

Women Empowerment and Education: A Socio- Cultural Study

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ABSTRACT

Education is considered as a basic requirement and a fundamental right for the citizens of any nation. It is a powerful tool for reducing inequality as it can give people the ability to become independent. Women, who come across discrimination in many spheres, have a particular need for this. Education is regarded as an important milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to face the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. Education of women is the most powerful tool of change their position in the society. Still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, backward, weak, and exploited. Education also reduces inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. Empowerment and capacity building provides women an avenue to acquire practical information and learning for their improved livelihoods. The policies on empowerment of women need to focus on upliftment, development and empowerment in socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects, by creating in them awareness on various issues: human rights, fundamental freedom, providing access to health care, quality education at all levels, career building, vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational opportunities, health, safety, social security and public life etc. in relation to their empowerment. India can become a developed nation only if women contribute to the best of their capacity and ability which is possible when they are educated and empowered.

KEYWORDS: Education, Women, Inequality, Discrimination and Entrepreneurship.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Women constitute nearly half of the total population. The sustainable development of the country depends on the full and equal participation of women and men. The overall development of a country depends upon the maximum utilization of her people, both men and women. Women empowerment can be considered as an important indicator for socio-economic development. On the other hand, women equal participation in education and employment is necessary for empowerment of women. Many research contributed to show that there is a relation between women education and empowerment. It is argued that women higher education increase employment opportunity. Similarly, employed women are able to contribute to the economy of family as well as socio-economic development of the country. Empowerment cannot be fully achieved without the women's full participation in education as well as employment. The article discusses how education plays an important role towards women empowerment as well as socio-economic development. The study has developed a theoretical framework showing the relationship between women education and empowerment. It is also argued that education plays an important role to overcome cultural constraints. Preference for "son" is well known in various developing countries especially India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Many researches contribute to show that women with higher levels of education are more likely to reject a strong societal preference for a son (Sultana, 2010). This article looks at how far woman education and empowerment play an important role towards socio-economic development in various ways.

The empowerment strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996). Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individual to think, take action and control work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's lives. There are always a number of elements in the society which are deprived of their basic rights in every society, state and nation, but these elements lack in the awareness of their rights. If we enlist such elements from the society, then women would top this list. In fact, women are the most important factor of every society. Even though everybody is aware of this fact, but nobody is ready to accept this fact. As a result, the importance which used to be given to women is declining in today's society. As a

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consequence of this growing tendency of underestimating women such as to make them occupy a secondary position in society and to deprive them of their basic rights, the need for empowering women was felt. 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. Socio cultural empowerment is necessary for the overall development of the females. The present research paper tries to study different attributes of socio- cultural empowerment of women and bringforth suggestions for strengthening the socio-cultural empowerment of women in the Indian society.

Sociocultural empowerment is necessary for the overall development of the females. The study focuses on the role of education in increasing the level of women empowerment particularly in the decision-making process at the household level and to find out how the socio-cultural factors influence women's education as well as empowerment. It was observed that socio-cultural ideology generates gender-based inequalities in women education. As a result of the patriarchal ideology, most women consider sons as 'assets'. On the other hand, daughters are treated as non- permanent family members in their natal home since they will move into their husband's house after marriage. Due to such beliefs and practices, women received less attention in education and as a result lack empowerment. The paper suggests that improvement in women's access to education particularly the higher level of education opportunities would increase women's employment and income. This could expand their ability to make decisions in the family and would play a key role in the empowerment of rural women.

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. Their quest for equality has given birth to the formation of many women's associations and launching of movements. The Constitution of our nation doesn't discriminate between men and women, but our society has deprived women of certain basic rights, which were bestowed 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. This paper has been prepared with the objectives (i) To study the impact of education on empowerment of women and (ii) To study the challenges in educational front on women empowerment. The present study is based on the collection of data from secondary sources viz. various published and unpublished records, books, magazines and journals.

Conceptual and Operational Framework

Education is milestone of women empowerment as only the educated women can play a very dominant role in the socio cultural and economic development of our country as well as in becoming informed citizens, parents and family members. The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow implying that still large women folk of our country are illiterate, the weak, backward and exploited. Therefore, "educating the women" is the most powerful tool that can bring change of position of women in society bringing reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. Education implies not only gaining knowledge but also transforming that knowledge into application through vocational training and skill development.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women Empowerment: A development perspective

Women empowerment is a process of enabling women to have access and make productive contributions to their economic independence, political participation and social development. Empowerment enables the individuals to realize their identity and powers in all spheres of life. It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in making decisions or free from the shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practices in the society. As per 2011 Census of India, women constitute 48.49% of the country's population and about 90% of the informal sector. They are often invisible in the development scenario. Denial of access and opportunities to rightful place, possession and position to women begins from home and extends beyond to schools and other institutions of learning and work. Differences in avenues to growth and development thus, become issues. The issues become areas of concern, not just for women, but for the entire society.

This analysis is inter-related to popular saying that "Educating a girl is educating the family and educating the family is educating the society." Furthermore, improvement in females access to education (high level in particular) increases women's employment and income level. The increased in women income improves family economic wellbeing. Women's socio- cultural empowerment cannot be complete without their equitable participation in family matters. Women have special role to play in the family decisions. They can bring a wave of creative and generative energy in this context. Today their participation is restricted because of their limited

knowledge as widespread discrimination is practiced at the basic education levels and lack of opportunities for pursuing higher studies (Sultana, 2006).

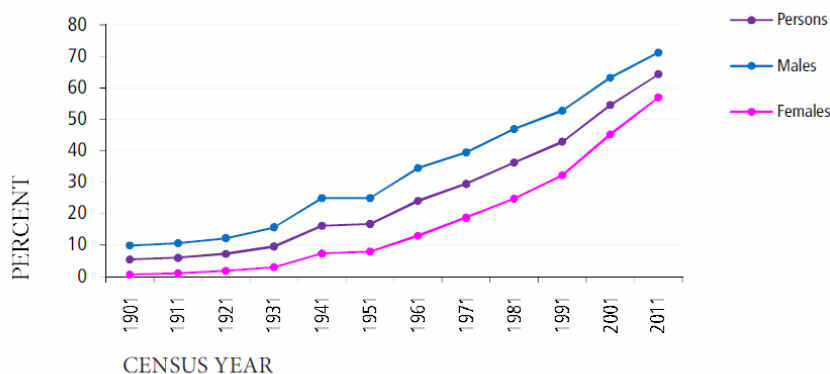
Gender Gap index 2013 (GGI) measures the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories – economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment. India ranks among the lowest 101 in 136 Countries, below Countries like China, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. This mirrors the status of women in India and gender discrimination in all aspects of life-education, economic activity and empowerment. Education is the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women. Amartya Sen makes a compelling case for the notion that societies need to see women less as passive recipients of help, and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation, suggesting that the education, employment and ownership rights of women have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment and contribute to economic development (Sen, 1999). Literacy and educational levels are increasing for Indian women still there is gap between male and female literacy rate which can be seen in the following Table.

Census Year	Crude Literacy Rate			Change in Percent Points		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1901	5.35	9.83	0.60	-	-	-
1911	5.92	10.56	1.05	0.57	0.73	0.45
1921	7.16	12.1	1.81	1.24	1.65	0.76
1931	9.5	15.59	2.93	2.34	3.38	1.12
1941	16.1	24.9	7.30	6.6	9.31	4.37
1951	16.67	24.95	7.93	0.57	0.05	0.63
1961	24.02	34.44	12.95	7.35	9.49	5.02
1971	29.45	39.45	18.69	5.43	5.01	5.74
1981	36.23	46.89	24.82	6.78	7.44	6.13
1991	42.84	52.74	32.17	6.61	5.85	7.35
2001	54.51	63.24	45.50	11.67	10.5	12.98
2011	64.32	71.22	56.99	9.81	7.98	11.84

The crude literacy rate has increased by almost 10 percentage points during the last decade. It surged forward by 12 percentage points in case of females while there was increase of 8 percentage points in male crude literacy rate during the last decade. The gap in crude literacy rates of males and females has decreased from 18.09 percentage points in 2001 to 14.23 percentage points in 2011

Table shows that the pre-Independence time literacy rate for women had a very poor stream in comparison to literacy rate of men. This can be witnessed from the fact that literacy rate of women has risen from 0.7% to 7.3 % while the literacy rate of men has risen from 9.8 % to 24.9 % during these four decades. The

Crude literacy rate by sex: 1901-2011



literacy rate of male has almost tripled over the period e.g. 25% in 1951 and 76 % in 2011. Government has undertaken various programmes to increase literacy rate. 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. From this analyse one can infer that only half of the female population are literates are wadding behind three fourth of the literate male population.

Women Empowerment: Issues and concerns

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. Indian woman is considered as shakti, which means power.

Empowerment calls for critical intervention by governments too. Interventions need neatly designed approaches with assigned roles for women and executed systematically. Women development and women empowerment are correlated conceptually and methodologically. Thus, promoting education among women is of great important in empowering them to accomplish their goals in par with men in different spheres of life, nurturing and sustaining a culture on unity, equity and dignity. Cultural and knowledge value-addition makes the case for social emancipation, political nurturing and economic empowerment that much stronger. Education makes women economically sound which is source of other types of women empowerment viz. Social, Psychological, Technological, Political. It enables them to overcome obstacles.

Obstacles to women empowerment

- Violence: Violence is the prime factor which opposes women's empowerment. Physical, emotional, mental torture and agony are deep rooted in the society from ancient times which are responsible for decline in female sex ratio.
- Gender inequality: Women empowerment is not only limited to economic independence of women; gender equality is the other side.
- Family restrictions: Illiterate guardians who are not willing to send their female children's to educational institutions.
- Early marriages: Early marriages results in dropouts from school. Lack of awareness on female education is also one of its causes.

Women's own perception of themselves and on their empowerment must be changed. They should also strive to change their image as weak, dependent, passive and try to become independent, active, strong and determined human beings.

Effectiveness of educational interventions on empowerment of women

Initiatives and Institutions According to the Human Development Report (1993) literacy is a person's first step in learning and knowledge building. So literacy indicators are essential for any measurement of human development. In India National Policy on Education (NPE) was set up in 1986 for the development of education and eradication of illiteracy. The higher rate of illiteracy of women is undoubtedly attributing for women to depend on men and to play a subordinate role. Within the framework of democratic polity, our legislation, development policies, plan and programmes have aimed for advancement of women in difference spheres. From the Fifth five year plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. The Mahila Samakhya Programme (Education for Women's Empowerment) started in 1987 focuses especially on the socially excluded and the landless women. This programme is an example of creative collaboration between the voluntary sector and the State In recent years, empowerment of women is considered 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 right and legal entitlements of women. The National Policy on Education (1986, revised in 1992) is perhaps the most luminous document on women's education. It emerged as a major breakthrough in addressing gender issues in government policy, which projected that education can be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) started in 1994 has a holistic approach to reducing gender and social disparities and universalising access, retention and achievement. Enrolment of girls has shown significant upward trend in DPEP districts as compared to non-DPEP districts. The 86th Constitutional Amendment made free and compulsory education a fundamental right for all children in the 6-14 age group which increased the enrolment of girls in schools that is 64.1% in 1980-81 to 85.2% in 1999-2000. The Government of India has declared 2001

as Women's Empowerment year. The national policy of empowerment of women has set certain clear-cut goals and objectives. The policy aims at upliftment, development and empowerment in socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects, by creating in them awareness on various issues human rights, fundamental freedom, providing access to health care, quality education at all levels, career building ,vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational opportunities, health, safety, social security and public life etc. in relation to their empowerment. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA – Education for All), which was launched in 2001-02, is the national umbrella programme that is spearheading the universalisation of elementary education through a community-owned approach, with a specific focus on the provision of quality education. One of the challenges accepted during the 12th Plan was establishing more Women's Universities. Inequality in education is a Global Issue. The highest levels of inequality in education were in South Asia (42 %), the Arab States (41 %) and Sub-Saharan Africa (37 %). There has been limited progress in reducing disparities in education, except in Europe and Central Asia (Human Development Report 2014).

Strategies for sociocultural empowerment of women

- 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"
- Confidence building in women that the change is possible, if women work collectively.
- Socio-economic participation of women in local and international forums need to be encouraged and ensured.
- Participation of women in income generating activities is to be encouraged. Proper implementation of schemes provided by the government should be done by respective agencies.
- The approach towards women based on sex discrimination needs a radical change.
- Promotion of feeling of self-dependence amongst women.
- Child bearing at young ages should be prevented by preventing early marriages.
- Removal of gender inequality.
- Women should actively participate in social and political moves. Fifty per cent seats should be reserved for women in all the government institutions and jobs.
- Spreading the message that education of women is a pre-condition for fighting against their oppression . 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.
- Eliminating all forms of discrimination in employment especially to eliminate wage differentials between men and women.
- In order to change the attitude towards female education and to raise the social consciousness of the country, a conscious strategic change is required in national media and communication effort.
- Education is capable of increasing women's sense of analysing which will support wider reforms in support of gender equality.
- Satellite schools for remote hamlets are to be introduced to increase the access.
- Encouraging women to use ICT tools and the use of internet, for their day to day work, study and research.
- Increasing real representation of women in political bodies and governance institutions in order to move from being objects of legislation to initiators of change,

III. 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 improvement, so if we have to see a bright future of women in our country, giving education to them must be a pre-occupation. Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power. The education of women is the most powerful tool to change the position of society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. To encourage the education of women at all levels and for dilution of gender bias in providing knowledge and education, established schools, colleges and universities even exclusively for women in the state. The education develops the idea of participation in government, panchayats, public matters etc. for elimination of gender discrimination

Hence, the evils of poverty, unemployment and inequality cannot be eradicated by man alone. Equal and active participation of women is obligatory. 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. 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 lifelong learning. That is true empowerment. From “women for development” the time has come to shift focus to “women in development”, with the cooperation of men through group engagement and management. That will indeed be a ‘quality’ change for equality. While being attracted by modernisation and globalization, we must be confident to say no to marginalisation.

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