

## **Women Empowerment and Education: As Facilitator of Social Reform in India**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Women constitute half of the human race. But the hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. Access to education has been recognized as an essential agent of social change and development. Women education in India has been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society, as educated Women can play a very important role in the development of the country. This paper tries to highlights the importance of education in Women Empowerment and so as to development of the country.*

**Key Words:** Women empowerment, Hegemonic, Masculine, Education.

“Women is a companion of man gifted with equal mental capabilities, she has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man; and she has the same right to freedom and liberation as of man” – Mahatma Gandhi.

Almost half of the human race is constituted by Women. But still Women are denied for equal opportunities with Men in different fields. Therefore, the concept of Women Empowerment has come and, in this context, access to education has been recognized as an essential of empowering Women. It is a potent investment through which modernization comes to existence.

### **Meaning of Empowerment:**

The word “empowerment” is used in different context. Empowerment refers to the expansion of social or economic strength of individuals and communities. The process of empowerment is a process which enables one to gain power, authority and influence over themselves. Economic empowerment of women means to ensure income generation, activities for women with forward

and backward linkages and also provision of training, employment with the ultimate objective of making all women economically independent and self-reliant.

**Objective:**

The soul objective of this paper is to see the importance of education in empowering women in Indian context.

**Methodology:**

The paper is based on secondary sources of data. Data are collected from books, journals, articles and census report and different periodicals of the government of India.

**History of Women Education in India:**

The history of Indian Women can be divided into three periods, i.e., ancient, medieval, and modern. History is a witness to the women who have in the past demonstrated unique leadership capabilities. Razia Sultana, Rani of Jhansi, Sarojini Naidu and Indira Gandhi etc. are motivation examples of women empowerment. God has gifted women with compassion, tender heartedness, caring nature, concern for others which are positive signs that imply that women can be leaders.

The East India Company established its rule over India since 1757. During that period education of men was modernized and institutions were opened to promote women education. In 1858, the British government took upon itself the direct responsibility of administration. But in spite of this they did not pay any attention towards the education of women in this country.

After independence, India's national government introduced some committees for the development of women education in India. These are- Radhakrishnan Commission or University Education Commission (1948), Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh Committee, Kothari Commission (1964) Resolution on the National Policy on Education (1968) etc. From the Fifth five-year Plan (1974-78) onwards has a been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. The GOI has made empowerment of women as one of the principal objectives of the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) and also declared 2001 as the year of 'Women's Empowerment'. Constitution of India has bestowed and guaranteed equality before law and equal opportunities for men and women as fundamental rights. Separate institutions for women and child development, departments at the central and state levels, creation of the National Commission for women and also State Commission for women in several states are some of the important developments for the betterment and prosperity of women. The launching of 'Rashtriya Mahila Kosh' (1993), 'Indira Mahila Yojana' (2019), 'Mahila Samridhi Yojana' (1993), reserving one third of the number of seats in Panchayats and the local bodies are

programs launched with a view to improve and empower women socially, economically and in political frontiers.

### **Importance of Women Education in India:**

Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. In recent times the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990, to safeguard the rights and legal entitlement of women. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> 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 levels.

Education is an entry point to other opportunities because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations-

\*Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families.

\*Education helps girls and women to know their rights and gain confidence to claim them.

\*The education of parents is linked to their children's educational attainment and the mother's education is more influential than the father's. An educated mother's greater influence in household negotiations may also allow her to secure more resources for her children.

\*Educated mothers are most likely to be in labour force, allowing them to pay some of the costs of schooling and may be more aware of returns to schooling.

\*An educated women averaging fewer children can concentrate more attention on each child.

\*Besides having fewer children educated women are less likely to have mistimed or unintended births.

### **Women's education prospects and problems:**

Although education plays a multiple role in empowering women and various measures have been taken by the government to educate women; in spite of all these there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programs and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India on the other. The 2011 census report indicates that literacy among women is only 65.46 percent; It is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women in 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 women folk of our country are illiterate, 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 2011 census.

**Table 1: Literacy Rate in India**

Year	Person	Male	Female
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
1961	24	34.4	13
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.4	76	54
2011	70.04	82.1	65.5

Source: Census of India (2011)

According to Table 1 the literacy rates of males are always higher than that of females right from 1951 to 2011. It is evident from the above table that the literacy rate for women had a very poor spurt in comparison to literacy rate of men during the period of 1951-1971. Surprisingly the female literacy rate has increased at a faster pace than the male literacy during the decade 1981-2001 From this above table one can infer that still the female literacy rate (only half of the female population are literates) is wadding behind male literacy rate. The rate of school drop outs is also found to be comparatively higher in the case of women. This higher rate of illiteracy of women is undoubtedly attributing for women dependence on men and to play a subordinate role. The lack of education is the root cause of women’s exploitation and negligence. Only literacy can help women to understand the Indian’s constitutional and legislative provisions that are made to strengthen them. Thus promoting education among women is of great importance in empowering them to accomplish their goals in par with men in different spheres of life.

**Table 2: State-wise Percentage of Female Literacy Rate and Women Workforce Participation Rate in India**

Sl. No.	Name of State	Female Literacy Rate	Women Workforce Participation Rate
1	Andhra Pradesh	59.7	36.2
2	Arunachal Pradesh	59.6	35.4
3	Assam	67.3	22.5
4	Bihar	53.3	19.1
5	Chhattisgarh	60.6	39.7
6	Delhi	80.9	10.9
7	Goa	81.8	21.9

8	Gujarat	70.7	23.4
9	Haryana	66.8	17.8
10	Himachal Pradesh	76.6	44.8
11	Jammu & Kashmir	58.0	19.1
12	Jharkhand	56.2	29.1
13	Karnataka	68.1	31.9
14	Kerala	92.0	18.2
15	Madhya Pradesh	60.0	32.6
16	Maharashtra	75.5	31.1
17	Manipur	73.2	38.7
18	Meghalaya	73.8	32.7
19	Mizoram	89.4	36.2
20	Nagaland	76.7	44.7
21	Orissa	64.4	27.2
22	Punjab	71.3	13.9
23	Rajasthan	52.7	35.1
24	Sikkim	76.4	39.6
25	Tamil Nadu	73.9	31.8
26	Tripura	83.1	23.6
27	Uttar Pradesh	59.3	16.7
28	Uttarakhand	70.7	26.7
29	West Bengal	71.2	18.1
Union Territories			
1	Andaman & Nicobar Island	81.8	17.8
2	Chandigarh	81.4	16.0
3	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	65.9	25.3
4	Daman and Diu	79.6	14.9
5	Lakshadweep	88.2	10.9
6	Pondicherry	81.2	17.6
	All India	65.46	25.5

Source: Census of India (2011)

In Table 2, the state-wise female literacy rate in India averaged 65.46% according to the 2011 Census. Kerala recorded the highest female literacy rate at 92.0%, while Rajasthan had the lowest at 52.7%. Compared to the 2001 Census, when female literacy stood at 54%, there was a significant increase to 65.46% in 2011. This improvement indicates considerable progress in women's education over the decade.

Similarly, the average all-India Women Workforce Participation Rate (WWPR) was 25.5%. Himachal Pradesh recorded the highest WWPR at 44.8%, followed closely by Nagaland at 44.7%. In contrast, Delhi and Lakshadweep reported the lowest participation rate at 10.9% each.

An analysis of the relationship between female literacy and women's workforce participation reveals a weak negative correlation between the two variables. The correlation coefficient was

found to be (-) 0.028, indicating that states with higher female literacy rates often tend to have lower women workforce participation rates, and vice versa. This trend may be attributed to the fact that a large proportion of women workers in India are engaged in rural agricultural activities, where many women are either illiterate or possess low levels of educational attainment. The Government of India has undertaken various initiatives and development programmes aimed at improving the status of women in every sphere of society.

### **Conclusion:**

From the above discussion it is seen that education of women is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. In recent years women have come forward from their confinements to claim their rights. To encourage the education of women at all levels and for dilution of gender bias in providing knowledge and education, there must be establishment of schools, colleges and universities, exclusively for women. The main stress should be on equal work and elimination of discrimination in employment. The popular UNESCO slogan should come in handy: "educate a man and you educate an individual; educate a woman and you educate a family."

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