

Women Empowerment through Education and Government Initiatives

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Abstract

Women are mostly admired and valuable but their contribution in the development scenario is negligible. They need to be empowered for the full development of the nation and society. Education can play an important role in empowering the women. The government has taken many measures to empower the women through education but still literacy rate in India for women is 65.5%. This paper discusses the empowerment of women through education in India and government initiatives taken to improve it.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Education, Government Initiatives

Introduction

Generally, empowerment is a social process, which calls out the imbalances of allocation of powers and relations (Yamuna, 2013). The social word dictionary defines empowerment as the process through which a group or community achieve political influence or relevant legal authority (Barker, 1991). It is a multidimensional process, which helps an individual or group to actualize their powers and potentials in every aspect of life. It is a broad term, which includes self-actualization, participation in decision-making, confidence and access to resources in fair and equal proportion. Thus, empowerment is associated with the power. It is a process of giving power to the weaker and to the powerless to maintain the balance. The women are one of the powerless sections of the society. Though, they constitute nearly half of the population of the world, their status in the society is considered inferior to the male members of the society. This perception of the subordinate position of the women has created an imbalance in the society. Therefore, the empowerment of the women is essential for creating balance in the society.

The term 'women empowerment' gained popularity in 1980s, when the United Nations Declaration the period from 1976-85 was declared as a decade for women. The issue of women empowerment emerged as a critical issue for the whole world in the 1985 at the International Women's Conference held at Nairobi. This conference defined the word empowerment as the redistribution of social powers and control of resources to the women. Empowerment of women is a multifaceted concept, which includes political, economic, physical as well as social aspect (Deka, 2008).

Hence, the term women empowerment means dispensing the powers to the women. It includes the authority to maintain and regulate their daily life in all aspects such as right to participate in social as well as political gathering, economic autonomy, awareness, right to take decisions about their education and life and other related factors. It is the breaking the chain of personal limitations.

Indicators of Empowerment

Empowerment is a complex issue as it varies according to the society, nation, culture and religion. The extent of the women empowerment in a society can be measured at two levels i.e. family level and society level.

At the family level, it can be measured through the extent of their participation in crucial decision-making processes such as her reproductive functions and family size, sharing of domestic work by men, their economic independence,, feeling and expression of pride and value in her work, extent of her self-confidence and self-esteem and ability to prevent violence.

At society level, it can be measured through extent of their participation in community programmes, productive enterprises, politics and arts, awareness of their social and political rights and exercising these legal rights when necessary and involvement of women in non-traditional tasks.

Need of Women Empowerment and Education

Women's are mostly admired and valuable but their contribution in the developmental scenario is negligible. For personal and social growth of society as well of women's it is essential to empower women. Women's empowerment helps the women to gain knowledge,

awareness, skills and techniques, which is prerequisite for the sensitivity towards society. For this purpose, education, employment and health of women's need special consideration. Economic empowerment is essential for enhancement of female sex ratio. Economically empowered women play a significant role in the wealth and well-being of their families as well as in the nation. This is possible only if the women's are educated. Women's are exploited and neglected everywhere only due to the lack of education. Therefore, education and literacy play major role in predicting the human development.

Education is the road to provide empowerment to women. It is a process, which aware women are about their rights, requirements and opportunities available to them. It forces the society to breaking down the stereotype nature, which restrict the women from demanding their rights from men in position to authority (Yamuna, 2013).It provides greater access to employment opportunities, which secure them economically. Education is not only about getting knowledge but it also helps the women to utilize that knowledge to develop their skills. High literacy rate leads to better health, economic growth and empowerment of the unprivileged sections of the society. Only education and literacy can enable women to figure out the legislative and constitutional provisions made to strengthen them. Education provides strength and power to women to overcome the obstacles.

Indian Scenario

From the last few years India is developed as a prominent nation for international business. It has been approximated that by the end of 2020, India will emerge as a more literate, knowledgeable and economically sound country. Contribution of women is essential for economic growth of the country. India needs its women's to be more empowered to become the largest economies in the world. Women have the ability to advance not only their own economic status but also the status of the community and the country to which they belong. Their economic contribution remains unrecognized and their work remains neglected. Gender Gap Index 2012 (GGI) measures the disparity among male and female in four major aspects- educational accomplishment, health and survival, opportunity and economic participation and political empowerment (Khatri, 2017). In the list of 135 countries, India ranks 105 which is lowest from the countries like China, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as shown in table 1:

Table 1:-Gender gap Index 2012

S. No.	Gender Gap sub-indices	Rank	Score
1.	Educational accomplishment	121	0.8525
2.	Health and survival	134	0.9312
3.	Opportunity and economic participation	123	0.4588
4.	Political empowerment	17	0.3343
	Overall Index	105	0.6442

Source: World Economic Forum (2012) Global Gender gap Index 2012.

Table1. Clearly shows the status of women in different dimensions. Except the political empowerment, the rank of women in other three aspects is above 100, which clearly shows that they need to be empowered for the growth of the country.

According to Census 2011, 48.49% of the country's population belongs to the women (Shetty and Hans, 2015). However, in India out of the whole population (1,210,193,422) only 77,84,54,120 individuals are literates. Women's constitutes only 65.5% of the literate population whereas literacy rate of male population is found to be 82.1%. Women literacy rate has stated increasing since 1981. Table 2 shows the female literacy rate according to census 2011.

Table 2:-Literacy rate: India 1981 to 2011

Year	Literacy rate			Gap in literacy
	Total Population	Male	Female	
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8	26.6
1991	52.2	64.1	39.3	24.8
2001	64.8	75.3	53.7	21.6
2011	74.1	82.1	65.5	16.6

Source: Census of India 2011

Note: Literacy rate for 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011 Census relates to the population aged seven years and above

Secondary schooling and skill based training is must to take part in market. The wages paid to the women having secondary education are higher than men (Khatri, 2017). Table

3.Shows the number of girls and boys enrolled in primary, middle and secondary education in India as per the Flash and DISE Statistics 2013-14.

Table 3:- Number of girls per 100 boys enrolled in school in India

Year	Primary (I-IV)		Upper Primary (V-VIII)		Secondary (IX-X)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
2009-10	697	639	317	278	169	138
2010-11	701	646	327	292	175	143
2011-12	726	672	331	299	186	155
2012-13	696	652	333	317	183	163
2013-14	686	638	341	323	197	176
2014-15	676	629	345	327	201	182

Source: Educational statistic at a glance 2014-15

Government Initiatives

India being a welfare state has a duty to work for the benefit of its citizens. The Constitution of India makes special provisions for the welfare and uplifting the life standard of weaker sections of the society including women. In the light of these provisions, the Indian parliament has enacted many women welfare laws. These laws aim to protect women from violence and exploitation as well as provide equality to women in all spheres of life.

The government initiative first started with the five year plans which made various provisions for women welfare, development and empowerment from time to time. The First Five Year Plan (1951-1956) and Second Five Year Plans (1956-1961) took measures to empower the women. However the Third Five Year Plan (1961-1966) and the Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-1974), taking into consideration the recommendations of International Women's Decade make provisions for welfare of women. However the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985) and onwards shifted the concept of women welfare to women development. It recognised the access to

resources as an obstacle to the women development. The Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-1990) first time stressed the need of training in skills for women empowerment. During this period National Policy on Education was adopted in 1986 which contained a full and separate chapter on education for women's equality.

The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997) gave political empowerment to the women. The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) shifted the concept of development to empowerment completely. The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) totally aimed at empowerment of women as a result of which National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) was put into action. The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) made efforts to increase the number of beneficiaries of women welfare programmes.

National Policy of Education (1986) was adopted during the Seventh Five Year Plan and was revised in 1992. In 1990 the National Commission for Women was established by the Act of Parliament to protect the rights and legal entitlements of women. The Revised National Policy on Education (1992) is the most significant document on women's education. It addressed the gender issue by stating that education can play a central role in uplifting the status of women. In 1994 District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was stated as a comprehensive approach to eradicate gender and social discrimination and providing universal access to each child. Due to this approach rise in enrolment of girls has been seen. The government through the 86th Constitutional Amendment made education as a fundamental right of the every child. It made compulsory for the state to provide free and compulsory education to the children's belonging to the 6-14 age groups. Due to this step enrolment rate of girls has increased from 64.1% in 1980-81 to 85.2% in 1999-2000. The year 2001 is declared as a Women's Empowerment year by the government of India.

National Policy for empowerment of Women was adopted in 2001. It aimed at upliftment, development and empowerment in socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects. The policy has objectives to provide equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic realms of life. It also emphasized the equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels career and vocational guidance.

Besides this various schemes and programmes has been launched by government such as:

- Mahila Samkhya programme, 1987 (Education for Women's Empowerment)
- Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, 2000
- Rajiv Gandhi Scheme For Empowerment Of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) –SABLA, 2010
- Hostels for Working Women
- Beti Bachao Bati Padhao Scheme etc.

Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be concluded that government has taken many initiatives to uplift the women. Various plans, policies and programmes have been launched to educate and empower the women. There exist a direct relation between education and empowerment. The efforts taken by the government to empower through education has resulted in upliftment and empowerment of women to some extent. However way to empowerment is a long way and it can be achieved through education only. As education makes the women financially and socially strong, it can be proved a big milestone in empowering the women. The need of the hour is to implement these policies and programmes strictly in letter and spirit, so that women can be empowered in real sense.

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