



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION: A HOLISTIC AND CONTINUOUS PROCESS

Education

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ABSTRACT

“Educate your women first and leave them to themselves: then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them”

Swami Vivekananda

Women empowerment is the process of enabling and developing ability or potential in women so that they can think and act freely, exercises their choice and control their lives and thereby reducing discrimination and exploitation towards them. It brings about upliftment of women in social, economic and political spheres where they are able to play an equal role at par with men in society. But women who constitute half of the population in India yet they have been subjected to the oppression of patriarchal order and suffered from fewer rights and lower social status than men for centuries. This widespread discrimination and exploitation of women evoke the need for empowerment of women. In spite constitutional guarantees, enactment of laws, initiations of social reformers, efforts by the government through different schemes and programmes and U.N.O.'s directives, the equal status of women in India is not still achieved to the desired goals after 68 years of Independence. Empowerment through Education is a continuous, holistic Process with different components like psychological, Economic, Political, Social and Legal. Empowerment given its complex nature is subjected to a variety of interpretations. However its nature can be comprehended by identifying a few indicators. Through these indicators this Paper tries to explore the various possible Strategies through which Empowerment can be made possible. Empowerment can be achieved and sustained through a number of strategies like Education, Research & Document at Campaigns/ Networking/ Training /Media etc.

KEYWORDS

Empowerment Education, Development

Introduction

In this era of Modernization, Liberalization and Globalization Women need to have the same power as Men have. Women are still facing the same problems in the Male-dominated societies. Women constitute more than half of the population. By educating women, a country can reduce poverty, improve productivity, ease population pressure, and offer its children a better future. Recent studies show that the economic and social returns to the family as a result of education for women are greater than those for men. Educated mothers and fathers have better educated children and maternal education tends to influence a girl's education in particular. As each generation of women is educated, so are the long-term rewards for society to build quickly. So, in order to reap all these benefits, empowerment of women is essential through education. The low social status, lack of education of women and the consequent power imbalances between women and men are the underlying reasons for harmful and discriminatory practices and physical and sexual violence against girls and women in all societies. Low rate of female literacy in India has always been a matter of concern. Female illiteracy in India can be attributed to several economic and social compulsions, but a change is discernible in people's attitude to give education to girl child to empower her to have access to employment opportunities, enabling them to make their mark as income earners instead of mere 'doers' of domestic chores - as strong a life support as boys to parents in old age. The women empowerment through education provides them an opportunity to see themselves different, to become discomfited with their subordinated status, and empowered to confront the situation and transform the aspect of family and income relations that oppress them. Education empowers the women to develop more self-esteem and courage to challenge authorities and individuals who oppress them.

Need of Education in Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is a tool of development not only of women but also of whole families and thereby a nation. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, “To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves.” Education empowers women more effectively which would help to abolish gender inequality, develop their potentials, increase social and economic return, improve the quality of life, produce educated and healthy children and reduce fertility and mortality rates. Education is key to empowering women's participation in decision making in democracy, dynamic transformation of society and shaping the destiny of future generations. Swami Vivekananda said “There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved.” It is education which can do so by empowering women.

Understanding Empowerment

Empowerment is the buzzword; today it is 'Millennium Development Goal'. It is essential for sustainable development. Empowerment refers to giving decision-making power to women in social, economic and political spheres of life. According to Shetty (1992) empowerment is easy to 'intuit' but complex to define. An empowered individual would be one who experiences a sense of self-confidence and self-worth, a person who critically analyses his/her social and political environment, a person who is able to exercise control over decisions that affect his/her life. According to Ms. Lazo empowerment is a moving state: it is a continuum that varies in degree of power. It is relative. One can move from an extreme state of absolute lack of power to the other extreme of having absolute power. Empowerment can have six components: Cognitive, Psychological, Economic, Political, Social and Legal. Empowerment is a construct shared by many disciplines & arenas: community development/psychology/education/ Economics and studies of social movements and organizations. Meaning of empowerment is assumed rather than defined. Empowerment is Multi dimensional, and is a process. It is multi-dimensional in the sense that it occurs within sociological/psychological/economic & other dimensions. It also occurs at various levels. Like individual/group and community levels. It is a social process as it occurs in relationship to others. Empowerment is a process that is similar to a path or journey i.e., develops as one works through it

Indicators of Empowerment

Empowerment is a complex phenomenon and has to be understood in societal, national and cultural contexts. It is context-dependent. Many researchers have developed a number of indices to measure women empowerment.

1) At the Level of Woman & her Household

- participation in crucial decision making processes
- extent of sharing of domestic work by men
- feeling & expression of pride & value in her work
- self-confidence/self-esteem ability to prevent violence

2) At the community and organizational level

- presence of women's organizations
- allocation of funds to women's projects
- emergence of women leaders at every level like village/mandal/district/state & national level
- involvement of women in the design/development and application of technology
- participation in community programs/productive enterprises / arts/politics
- Participation in non-traditional tasks

- exercising her legal rights wherever & whenever required

3) At the National Level

- awareness of her social & political rights
- integration of women in the General National Development Plan
- existence of women's networks and publications
- the degree to which the Media takes on the women's issues

Having identified the various indicators that vary from region to region and culture to culture we conclude that women are facing a lot of problems. Given such a situation a number of Strategies can be thought about to achieve Empowerment

Strategies for Sustainable Empowerment

Empowerment is a continuous /holistic process. It has to be a core part of any development strategy. Women were denied equal status/engaged in physical labour /eat less/ have less access to education and health facilities/get less wages/play a large role in bringing up children & looking after the family. Empowering Women therefore is a Human rights issue. This should be a continuous process and conscientious activity to be taken up by all the stakeholders. Since women empowerment is a Millennium goal, strategies need to be developed to achieve this.

Education

Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge/skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Around 245 million women cannot read or write. Female literacy is 54.16 and there are wide spread disparities within states. Educational achievements of Women can have Ripple Effects within the family and across generations. All of us understand that education is a part of Human Development. Education is important because:

- educated girls tend to marry later
- they will have smaller and healthier families
- they understand their rights & duties
- However there is a huge gap in the literacy ratios
- Education has far reaching effects. Education of the Parents is linked to the children's educational

Mother's education is more influential. An educated mother can secure better resources. The Planning Commissions National Human Development Report 2001 observes that many developments in Himachal Pradesh can be linked to self empowerment of women. Himachal Pradesh is second only to Kerala in terms of school participation.' in the younger age groups & the participation rate of girls is as high as it is for boys. Female labor participation is high because of hill economy & horticulture. This has led to many positive influences like reduction of female discrimination within the family:

- greater participation in decision making at the house-hold and village levels
- Increase in the marriage age for girls & higher educational levels of females have encouraged to take up jobs including teaching.
- Educational system should address;
- Gender issues need to be addressed in the educational system
- Curriculum has to be gender sensitive
- Gender sensitization cells have to be established in all schools & colleges
- Workshops & seminars on gender issues are to be conducted to reorient the teachers in concrete terms
- Elimination of gender prejudice
- Revising teaching materials
- To provide skills for income generation
- Encouraging leadership
- Develop necessary skills to take their own decisions and negotiate
- Raising awareness on the necessity of health care
- Increasing the Enrolment & retention rate of girls
- Community awareness has to be created
- Any strategy to sensitize women about the importance of education is a worthy one

Media

- Organizing mass media campaigns to raise awareness
- Create social climate friendly to women's issues
- Promotion of autonomy & gender issues
- Health care & nutrition

- Political awareness

In rural India, women's economic opportunities remain restricted by social, cultural, and religious barriers. India is one of the world's fastest growing economies, with women mainly from the middle class increasingly entering the workforce. Urban centers like Delhi and Bangalore have seen an influx of young women from semi-urban and rural parts of the country, living alone and redefining themselves.

Conclusion

Empowerment of women is one of the biggest challenges faced by any nation. Situation is still worse in developing and under developed nations. In such a society, women are confined mostly to family and child rearing. They are least cared and consulted in taking any major or important decisions regarding family or even about themselves. They are deprived of equality of opportunities to health, nutrition and education as compared to that of boys in the family. Even if they are allowed to get educated, it would be nominal and substandard when compared to that of male child. There are various strategies for empowering women. Among them the most important strategy is providing education and training to women at an appropriate time. Education will open up their cognitive and intellectual abilities to acquire knowledge about various things. Even more important aspect is providing training which will improve their innate abilities to the fullest so that they can take up any skillful job effectively.

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