

EDUCATION – A TOOL OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is a multifaceted and multidimensional concept. Education is a key part of the instrument to improve the individual's well being and societies. As the 2015 largest for achieving Millennium Development Goals approaches in which focus on girls education, mortality as well as sustainable Development. For this Education is potent tool in the emancipation of empowerment of women. The greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. Education is the corner stone of women's empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities to challenge traditional roles and to change their lives. The 2011 census, indicated a 2001–2011 decadal literacy growth of 9.2%, which is slower than the growth seen during the previous decade. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India. The level of literacy is 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. Despite all the developmental measures women is still lagging behind men in almost all walk of life. The present paper highlights role of education for enhancing the status of women in Indian context.

Introduction

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. Education has been regarded both as an end in itself and as a means of realizing other desirable goals. It develops the personality and rationality of individuals, qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions and there by act as a major economic status. Education act as a major instrument which directs the society for a change and provides the vertical mobility and helps to equalize status among individuals coming from different stratas. As the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development goals approaches a number of processes are under war among UN member states, the UN system academia, policy makers and civil society to reflect on the post 2015 development framework.

The most recent 2012 MDG report revealed that 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 empowerment. Nobel Laureate Amritya Sen said that education is essential for capacity building. It is critical core in the growth, Catalyst of development and an agent of change. The Indian Constitution attaches high priority to education Article

26 of universal declaration accords education as one of the human right. The National Literacy Mission (NLM) was initiated in 1988 with the objective of achieving sustainable development threshold level of 85 % functional literacy for non literates in the age group of 15-35 by 2014. The 2011 census, however, indicated a 2001–2011 decadal literacy growth of 9.2%, which is slower than the growth seen during the previous decade.

There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) in 2011 were 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. However, the national average masks enormous disparities base on gender, caste and region etc. Further, National Knowledge Commission (NKC) states that no country on the path to become knowledge society which can allow a sizable proportion of its population to remain illiterate.

The movement for improving the women's status all over the world has also emphasized education as the most significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in the society. Education has been recognized as one of the major instrument of empowerment. The availability of information, which education provides, leads to new ideas, a clear understanding of one's position or state a change in outlook, questioning and challenging of rules and regulations in one's community. It is the index of human resource development. Women's educational status makes path towards empowerment.

Women's Educational Development – Quantitative Aspects

Earlier in India in the Vedic period, women had access to education, but with the passage of time they had lost their right. In British Period, there was revival of interest in women education but to very lesser extent. After independence in 1947 the government have taken various measures to provide education to all Indian women. In 1947 the number of girls enrolled in primary schools 83% of all the girls in educational system.

In middle schools, an enrolment of only 9% of total enrolment is there. In secondary schools, girls' enrolment was only 7% of total. In Higher Education enrolment of girls was lesser than 1% of total girls in educational system. The female literacy rate was just 9%.The 15th official census in India was calculated in the year 2011. In a country like India, literacy is the main foundation for social and economic growth. When the British rule ended in India in the year 1947 the literacy rate was just 12%. Over the years, India has changed socially, economically, and globally. After the 2011 census, literacy rate India 2011 was found to be 74.04%. Compared to the adult literacy rate here the youth literacy rate is about 9% higher. Though this seems like a very great accomplishment, it is still a matter of concern that still so many people in India cannot even read and write. The numbers of children who do not get education especially in the rural areas are still high. Though the government has made a law that every child under the age of 14 should get free education, the problem of illiteracy is still at large.

Disparities among Women's Education

Gender disparities have continued with the male literacy rate being consistently ahead of female literacy rate. Still there has been a large gap between literacy rate of men and women.

TABLE I GENDER DISPARITY PROFILE IN LITERACY RATE

Year	Males	Females	Person
1901	9.83	0.60	5.35
1911	10.56	1.05	5.92
1921	12.21	1.81	7.16
1931	15.59	2.93	9.50
1941	24.90	7.30.	16.10
1951	24.95	7.93	16.67
1961	34.44	12.95	24.02
1971	39.45	18.69	29.95
1981	56.50	29.85	43.67
1991	64.13	39.29	52.21
2001	75.85	54.16	65.38
2011	82.14	65.46	74.04

Source: Registrar General and Census Commissioner India 2001

Gender disparities have continued with male literacy rate being consistently ahead of female literacy rate. The literacy rate for male is 82.14 and female literacy rate is 65.46 Table I shows that disparity in literacy rates between male and female continuous to be wide. The task of improving the literacy level to appreciable extent and removing the gender disparities is a big task. The figures show that since 1901, through the twentieth century, the female literacy was much below than their male counterparts. Even in 2011, the gap still exists between male and female literacy rate. Undoubtedly, the Indian government has initiated various programmes and policies to increase female literacy but these programmes and policies done little to attain the goal. The gaps in the male and female literacy rates are quite substantial. The scenario of higher education in India is quite dismal. Gender disparities also present here. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) in India shows significant disparities between boys and girls. As compared to 12.42 percent in boys, only 9.11 percent of girls have access to higher education. Hence women have been remained neglected in the field of higher education also. The gap in male and female literacy rate is quite substantial. The scenario of higher education in India is quite dismissal.

TABLE II STATE WISE LITERACY STATISTICS 2011

State/UT	Male	Female	State	Male	Female	State	Male	Female	State	Male	Female
A&N	90.11	81.84	Delhi	91.02	80.93	Lakshdeep	96.11	88.25	Punjab	81.48	71.34
Andhra Pradesh	75.56	59.74	Goa	92.81	81.84	M.P.	80.53	60.06	Rajasthan	80.51	52.66
Arunachal Pradesh	73.69	59.57	Gujrat	87.23	70.73	Maharashtra	89.82	75.48	Sikkim	87.29	76.43
Assam	78.81	67.27	Haryana	85.38	66.77	Manipur	86.49	73.17	Tamil nadu	86.81	73.86
Bihar	73.39	53.33	H.P.	90.83	76.60	Meghalaya	77.17	73.78	Tripura	92.18	83.15
Chandigarh	90.54	81.38	J&K	78.26	58.01	Mizorum	93.72	89.40	U.P.	79.24	59.26
Chhattisgarh	81.45	60.59	Jharkhand	78.45	56.21	Nagaland	83.29	76.69	Uttaranchal	84.01	60.26
D.N&Haveli	86.46	65.93	Karnataka	82.85	68.13	Orissa	82.40	64.36	West Bengal	82.67	71.16
Daman & Diu	91.48	79.59	Kerala	96.02	91.98	Pondicherry	92.12	81.22	INDIA	82.14	65.46

Source: National Human Development Report 2011

Table II depicts that female literacy rate is not uniform among different states of the country. There is wide range of regional disparities. The disparities are far wider in the four northern states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan; Uttar Pradesh. Kerala has the highest women literacy rate, which is 91.98 percent. Rajasthan and Bihar are recorded with the lowest 52.66 and 53.33 percent literacy rate in 2011. As against the male literacy rate of 82.14 percent in 2011, the female literacy rate is 65.46 percent. Gender disparity is much wider in some states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Arunachal Pradesh. A large number of children are out of school out of which most are the girls who remain away from the schools. There are also intra district gender based differences in literacy rates. In fact the largest number of districts with higher gender disparities between rural male and female literacy is concentrated in four (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan) educationally backward states.

STRATEGIES OF EDUCATION FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Inter-sectoral convergence of schemes for women; monitoring and review of progress strengthening institutional framework for greater efficiency in support to women Focused research, review of schemes, programmes and legislations, and gender audits for evidence based policy making. Investment in skill and entrepreneurship development, micro-credit, vocational training and SHG development for economic empowerment of women Support to Panchayati Raj institutions; women's movements and community representatives for strengthening of local bodies 360 degree approach on media and

communication for behaviour change and social mobilization for gender equality

Giving all girls a fair chance to learn is practical, affordable and essential. There is a need to make gender equality a reality for the 50% of total female population which is currently unfairly denied for access to education. In order to ensure full integration of women in development process, there is need to start with the education of girl child like is said “educate women you educate the nation and educate a man you educate an individual. The girl child therefore needs to acquire the skills necessary for active and effective participation all levels of social, cultural and economic and political sphere.

Economists view the economic growth with women’s participation directly related with their educational status prevailing prejudice, poverty low enrolment of girl , poor socio-economic status, engagement of girls child poor socio- economic status, engagement of girls children in domestic work and higher drop and rate among girls are the major concerns.

Open learning system for the girls who cannot come to educational institution or for lifelong learning for educated women. Education gives economic independences which accelerate the improvement of status o women and ultimately the status of the society Education keeps women to improve her quality of life. An Educated woman is aware of her rights and responsibilities and can take part in the development process of the nation. An Educated mother is better equipped to help her children in terms of health, study, awareness, etc.

Education under nutrition and gender discrimination is all interrelated. The investment intimate education has a high social rate of return economic development largely depend upon the human resource development –index. A Literate human have higher level fertility and mortality poor nutritional status law earning potential and little autonomy within the household. A recent Survey in India found that infant mortality is inversely proportional to mothers’ education level.

However, on the female literacy we cannot ignore the achievement of southern states in terms of female education. It is generally believed that states performances in terms of social indicators are often proportional to economic growth. But in India the states like Punjab and Haryana have lower literacy rates Kerala had performed really well in the field education and health. H.P has also performed better than other states in short span of time.

Women Empowerment Through Millennium Development Goal (Mdg)

Millennium Development Goal (MDG) With an objective to develop inclusively, United Nations (UN) member states and various international organizations committed to achieve various millennium development goals by 2015. The millennium declaration signed in Sep 2000 consists of 8 goals. Women empowerment has become a prominent issue worldwide and it is understood that the empowerment of women is the most important factor behind poverty alleviation and achieving millennium development goals (MDG). “Promote Gender equality and Empower Women” has been emphasized as root

goal among the eight goals which can be emphasized for an all round equitable development. The objective of the goal was to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and in all levels by 2015. The latest report on gender dimensions by UN Women says a. Gradually we are moving towards the goal and girls' participation in primary education is at parity with boys. Still only 2 out of 130 countries have achieved the targets at all levels of education. b. In the non agricultural sector, around 40% jobs are held by women in 2011 which is satisfactory but not meeting the targets again. c. Worldwide, women parliamentarians account for around 20% till Jan 31, 2013. Slowly, the women participation and economic empowerment has been an important issue for the economies all over.

This can provide enormous economic opportunities for the economies to enhance the competitiveness. This brings an empowered society and an empowered nation at large. Governments need to focus more on the sensitizing the communities on gender equality, strong and effective regulations and incentives etc. can surely produce desired results. A gender neutral economy is inclusive one in a real sense and it helps in achieving the targets as per the declaration. The picture below shows a holistic view of women empowerment. Government Initiatives to improve women literacy in India Government of India has also taken several initiatives to let women participate in the mainstream society. Various policies and programmes have been started to enhance the literacy and economic empowerment of women workforce.

To name a few, i. **Mahila Samakhya Program** This has been a rural wing of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), started in 1988 in accordance with New Education policy, 1968. It has an objective to help and empower weaker sections of rural women. ii. **Sakshaar Bharat Mission** (Female literacy) Launched with a mission to enhance the female participation in education and create a literate India. This had been formulated with an objective to achieve 80% literacy level by 2012 and to reduce the gap of male-female literacy ratio by not more than 10%. The focus has been on adult female literacy rate through imparting relevant skills and training programmes, functional literacy, promoting learning society and provision for continuing education especially in the rural areas. iii. **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme** The scheme has been launched in 2004 with a mission to enhance the livelihood of girls from backward classes with a provision for education. The schools admit 75% of its students from backward classes and 25% from Below Poverty level (BPL). The scheme integrated with **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme** to facilitate education for them especially in the educationally backward areas by setting up boarding facilities till elementary level. The main objective of the programme has been to enhance the enrolment ratio of girls in the educationally backward sections of the society and to give them a voice towards empowerment. iv. **National Policy on Education** A unit of National Education for Women has an objective to empower women through providing value based education. The scheme comprise of materials based on the needs of a woman. So that, education can have a significant contribution imparting value based knowledge and learning outcomes to empower the locality. v. **Scholarships**

Various scholarship programmes have been started by central and states governments to enhance the awareness and encourage the girls to come up and study. These have helped families ignorant towards female education citing the financial difficulties. The scholarship programmes are Single girl child scholarship for women, Scholarship for women scientists, Maulana Azad national scholarship for minority girls etc. vi. Training of Female teachers The scheme provides trainings to the female teachers. The training programmes under this scheme consist of technical training, knowledge sharing, behavioral trainings, theoretical training to enhance their capability to teach students better. vii. National Program for Education of Girls at Elementary Level Under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), the programme launched to enhance the literacy rate of females at elementary level. The programme has helped in upgrading the literacy level in the most backward regions. The programme is focused on rural outreach and it is said that it reaches where Sarva siksha Abhiyan did not reach. The policies' initiatives, schemes and openness of information have gradually led people to take steps towards a participatory and equal society. The situation has improved a lot but still governments and institutions need to play a proactive role as far as including the female in the mainstream of economy generation.

Conclusion

Education plays one of the most significant roles for women in enhancing their livelihood conditions. There are various drawbacks of not educating women like limited prospects, decreased family income, risk of exploitation, limited economic progression of a country at large. The unutilized human resource in terms of women especially in developing countries is a cause of concern. Education gives them voice and ability to make decision and influence the positive change in the community. This is core to enhance economic prosperity and can help in achieving other millennium development goals as per the millennium declaration much prior to the deadlines. Governments need to increase the pace of empowerment schemes meant for women in a more Education: An Instrument to Enhance Women Empowerment and which is in an accountable manner to increase the potential of these enormous financial and social resources. Women education can prove to be single solution for almost all the issues in the economy like, population control, peace and security, economic generation, poverty alleviation, knowledge pool, equity, self reliance etc.

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