# AN APPRAISAL OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT** *In the twenty first century there are so many social changes that are facing. Amongst women empowerment, women rights, girls' education, and predicament of gender disparity are the key areas which are acute in the Third World countries and developing counties like India and ninety per cent of the whole world. First growing nations like USA, England, Russia, France and few more countries already overcome from these discriminating evils and they are passing over the second generations. This is not the demand of the hour but this was one of declarations of nineteenth century brought to the fore by Swami Vivekananda of Colonial India under British rule. After passage of time, the voice of common mass all over the world especially the women carried forward by way of enhancing their rate of literacy and educational status. The Government is now bound to formulate the different strategies to implement the recommendations of different commissions.*

## Introduction

The present study was conducted on aspects and agencies of empowering women through education with special reference to Sarva Shiksha Mission (SSM). The studies were reviewed to identify the gaps in this field by analyzing tools, techniques and finding of the related studies. All the available studies related to field were analyzed for this purpose. 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. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investments in secondary school education for girls yield especially high dividends. Sarva Shiksha Mission is a comprehensive scheme launched in the year 2000 with an objective of widening the scope of elementary education throughout the country. This programme aims to improve the performance of a school system through community owned approach and to impart qualitative elementary education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. The one of its objectives is to reduce gender parity that exists in the society.[1]

## Discussion

### Few Initiatives in India

**National Policies and Commission for Women:** The National Policy of Education (NPE), 1986 and the Programme of Action (PoA), 1992 act as the guiding force of influence both the qualitativ and quantitative indicators regarding the need for empowerment of women. The NPE (1986) states that

"Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accuamlated distortions of the past; there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will plat a positive, interventioanl role in the emplowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions.

This will be an act of faith and social; engineering Women's studies will be promoted as a part of various courses and educational institutions encouraged taking up active programmes to further women's development".[2]

**National Commission for Women (NCW):** The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. It continues to pursue its mandated role and activities viz.; safeguards wommen's rights through investigations into the individual complaints of atrocities, sexual harassment of women at work place, conducting, legal awareness programs, campus, review of both women specific an women related legislations, investigates into individual complaints, atrocities, harassment, denial of rights etc. Problem of violence against women is multifaceted.[3]

**National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001):** The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowement (Swashakti) and the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was passed in the same year to bring about the advancement development and empowerment of women.[4] This policy has endorsed the proisions of NPE 1986. The policy prescribes:

- Equal access to education for women and girls.
- Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination.
- Universalize education.
- Eradicate illiteracy,
- Create a gender-sensitive educational system.
- Increse enrolment and retention rates of girls
- Improve the quality of education.
- Development of occupation / vocation / technical skills by women.
- Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education.

**National Mission for Empowerment of Women (2010):** The launch of the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) on 8th March, 2010 by the Ministry of Women and Child Development was an important evelop-

ment to translate the NPEW prescriptions into reality.[5]

## Higher Education & Higher Education

Swami Vivekananda's ideas of women equity and empowerment have been analyzed in the perspective of recent concept of empowerment in this report. Despite the heroic efforts of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar for educating the girls there were meagre endeavour perpetuating during the last quarter of the 19th century in Bengal. According to Vivekananda thus educated Indian girls would be in a position of power to solve their own problems in their own way. Vivekananda says *"Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in a man"*. The education of parents is linked to their children's educational attainment, and the mother's education is usually more influential than the father's. An educated mother's greater influence in household negotiations may allow her to secure more resources for her children.[6]

Educated mothers are more likely to be in the labour force, allowing them to pay some of the costs of schooling, and may be more aware of returns to schooling. And educated mothers, averaging fewer children, can concentrate more attention on each child. Besides, having fewer children mothers with schooling are less likely to have mistimed or unintended births. This has implications for schooling, because poor parents often must choose which of their children to educate. Closing the gender gap in education is a development priority. The 1994 Cairo Consensus recognized education, especially for women, as a force for social and economic development. Universal completion of primary education was set as a 20-year goal, as was wider access to secondary and higher education among girls and women. Closing the gender gap in education by 2015 is also one of the benchmarks for the Millennium Development Goals.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) advocates widely for universal education and has been instrumental in advancing legislation in many countries to reduce gender disparities in schooling. The 2003 UNFPA global survey on ICPD+10 showed that most programme countries formally recognize the important of reducing the gender gap in education between boys and girls. UNFPA supports a variety of educational programmes, from literacy projects to curricula development with a focus on reproductive and sexual health. Because of the sensitivity of these issues, the focus and names of the educational programmes have gone through a number of changes over the past decades.

Empowerment means to increase the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. If often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities. Women's Empowerment means ability of women to transform economic and social development when empowered to fully participate in the decisions that affect their lives through leadership training, coaching, consulting and the provision of enabling tools for women to lead within their communities, regions and countries.

India has occupied an important place in learning for thousands of years. The present format of Higher Education in India was started in 1857. At present, India possesses a highly developed higher education sys-tem which offers facility of education and training in almost all aspects of human's creative and intellectual endeavors such as arts and humanities, natural, mathematical and social science, engineering, medicine, dentistry, education, agriculture, law, commerce and management, music, and performing arts,

national and foreign languages, culture and communications etc. Although higher education has expended several times since independence, issues of access, equity and quality still continue to be the areas of concern.

Every year, India is producing 2.5 million graduates and this figure is just after USA and China. The higher education institutions suffer from large quality variation in so much so that a NASSCOM – Mackinsey Report - 2005 has said that not more than 15 percent of graduates of general education and 25-30 percent of technical education are fit for employment. The various regulatory bodies regulating higher education have constituted autonomous bodies for monitoring qualities standards in the institutions under their purview.

Ved Prakash (2008) based on selected educational statistics published by MHRD on Educational Index status of Education in India: National Report (2008) and found that the effect of modernism and technological progress will increasingly demand competencies and pose challenges requiring more vibrant content.[7] Higher education needs to be reoriented to increase women's access to traditionally male dominated courses and equip them to take up entrepreneurial administration and leadership roles and responsibilities. The three specific needs related to women and higher educations are:-

Recognition of women as an essential human resource base of each country.

A strong commitment to equip women with the necessary range of managerial skills empowering them in their decision making role;

Institution of a feminine leadership model suited to the needs of social development across all sectors. With the adoption of several policies the participation of women in higher education has changed. The enrolment of girl students in higher education is increasing.

**Women Student's Enrolment in various faculties**

| Year | Arts | Science | Commerce management | Education | Engg/tech. | Medicine | Agri. | Veter.ei other science faculties | Other faculties | Law | Veter science | Other faculties |
|------|------|---------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-------|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----|---------------|-----------------|
| 2006-07 | 45.8 | 37.95 | 35.15 | 48.73 | 19.82 | 44.3 | 15.9 | 20.51, 35.57 | 35.57 | 20.7 | 20.51 | 35.57 |
| 2007-08 | 46.5 | 39.86 | 36.88 | 49.41 | 22.9 | 45.31 | 16.5 | 20.29, 36.59 | 36.59 | 21.7 | 20.29 | 36.59 |
| 2008-09 | 47.2 | 43.22 | 36.82 | 63.1 | 21.07 | 45.46 | 18.9 | 20.70, 45.55 | 45.55 | 20.7 | 20.7 | 45.55 |

But the drop out also is going up. Our education system still fails to adopt the girls in higher education. The gaps in the male - female literacy rate are an indicator of gender discrimination persisting in India. The male literacy rate is more than 75% whereas female literacy rate is only 54.16%

as per 2001 Census. According to the higher education department of India, total enrollment in higher education in India is 1, 43, 23, 566 students out of which only 54, 91, 818 girl students are enrolled in the year 2008. The data clearly reveal that the overall representation of women in higher education is not up to the marks.

It cannot however be denied that there has been a phenomenal growth in enrolment of women students in higher education in the country. The share of girl's enrolment which was 11.3% of the total enrolment in 1950-51 has increased to 38.6% (provisional) in 2008-09. GER of girls has increased by 4.6 percentage point during 2001-02 to 2008-09. The number of women students enrolled per hundred men students at all level reached the figure of 71 in 2010. Women enrolment had been the highest in the faculty of Arts(45.66%), followed by science (19.98%) and Commerce (15.91%), constituting 81.55% in the three faculties. During 2009-10, 867 new women colleges had been established in various states, thus taking the total number of women colleges to 3432 (Annual Report, 2009-10). These figures indicate that women students are enrolling in various courses as per their preferences and future requirements. But we have miles to go.

In the National Girls' Conference held in Maputo, Mozambique, in mid-November, 2014, Girl leaders came together to advocate for their rights and among them 15-year-old Catia Zefanias Uamusse declared that "Adolescent girls have rights and potential," and affirmed at the opening of the conference that "We ought to be in charge of our own bodies and make decisions regarding our sexual and reproductive health." The event, supported by UNFPA and organized by the NGO Fundação para o Desenvolvimento da Comunidade, brought together girl activists from around the country to address the most pressing issues affecting them. Hundreds of adolescent girls participated in the conference, raising their voices on issues including human trafficking, access to education, the persistence of gender-based violence, and harmful practices such as child marriage. They also discussed sexual reproductive health and rights, legislation, and their own ability to make lasting change in their communities and country.[8]

**SOUTH KOLKATA SOCIETY FOR EMPOWERENT OF WOMEN (SEW)** is a voluntary organization. This organization has been actively working for equal rights of the women specially Muslim and other women belonging to backward community (Educationally and financially).[9] This Society has been trying to give them legal protection. The demands they lifting are:

All Indian Muslim (Both male and female) will enjoy equal right to divorce. All cases of divorce will be settled by the courts. This has been already done by some other Muslim countries.

**Polygamy must be banned immediately.**
Law of inheritance (For the Muslims) must be based on the principle of equality without sex bias.

If a husband dies leaving his widow and children and husband's father remains alive the widow and her children are deprived from the property of the father. This law must be changed and inheritance to the property of the deceased husband must be secured by law.

Law of Adoption for non Hindus (Like the Muslims and others) must be enforced.

The Government must take up some socio-economic programmes and start projects to give rehabilitation to the divorced and oppressed women specially those who have been driven out by their husbands.

South Kolkata society for Empowerment of Women organized a rally and road show on 09.12.2010 to highlight these demands. About 1500 people from all strata of the society irrespective of caste and creed assembled on that day to express their solidarity and oneness with these demands. Social injustice and oppression by the influential members of the society in the name of religion has given birth to a strong resentment among the women of the society. They are being united with an urge to lead a healthy social life. The women members of the society cannot be protected from oppression and injustice without the shield of law. So, both men and women are coming out on the street to launch protest.

**Conclusion:**
Education among women is the most powerful tool of attaining power in the society. It helps in lessening in equalities and functions as a means for improving their status within the family. Educated women are more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them. Education is an input not only for economic development but also for inner strength and hence the need for higher education of women, and in particular of rural women, is not recognized in rural areas. Female literacy rates as well as basic educational level have to be increased at par with its male counterpart to achieve these goals.

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