



## Education- A Key Facet of Women Empowerment or Not

### KEYWORDS

Education, Empowerment, Tool

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**ABSTRACT** Empowerment connotes the ability to change one's own life and community. Though

'Empowerment' is frequently used word it is difficult to define and harder to measure, the word's meaning has become almost lost with overuse. Education is generally considered as a path to women empowerment. It has both positive and negative outcomes. Though literacy rate and educational attainments of women have shown an upward trend, other indicators like declining child sex ratio, low work participation rate and increasing violence against women and low political participation gives a gloomy picture. Majority of the educated women are prone to the ill-effects leading to social adversities. So it is necessary to sharpen education as an emancipating and empowering tool.

### Introduction

"Empowerment" literally means "to become powerful". According to international encyclopedia power means "having the capacity and means to direct one's life towards desired social political and economic goals or status". Thus empowerment is a process of acquiring capacity and creating the ability to face challenges in life and to move towards life with greater dignity and self-esteem. Education, health, access to resources, participation in decision making etc., 50 percent of the population comprises of women, women empowerment is an essential element in national development. Empowerment of women is empowerment of family and in turn development of the nation. Increasing violence against women is also another factor that necessitates their empowerment. Empowerment is needed to create awareness about their rights and facilitate institutional support. Globalisation has presented issues of diverse sphere which the women will have to tackle owing to multiple identities, women empowerment which gives them courage, knowledge and ability to face all these challenges.

### Status of women in India

According to 2011 census, women account for 48.5% of the population. Growth rate of females (18.3%) is higher than males (17.1%). Overall sex ratio is 940 and child sex ratio is 914. Sex ratio is one of the most important social parameters indicating the balance between males and females in a country. Women literacy rates as per 2011 census is 65.46% improvement in female literacy is higher than males in all states/UTs, except Mizoram (where it is same in both males and females) during the decade 2001-11. As per the NSSO 68<sup>th</sup> survey, labour force participation of females was only 23% whereas it was 56% for males. Labour force participation among urban females is less when compared to rural. It was about 25% for rural females and about 16% for urban females on an average; they constitute only 25% of the family income. The share of self employment in the total workforce is 59% of rural females and 43% of the urban females. In the rural area, 75% female workers were engaged in the agricultural sector, 17% and 8% were engaged in secondary and tertiary sectors respectively where as in urban areas 55% of female workers were engaged in the tertiary sector, 34% were in secondary sector and 11% were engaged in agricultural sector.

### TABLE-

#### CRUDE LITERACY RATE IN INDIA FROM 1901 TO 2011

Census year	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1901	5.35	9.83	0.60
1911	5.92	10.56	1.05
1921	7.16	12.21	1.81
1931	9.50	15.59	2.93
1941	16.1	24.9	7.30
1951	16.67	24.95	9.45
1961	24.02	34.44	12.95
1971	29.45	39.45	18.69
1981	36.23	46.89	24.82
1991	42.84	52.74	32.17
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: census of India

Women generally work in the informal sector where wages are lower and they are not coming under labour laws. Women workers are also engaged in piece of work and sub contracting at exploitative rates. Although Indian women played a major role in the freedom movement, it did not translate into continued participation in public life in the post independence era. Women are under-represented in governance and decision making process. At present, women occupy less than 8% of the cabinet positions, less than 9% of seats in high courts and the Supreme Court and less than 12% of positions as administrators and managers are women. In 2009, out of 40 cabinet ministers only three were females; out of 38 ministers of states, only 4 were females. As on June empowers women. Hence through empowerment women gains autonomy; are able to set their own agenda and are fully involved in economic, political and social decision making.

"Women empowerment" has become most widely used and least understood term. It has become a fashionable world. Though empowerment is a frequently used word it is difficult to define, harder to measure and complex with varying interpretations in different societal national and cultural context; the word's meaning has become almost

lost with overuse. Empowerment as a phenomenon is not something new. It has been there throughout history in almost all societies. It has been reshaped from women's welfare to development and presently to empowerment. History reveals that ancient women were well empowered than modern. According to studies, women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period. Works by ancient Indian grammarians such as patanjali and katyayana suggest that women were educated in this period. Rig Vedic verses suggest that the women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their husband. Gradually they lost their rights the Indian woman's position in the society further deteriorated during the medieval period and British period which is still continuing. At present there is legal and constitutional provision for equal status but not free from discrimination and harassment.

### Need for Empowerment

Women all over the world are challenged by a number of obstacles that restrict their ability to play a significant role in their communities and the broader society. According to the UN statistics two third of the adult illiterates worldwide are women. For a time they have lagged far behind men in key socio economic indicators that place them at a huge disadvantage. Growing body of research shows that women are less likely to have access to land, credit, decent job etc. Since 2009, there was no female judge in the 24 judges of the Supreme Court (Economic Review 2010) however, through the vehicle of the panchayat raj institutions and urban local bodies more than one million women have entered into active political life in india owing to 1/3<sup>rd</sup> reservation in these bodies through the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments of constitution.

**TABLE-  
STATEWISE WORK PARTICIPATION RATES FOR MEN  
AND WOMEN AGED 15-59**

States	Male	Female
Jammu & Kashmir	70	53
Himachal Pradesh	85	79
Utharakand	79	63
Punjab	68	26
Haryana	77	47
Delhi	66	11
Utter Pradesh	84	49
Bihar	81	45
Jharkhand	77	37
Rajasthan	80	55
Chattisgarh	88	71
Madhya Pradesh	83	59
North east	68	49
Assam	71	33
West Bengal	80	40
Orissa	80	52
Gujarat, Daman.Dadra	83	49
Maharashtra/Goa	77	46
Andhra Pradesh	80	56
Karnataka	81	52
Kerala	68	28
Tamil Nadu	73	41
India	79	47

Source: IHDC 2004-05

### Education and Women

Pandit Nehru once aptly quoted, "if you educate a man, you educate an individual; however, if you educate a wom-

an, you educate a whole family." This quote highlights the importance of educating women. Education creates human rights, builds human capital in women, human capital empowers women and empowerment reduces gender inequality. Access to education is milestone of women empowerment as it is a powerful tool which changes their position in society. Education is considered to be a key facet of women empowerment. Education strengthens women through economic independence, enriches their capacity to take decisions and gives them courage to face challenges. It is considered that educated women get more acceptances in family and society and it increases the chance of participation in decision making and governance. Census of India 2011 indicates that only 65.46% of women are literate whereas literacy rate is 82.14% in men. Among the states, female literacy is the highest in Kerala (91.98%) and lowest in Rajasthan (52.66%). The percentage of the girls in total enrolment at primary and upper primary level was 24.8 and 4.6 respectively in the year 1950-51; this increased to 116.7% and 83.1% respectively at primary and upper primary level in 2010-11. The annual average growth rate of enrolment of girls is considerably high when compared to boys. In higher education, enrolment of women has reached 41.40% in 2009-10. There is gender equality in school attendance in urban area but the female disadvantage in education is marked in rural area and this increases with age. The number of girls' enrolment per hundred boys enrolled by stages of education shows that at all levels the number has increased considerably. The gender disparity in the gross enrollment ratio was also less in 2010-11 when compared to 1950-51. Thus the statistics on the women education shows a rosy picture on the status of women as far as education is considered. The participation of girls in all stages of education has been increasing steadily through the years.

**TABLE-  
GROSS ENROLEMENT RATIO**

Level	Boys	Girls	Total
Elementary	104.9	103.7	104.3
Secondary	69	60.8	65
Senior secondary	42.2	36.1	39.2
Higher education	20.8	17.9	19.4

Source: Education statistics at a Glance MHRD

Education has always been looked upon as a gateway enabling women to be equipped for the world of work and for personal enhancement. But if we go through various statistics on education and work participation it gives a doubtful picture on the role of education as tool of women empowerment. Even though there is a considerable increase in the enrolment of girls in elementary as well as in higher education the work participation rate has not increased proportionately.

It is widely acknowledged that status of women in Kerala is far better than the status of their counterparts elsewhere in India and development scholars point to the past and present levels of female literacy and education, late age of marriage, declining fertility and greater life expectancy to establish this fact. In recent times, these conventional indicators are under scanner due to various other indicators like decreasing sex ration among 0-6 age group, work participation level, increasing violence against women and low political participation (Economic Review). We can't find any positive correlation between education and work participation rate among women. It is observed that education

fails to bridge the gender gap in labour force participation. Educated girls prefer to be in the education stream due to lack of suitable employment avenues and this reflects low work participation. There has been a tendency to withdraw from workforce on the part of educated women. The women of Kerala outperform their counterparts in many developmental indicators. But in the case of economically active persons, the statistics is not favourable to the women. As per the data of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme implementation based on Census India 2011, while the average female workforce participation rate is 25.51 in India, that of Kerala is only 18.23. The FWPR of Kerala is one of the lowest in the country, and far below the national level. Kerala stands first in human development among the Indian states. But the wide gender gap in the WPR pulls down our gender equality in human development. This indicates worsening of their access to self acquired income and weakening of their position within family. Even higher education as a tool of empowerment is questioned. Even though education has equipped women to acquire power to earn and become financially independent, the role of regulating accesses to material and social resources is patrifocal.

Participation in decision making is yet another component of empowerment. In Kerala, percentage of highly qualified women is more but there is little space for women in leadership and empowered roles. In spite of increased literacy and educational attainment women are under-represented in governance and decision making. It is believed that education will improve the status of women but the question is that how many of the educated women have been given due to consideration in decision making in their families? Imparting formal education is not enough for empowerment but it needs some extra effort to uplift the women in the field of decision making. Another striking observation is that violence against women is increasing when they come out for work with high educational qualifications. The crime against women during the year 2011 has increased by 7.1% over the year 2010 and by 23.4% over the year 2007. The proportion of IPC crimes has increased during last 5 years from 8.8% in the year 2007 to 9.4% during the year 2011(NCRB). Kerala has been witnessing an increase in the rate of crime. Kerala has a crime rate of 424.1, more than double the national average of 187.6. of the 2,41,986 incidents of violent crime in the country, Kerala accounted for 11,756 more than much larger states like Rajasthan (10,577) and comparable to its bigger neighbor such as Tamil Nadu (12,333) Andhra Pradesh (12,491). NCRB's "Crime in India 2011" report has ranked Kerala next to Assam with 33.8 percent rate of crimes committed against women over a period of time. A number of educated women are subjected to domestic violence and harassment in work place. Even though educated, most of the women lack legal awareness regarding their rights.

Above all, majority of the educated women are not in a position to distinguish between their desires and needs and many are living in a world of economic illusion which weakens their position in the family and society. Women are more fascinated and tempted by the material assets such as gold and diamond ornaments and also by the "easy cash earnings" through money chains. The business corporate and jewelers take advantage of these tendencies of women which lead to conspicuous consumption of such products in the market by middle and low group families and associated financial breakdowns which may end up in mass family suicides. Another social evil, dowry is prevalent more among educated families where women play a major

role in demanding it. This can be described as ill effects of education as the educated women are more prone to these tendencies. Life style diseases increase among the members of this group as they prefer to attend monthly parties and dinners organized by different social settings and clubs that satisfy their "false status" but do not wish to engage in physical exercise and hard labour and adopt a life style which is not suitable to their health.

### Conclusion

It is not the education but the social structure that decides the role of women in the society. Literacy and education do not change mind set. What we need is the change in the attitude of the society towards "women empowerment". Women's perceptions on their empowerment and their status should be modified. The society has a major role to play in bringing this into force as the women were subjected to marginalization considering them to be weak in all respects. Educational system should be such that it should impart value based education highlighting the importance of women in society; curriculum should be framed in such a way as to help them in identifying their roles as mothers, sisters, wives and daughters and also as members of a working class. It should ensure the independence of women through legal education, making them aware of their rights and should also see that women are not deprived of their rights and opportunities. Efforts should also be made to develop leadership qualities among women as it is the women who bring up a society of leaders from their children. They should be given strength and courage to express their feelings and come out of their mounds. They should be given opportunities to face challenges bravely and express their opinions and ideas so that participation in decision making can be ensured. If these are given priority, education will prove to be a facet of women empowerment. Education is essential but not the sufficient factors for women empowerment. It's not only the job of the government to protect women's rights but also our duty being the citizens of the country. We, together have to take a step ahead to give women the right to live a happy life.

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