goals Report revealed that while there was notable progress in some gender equality dimensions there remains much to be done in every country, at every level, to achieve equality and women's empowerment.

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. Across much of the world, either by law or custom, women are still denied the right to own land or inherit property, obtain access to credit, attend school, earn income and progress in their profession free from job discrimination. Women are significantly under-represented in decision-making at all levels. Moreover, as the lives of women and men are embedded in a matrix of unequal gender relations, a decrease in the gender inequality is necessary for an outcome of 'empowerment' for women. However, the women, in order to be significantly empowered to achieve their perceived goal, firstly need authority at home, which in most cases they do not have. The process should therefore be carried out concurrently at home and outside. Within the family they should have same say as men and so should be the case at work. The most extensive element of women empowerment is providing them social rank, status and justice. Major attributes that contribute to women empowerment are education, social equity and status, improved health, economic or financial stability and political participation. In other words, changes such as increased income, skills and self-confidence, may be better understood as enablers that promote women's empowerment.

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