

Empowerment of Women and Education in India

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Abstract

Women are the most important factor of every society. However, there is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors and women oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walk of life. In order to fight against the socially constructed gender biases, women have to struggle against the system that requires more strength. Such strength comes from the process of empowerment and empowerment will come from the education. The article examines the importance of education for women empowerment.

Keywords: Education, women empowerment, participation, gender equality, Participation

Introduction

In all parts of the world, women are facing threats to their lives, health and well-being as a result of being overburdened with work and of their lack of power and influence. In most regions of the world, women receive less formal education than men and at the same time, women's own knowledge, abilities and coping mechanisms often go unrecognized. As a significance of this growing tendency of underestimating women such as to make them occupy a secondary position in society and to deny them of their basic rights, the need for empowering women was felt. Women empowerment and gender equality in India is an alarming issue. '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 to-wards 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.

Gender Equality in India

According to the 2011 census, total population of the country was 121 crores (census 2011)¹. Out of this 49.5% were females. Discrimination of women from womb to tomb is well known in India. Many problems such as dowry, domestic violence, sex selective abortion, female infanticide etc are still prevalent. According to the National Crime Records the percentage of IPC crimes committed against women has increased many folds during the last decades². A woman is raped once in every 10 minutes. In Indian society, preference is still continuing for a son over the birth of a girl and biased attitude of the parents is seen in favour of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities.

Work force participation

As per Census 2011, the work force participation rate for female is 25.5% against 53.26% for males. It is witnessed that in software industry women enjoy equal wages and roles with men, but in other sectors women are mostly ill paid. Women perform about 2/3 of total hours, get 1/10th of the world's income and own less than 1/100th of the world resources.

Political participation

Though there is difference between men and women in all these spheres, huge difference is visible in political arena. Though the Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens, women are still marginally represented in the Indian legislatures. Their progress with regard to occupying posts of authority at the center and state is very low. Almost 90% of seats in Indian legislative bodies are occupied by men. After the 2019

General Election women make up only 14.3 percent (78 MPs) of the 543-member Lok Sabha. It is the highest percentage that ever achieved. In Rajya Sabha women constitute 11 percent. It is much less than the world average of 24.3%

Barriers of Women Empowerment:

The main obstacles that go against the way of women empowerment in India may be summed up as follows:

1. Gender discrimination.
2. Region-based and state-based disparity: There is a dramatic difference in the female literacy rate based on various regions in India. Female literacy rate in urban areas is higher as compared to rural India. In Rajasthan, most of the rural women are illiterate. This is leading towards region-based and state-based disparity.
3. Financial constraints, Poverty
4. Lack of awareness: Lack of education means lack of awareness. Illiterate women are not aware of their rights.
5. Women will be low in building of self-esteem: Illiteracy leads female to feel low in their self esteem level
6. Female infanticide- intentional killing of newborn female children
7. Patriarchal order and the subordinate status of women.
8. Lack of proper educational programme.
9. Inadequate school facilities
10. Low retention and high dropouts
11. Professional inequality, particularly workplace harassment.
12. Inequality in sharing the burden of house hold work.
13. Atrocities on women.

It is also noted that the gender inequality is related to religious, social and economic structure, traditional attitude towards women, economic insecurity and negligence of men and lack of sincere efforts of all concerned.

Importance of Women empowerment

The term “empowerment” has been overused, misused, and coopted (Stromquist, 2002; Stacki and Monkman, 2003). It is commonly deployed as a synonym for enabling, participating, and speaking out. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at NAROIBI in 1985. ‘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 (Bera,2016). The empowerment strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi, Schuler and Riley, 1996). The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development.

Education and empowerment

International Convention in all forms of Discrimination against Women (ICDAW) in 1993 mentioned that education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence, necessary to participate fully in the development process. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserted that “everyone has the right to education”. It empowers girls to achieve more in their

social, career, economic and family lives. Education helps a woman to be more self confident and take decisions for her, family and in public domain. Being aware of people and places outside our community also broadens her thinking and perceptions and exposes her to a world which might be different from hers. Education also gives her an opportunity to explore employment opportunities or become self employed. Women have the capacity to achieve their goals and create financial freedom for both themselves and their families. Education is a milestone of women

Empowerment because it enables them to respond to challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. It helps a woman to understand her rights to equal treatment like a man in the society of this nation. Education not only educates a woman but enables her to take decisions and accept responsibilities at her home and outer world.

Literacy rate: in Present Scenario

Literacy represents a measure of educational status of any community. Literacy rate is estimated as the percentage of people educated to the respective total population. According to UNESCO (2018)³, the global literacy rate by for all people aged 15 and above is 86.3%. The global literacy rate for all males is 90.0% and the rate for all females is 82.7%.

Trends in Women Literacy Rates in India

Though literacy is very important for both males and females, there exists a wide gap between both the sexes in India. The trends in total literacy rates by sex in India between the years 1951 and 2011 are given in table 1

Table: 1 Trends in Literacy Rates by Sex in India: 1951-2011

Year	Male literacy	Female literacy	Total	Divergence (Male-Female)
1951	27.2	8.9	18.3	18.3
1961	40.4	15.4	28.3	25
1971	46	22	34.5	24
1981	56.37	29.75	43.56	26.62
1991	64.13	39.29	52.20	24.84
2001	75.85	54.16	65.38	21.69
2011	82.14	65.46	74.4	16.68

Source: Registrar General of India, Census of India, for relevant years⁴

The total literacy rate in India during the year 1951 was 18.3 per cent which increased steadily and reached to 74.4 per cent by 2011. Though there is an increase in the literacy rate, it provides us an indication that there is still scope for further developing the literacy

levels as the maximum achievable limit is 100. When looked at the literacy rate by male and female separately, in all the years, male literacy rates were higher than that of female literacy rates. In the year 1951, the male literacy rate was 27.2 per cent while the same for female was only 8.9 per cent. In the year 2011, the male literacy rate has reached to 82.14 per cent and female literacy rate to 65.46 percent. The divergences in the literacy rates between sexes indicate the difference in the growth rate of literacy levels between males and females over a period of time. The divergence in the literacy rates between the sexes showed a declining trend from 26.62 in 1981 to 16.68 in 2011, indicating the reduction in the gap between literacy rates between male and females over time. This can be attributed to the faster growth of female literacy rate compared to that of males during the period of reference.

Constitutional Provisions and Government Efforts for Women Em- powerment in India:

Article-14 - Equality before law and Equal protection o law for all persons

Article 15(1) - Prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of reli- gion, race, caste, sex or place of birth

Article 15(3) - Special provisions to be adopted by the State in favour of women and children

Article 16- Equality of opportunity for employment to any office un- der the State

Article 21 (A) - Free and Compulsory education for children below the age of 14

Article 39(a) - Right to secure adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally

Article 39(d) - Equal pay for equal work for both men and women Article 42- Maternity relief

Article 51A- Promotion of dignity of women

Articles 243(D) - Reservation of not less than one third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies.

Besides this, government has taken initiatives for women empowerment through enacting laws and implementing several schemes Operated by different departments and ministries. The Functional Literacy for Audit Women (FLAW) was started in 1975-76 to provide illiterate adult women to gain functional skills and to awaken de- sired awareness for health, hygiene and children practices. The Na- tional Commission of Women was set up by an act of parliament in 1990. The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) 2010 has emphasized to facilitate the process of integrating all

pro- grammes for welfare and upliftment of women undertaken by the ministries and department. The Government of India has undertaken different schemes for welfare upliftment and security of the women like, "Indira Mahila Yojana" (IMY) 1995, "Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Employment of Adolescence Girls" (RGSEAG), 2010, Modi Government's "Beti bachao, beti padhao" programmes etc. Yet India has not achieved the expected goals, hence comprehensive programme for empowering women is still demanding.

Suggestions Promote Women Education

Some of the factors that may encourage women education is given below:

- Various schemes and programmes by state and center government should be implemented to promote girls education
- Through giving parental motivational campaigns
- Promote gender equality in curriculum
- Residential schools for girls.
- Parental associations should be formed to encourage and to take care of girls education
- Arrange community awareness programmes.
- Imparting basic infrastructural facilities at schools
- Appoint counselors in Schools.
- Provide counseling for students.
- Provide Vocational education
- Educational loans with low interest rate

CONCLUSION

Women play an imperative role in making a nation progressive and guide it towards development. They are essential possessions of a lively humanity required for national development. However, in

Spite of constitutional guarantees, enactment of laws, efforts by the government through various schemes and programmes and U.N.O's directives, the equal status of women in India is not still achieved up to the desired goals after 72 years of Independence. Hence education can be used as powerful tool to help the women to understand the constitutional directives and legislative provisions for reducing women's exploitation and negligence upon them, to reduce the gen- dergap in literacy levels, to create awareness about the existing social problems and to fight for fulfillment of the basic amenities and welfare of the community. Education helps to enable women to exercise their rights on equal footing with men and participate in national development. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. So we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment. To see the development in women education India is supposed to upcoming super power of the world in recent years.

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