



## Women Empowerment and Development through Education in India

Sahidul Alam

Research Scholar, Department of Education, Aligarh Muslim University,

[Sahid.msd@gmail.com](mailto:Sahid.msd@gmail.com)

### Abstract:

‘Empowerment’ may be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their lives. ‘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 development of women in social, economic and political spheres where they are able to play an equal role with men in society. Hence an attempt is made to illustrate the present scenario of women empowerment, its possible determinants and how education can be used as an instrument of women empowerment. Present study discusses about various initiatives taken by Government of India for empowering women and find out the possible problems faced and possibilities ahead in promoting women empowerment through education. This paper also focuses on all the strategy of broad educational programme along with favourable attitudes of all concerned has been recommended for women empowerment. Article concludes with the note that due recognition must be given to women and society should come forward to ensure equal status for women in all spheres of life.

**Key terms:** Women Empowerment, Education

### Introduction

“If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered”.

**Pt. Jawaharlal**

### Nehru

A woman is the most important part of a family, and is the basic foundation on which a family stands. Thus women become the very ingredient foundation of the society and country. In a developing country like India, women’s role has changed dramatically in various fronts. Education plays a very significant role in every one’s life. Education of women is the most powerful instrument of the change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and function as a means of improving the status within the family. People must think that the education of women plays an essential role in enlightening living standards not only of their families but also of the nation. High women literacy rate improves the quality of life both at home and outside of home. To encourage the education of women at all levels and for erosion of gender bias in providing knowledge and education, established schools, colleges and universities even exclusively for women in India. One of the major recommendations of the National Policy on Education in 1986 is to promote Empowerment of Women through education. Empowerment is self-governance, self-

sufficiency and self-maintenance. The concept of Women Empowerment was introduced at the International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985. Empowering women has become the focus of considerable discussion and attention all over the world. Today we enjoy the benefits of being citizens of a free nation, but we really need to think whether each of the citizens of our country is really free or enjoying freedom, in the true sense of the term. The inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women are an age-old issue all over the world. Thus women quest for equality with man is a universal phenomenon. Women should equal with men in matters of education, employment, inheritance, marriage, and politics etc. The Constitution of our nation doesn't discriminate between men and women, but our society has deprived women of certain basic rights, which were granted upon them by our Constitution. Empowerment allows individuals to reach their full potential, to improve their political and social participation, and to believe in their own capabilities.

**Objectives of the Study:**

The objectives of the study of women empowerment and development through education in India are stated exactly as follows:

1. To know the need of education in women empowerment.
2. To assess the present scenario of women empowerment in India.
3. To know the constitutional provisions and Government efforts for women empowerment.
4. To study the impact of various educational policies and commissions on women empowerment and development in India.
5. To identify the barriers and challenges of women empowerment.
6. To identify the importance of education for achieving women empowerment.
7. To offer suggestions for women empowerment and development through education in India.

**Need for Women Empowerment:**

Empowerment enables women to acquire knowledge, skills and techniques which will help them in their personal and social growth as well as foster in them sensitivity towards problems in the society. Special efforts are required to be taken for education, health and employment of women. Economic empowerment is essential for improvement of female sex ratio but economic empowerment is possible only when women are educated. Lack of education is the root cause for women's exploitation and negligence. Only literacy and education can help women to understand the Indian's constitutional and legislative provisions that are made to strengthen them. Education is "potential affirming and performance confirming". Empowerment of a girl starts even enterprise makes empowerment operational. That is full filling journey for a mother too: from a painful situation to a gainful situation. When women are educated, they will be able to contribute in nation building. A few women are currently holding powerful positions in India and in the world, but there is still room for improvement if more women are educated. Perhaps with increase in women holding the mantle in a male-dominated political arena, the socio-political state of affairs of the whole world will definitely improve. Gender equity is what women desire. Empowerment becomes the means of achieving it with dignity.

### **Women empowerment through education in India:**

Women empowerment is the pivotal part in any society, state or country. It is a woman who plays a dominant role in the basic life of a child. Women are an important section of our society. Education as means of empowerment of women can bring about a positive attitudinal change. It is therefore, crucial for the socioeconomic and political progress of India. The Constitution of India empowers the state to adopt affirmative measures for prompting ways and means to empower women. Education significantly makes difference in the lives of women. Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. 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. As per United National Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) the term women's empowerment means:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.
- Gaining the ability to generate choices exercise bargaining power.
- Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Thus, empowerment means a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights. It is a multilevel construct referring to individuals, organizations and community. It is an international, on-going process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to the control over this resource. The parameters of women empowerment are:

1. Raising self-esteem and self-confidence of women.
2. Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child.
3. Building and strengthening partnership with civil society particularly women's organisations.
4. Enforcement of constitutional and legal provisions and safeguarding rights of women.
5. Building a positive image of women in the society and recognising their contributions in social, economic and political sphere.
6. Developing ability among women to think critically.
7. Fostering decision-making and collective action.
8. Enabling women to make informed choices.
9. Ensuring women's participation in all walks of life.
10. Providing information, knowledge, skills for self-employment.

### **Provisions for Women Empowerment and Development in India:**

#### **❖ Educational Provisions in the Indian Constitution:**

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment.

- Article 14: Equal rights and opportunities to men and women.
- Article 15: Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- Article 21: Free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years.
- Article 23: Forced labours are prohibited.
- Article 24: No child below the age of 15 years shall be employed to work.
- Article 25: Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.
- Article 30: Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.
- Article 41: Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases.
- Article 42: Provisions for just and human conditions of work and maternity relief.
- Article 45: Provision for free and compulsory education for all children.
- Article 46: Promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections.
- Article 47: Raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living.
- Article 73 & 74: Participation of women in the political and grass root development process.
- Articles 343: Reservation of not less than one third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies.
- Article 350A: Facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at primary stage.

#### **❖ Special Laws, Schemes and National Policies in Support of Women Empowerment:**

- a) The Child Marriage – Restraint Act, 1929
- b) The Hindu Succession Act, 1956
- c) The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- d) Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
- e) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- f) The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983
- g) The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
- h) The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
- i) The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

j) The Child Rights Act, 2003

❖ **The following schemes at present are aiming at women empowerment and gender equality in India:**

1. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975)
2. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (2010)
3. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers (2002-2003)
4. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (2009-10)
5. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (1986-1987)
6. Dhanalakshmi (2008)
7. Swadhar (2002)
8. Ujjawala (2007)
9. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan)
10. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (2010)
11. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (1993)
12. anganwadi scheme (1975)

❖ **Initiatives taken for Empowerment of Women in Difficult Circumstances:**

- National Commission for women (NCW) on 31 January, 1992
- Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) in 1993
- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) in December, 2005
- National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) on 12th April, 2005
- Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) on April, 2005
- Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) from June, 1997
- Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) on 25 December, 2000
- Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) in 2016
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on February 02, 2006
- Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana(RSBY) on April 1, 2008
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2002
- Right to Education Act (RTE) on 1 April, 2010
- Scheme for Working Women Hostel (WWH) in 1972-1973
- Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) in 1999
- Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) in 1985

**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. Lack of proper educational programme.
3. Female infanticide.
4. Atrocities on women.
5. Child marriage and dowry system.
6. Financial constraints.
7. Insecure working environment for women.
8. Patriarchal order and the subordinate status of women.

9. Lack of health care and safety.
10. Exploitation of women.
11. Professional inequality, particularly workplace harassment.
12. Inequality in sharing the burden of household work.

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

#### **Role of Education in Achieving Women Empowerment:**

In spite of constitutional guarantees, legislative provisions, judiciary mandate and administrative efforts, the women empowerment in India is still lacking in some areas. Mere enactment of laws and chalking out of schemes are not much effective for women empowerment. Hence education is needed for this. The National Curriculum Framework of Women pointed out, "Education of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and also empowering them to participate in decision making". Moreover education enables women not only to acquire knowledge but also help them to achieve economic security, self-confidence, vocational and technical skills and guidance, good health and safety, courage and inner-strength to face challenges in every spheres of life and enable them to play equal role as men in nation-building. Education can be used as a tool for reduction of inequalities and gender bias so that women can move from weak position to execute their power or capabilities in society.

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 stated, "Equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured, special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy and create gender sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of vocational or technical skills of women". Hence some practical steps should be taken as follows:

- Different types of educational institutions should be established exclusively for women in the state.
- Traditional evil norms and practices, such as child marriage child labour, dowry system, child prostitution, polygamy and female feticides should be strictly banned by enforcing laws and creating public awareness.
- The government should provide a package of educational grants, such as 'Kanyashri' of women and concessions in the form of providing free books, uniform, mid-day meals, scholarships, cycles and so on for enrolment for more girls and reducing the drop out students, especially from marginalized families of BPL.
- Adult and continuing education, social education, home schooling etc. can be used as a tool of basic change in the status of women. It would help to develop in women entrepreneurial skills and job opportunities. In rural areas mobile library, distance education through the media, non-formal schools should be provided for the life-long education and empowerment of women.
- Technical and vocational education should be provided particularly to the rural women, such as tailoring and weaving, mushroom farming, bee keeping, fruit

pulping etc., for improving their vocational efficiency so that they can be self-appointed and self-supportive. The government will have to offer financial support and teach them how they can earn money by starting business activities.

- The efforts of Govt. and N.G.O's will be co-ordinated in respect of implementation of schemes and programmes for empowerment of women. Better facilities of health care, sanitation and medication should be provided to women. The judiciary should look after the molestation cases with special care and transparency.

#### **How to Promote Women Education in India:**

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

- Through giving parental motivational campaigns.
- Residential schools for girls.
- Parental associations should be formed to encourage and to take care of girl's education.
- Various schemes and programmes by state and centre government should be implemented to promote girls education.
- Arrange community awareness programmes.
- Imparting basic amenities including building and toilet facilities will promote women education.
- Promote gender sensitivity in curriculum.
- Give Natural Learning Experiences.
- Promote Activity Based Learning.
- Provide apt counselling in apt time.
- Appoint counsellors in Schools.
- Organize co-curricular activities

#### **Suggestions for Women Empowerment and Development in India:**

1. Encourage participation of women in income generating activities.
2. Inculcate in women the confidence that change is possible, if women work collectively.
3. Awareness of daughter's education is essential. It is said that "educated mothers educate family which results in educated population of a nation which builds strong nation".
4. Encourage and ensure socio-economic participation of women in local and international forums.
5. Change the approach towards women based on sex discrimination.
6. Proper implementation of schemes provided by the government should be done by respective agencies.
7. Introduce the feeling of self-dependence among women through various activities.
8. Child bearing at young ages should be prevented by preventing early marriages.
9. Women should actively participate in social and political moves.
10. 50% seats should be reserved for women in all the governments.

11. Awareness needs to be generated regarding the necessity of educating girls so as to prepare them to contribute effectively to the socio-economic development of the nation.
12. Eliminating all forms of discrimination in employment especially to eliminate wage differentials between men and women.
13. In order to change the attitudes towards female education and to raise the social consciousness of the country, a conscious strategic change is required in national media and communication effort.
14. Education is capable of increasing women's sense of analysing which will support wider reforms in support of gender equality.
15. Introduce satellite schools for remote hamlets. Encourage ICT tools and the use of internet, for the study and research by women.
16. Increasing real representation of women in political bodies and governance institutions in order to move from being objects of legislation to initiators of change.
17. Awareness campaign, Workshops and seminars should be arranged at the rural area
18. Literature and publications are a major area through which the whole notion of women empowerment can be inculcated to the society.
19. Arranging programmes for interaction with other empowered women in the society is another important way of motivating women.
20. The institutions that are engaged in various fields of social work can start short term diploma or certificate courses in areas of rural development with special emphasis on projects for women's development.
21. Government should make sure that each official body has sufficient number of women members.
22. Government should make sure that the policies and schemes which developed for women work in a proper way.

**Conclusion:**

The evils of poverty, unemployment and inequality cannot be eradicated by man alone. Equal and active participation of women is required. Unless women are educated they will not be able to understand about their rights and their importance. Empowerment of women aims at striving towards acquiring higher literacy level and education, better health care for women and their children, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of their rights, improved standard of living and to achieve self-reliance, self-confidence and self-respect among women. There is a positive relationship between education and woman empowerment. Recently the NDA Government has launched 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' scheme which aims at making girls independent both socially as well as financially and which will help in generating awareness and improving the efficiency of delivery of welfare services meant for women. Such schemes should be implemented nationwide to bring the desired changes. What should never be forgotten is that women like men need to be proactive in the process of lifelong learning. That is true empowerment. In order to promote women's empowerment, it is necessary to create an environment that will allow women to

participate in educational programs and share the benefits. The educational and other policies for women empowerment should be implemented in reality for empowering women in India. Finally, it is realised that education enables women not only to acquire knowledge but also aid to help them to achieve economic security, social status, self- confidence, courage and inner strength to face challenges in life and reduces disparities and exploitation upon them.

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