

## Education as an Instrument of Women Empowerment in India



### Political Science

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### ABSTRACT

*Women education in India has ever been a major preoccupation of the government as well as civil society. Education is the primary criterion for human development and right to education is a fundamental human right. Educating a woman creates a vital opportunity for the social and economic development of the country and society. Nowadays, women are equally efficient like men in all walks of life. Education is the milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond properly to the challenges they face in their life. Women's education in rural areas is alarming. Education of women is the most powerful tool to make them confident and change their position in the society. This paper tries to find the relationship between inequality in education and women empowerment. A number of corrective measures are suggested to empower women by providing them quality education.*

### Introduction

In primitive societies women were regarded sacred and enjoyed respectable place. But the role of men as bread winner in hunter-gatherer societies laid the foundations of male dominant patriarchal societies. In spite of significant changes in our society, role of men remained significant in all walks of life. Gender roles worked out on the basis of convenience prevailed and men being powerful in controlling women at home and masses in communities and societies hardly thought about the complex conditions that caused and promoted subjugation and oppression among women.<sup>1</sup> Many evil customs, values and traditions stepped in which enslaved women and tied them to boundaries of the house. The untold miseries and suffering of the women especially during various wars especially World War I and II awakened the conscious of mankind.<sup>2</sup>

Education is undoubtedly the cornerstone for sustainable development particularly for those who have been exploited by the superior section of the same society. In the last two decades, debates on the status of women and the need to integrate them into development process may be seen in the form of national and international workshops, seminars and conferences. For women to be integrated into development process, they need basic education, so that they can become co-partners in development. It is pertinent to note that, women's development can be greatly enhanced through active participation in the aforementioned literacy programmes and the application of the skills acquired thereby improving their livelihood and overall well-being.

Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities for a longer time. The rise of feminist ideas has, however, led to the positive signs in women's condition in recent times.

### Importance of Education for Women

Women education plays a pivotal role in the overall development of the country. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also provide better guidance to all their children.

In India, where women are lagging behind, education can play a vital role in enhancing their status and bringing them at par with their male counterparts. Education among women will increase their ability to secure employment in the government as well as private organisations. Any society cannot claim to be a developed one economically, politically, or socially without a sound base of woman education system.

Various studies and observations proved that education can bring phenomenal change in women's life resulting in social transformation in the long run by developing their confidence, bringing

awareness about their rights, boosting their self esteem, reducing their dependency on their male counterparts, providing them independence and better job opportunities in open market.

### Education and Women's Empowerment

Women Empowerment is a universal issue and it is discussed at various formal and informal platforms globally. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at NAROI in 1985. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. India has set a challenging target of becoming a superpower by 2020. It will be possible only when the women population of our nation became empowerment. India presently account for the largest number no of illiterates in the world. Literacy rate in India have risen sharply from 18.3% in 1951 to 74.04% in 2011 in which enrolment of women in education have also risen sharply 7% to 65.46%. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plan and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in difference spheres. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local level.<sup>3</sup>

Educated and working women are in much better position in our society as compared to uneducated and unemployed women. Educated women are confident, they have their own point of view and can take their own decisions. They are well aware their rights and duties which transform them as empowered citizens.

Education empowers women in different ways. Education not only helps women to escape poverty by developing the skills they need to improve their livelihoods, but also generates productivity gains that boost economic growth substantially. For eradicating poverty, we need to overcome inequality by improving the lives of the poorest and marginalized women and education is must to achieve this goal.

Women's education is critical in helping them with an empowered approach to health issues. Educated women are more likely to avoid health problems, by adopting simple and low cost practices to maintain hygiene. Educated women are capable of getting secure jobs with good working conditions and decent pay.

Education helps people understand democracy, promotes the tolerance and trust that underpin it, and motivates women to participate in politics and claim for leadership positions.<sup>4</sup>

**Obstacles in Women Education**

We cannot deny the fact that Indian women still constitute a large body of under - privileged citizens. The Backward Classes Commission set up by the Government of India in 1953 classified women of India as a backward group requiring special attention. The educational, economic, political and social backwardness of women makes them the largest group hindering the process of social change.

The plight of women, in terms of education is further compounded by the negative attitude of parents toward female education. Some parents are usually reluctant to send their girl child for formal education especially to higher levels. Another problem closely related to this is the reluctance to acquire western education and misunderstanding on the part of the girls themselves about the values of the acquisition of formal education.

Other problems against women education include the familiar problems like lack of funds, inadequate facilities, inadequate manpower, sexual harassment, conflicting societal role expectations, government policies and lack of political will power to implement the entire educational programme.

**Status of Women Education in India**

The plight of women in terms education is deplorable in India. The 2011 Census report indicates that literacy among women as only 65.46 percent it is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women India is even much lower to national average i.e. 74.04. 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 65.46% against 82.14% of men as per 2011 Census.<sup>5</sup>

**Table I (Literacy Rate in India)**

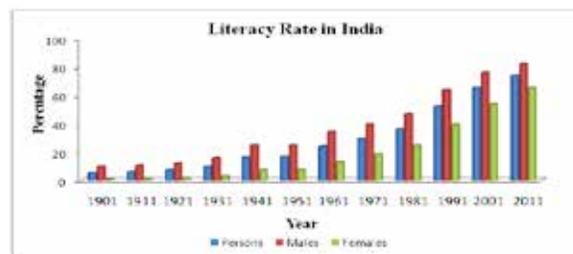
Year	Persons	Males	Females
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
1961	24.0	34.4	13.0
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: *Census of India (2011)*

Data shown in *Table-I* proves that women literacy is very low in comparison to men. This is witnessed from the fact that literacy rate of women has risen from 0.7 % to 7.3 % where as the literacy rate of men has risen from 9.8 % to 24.9 % during these four decades. During the post- independence period literacy rates have shown a substantial increase in general. However the literacy rate of male has almost tripled over the period e.g. 25% in 1951 and 76 % in 2001. Surprisingly the female literacy rate has

increased at a faster pace than the male literacy during the decade 1981 - 2001. The growth is almost 6 times e.g. 7.9 % in 1951 and 54 % in 2001.

Above analysis indicates that still the female literacy rate (only half of the female population are literates) is falling behind male literacy rate (three fourth of the male population are literates). 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. Thus providing quality education is the only method of empowering women.



**Figure I Literacy rate in India**

**Suggestions**

Present study makes it clear that we need a change in the mindset of men as well as women towards education.

Creating awareness about the need and necessity of women empowerment is required. It may be taken by the government as well as private social organizations to create awareness among people especially among younger generation about the importance of women empowerment.

There should be reservation of seats for women in Union as well as State Legislatures as it is given in local self government.

All the government policies should be women friendly and sufficient representation should be ensured in all the development schemes. Governments should try to strengthen women's security in crisis and stop violence against women. Special laws should be enacted to protect women's rights.

**Conclusion**

Education is a tool that can play a vital role in improving the socio-economic condition of the nation. Women are lagging behind in the field of education with their male counterparts. Only by providing quality education the goal of women empowerment can be achieved.

The Government of India has launched several schemes such as the *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme*, *Mid-day Meal Scheme* and the *National Program for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGL)* as a means of women empowerment. In this direction one of the most promising scheme is the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* also known as the *Education for All* movement. It is to bring more girls, especially from marginalized families of BPL, in mainstream education, the government is providing a package of concessions in the form of providing free books, uniform, boarding and lodging, clothing for the hostilities mid-day meals, scholarships, free bicycles and so on. These programmes are very helpful to improving the girl's education in India.

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