

# Education: A Key Factor of Women Empowerment

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## ABSTRACT

Education is the backbone of a nation. A nation can never be progressed if its women are not educated. Discrimination and inequality for women from womb to tomb is well known. Women strength comes from the process of empowerment and empowerment will come from the education. In Vedic age Women had right to be educated like men. They had right to perform 'yajna' like male 'Ṛṣi' <sup>1</sup>. In the mediaeval age the position of women decreased at bottom. In modern era, in spite of several legislative regulations and acts, the education discrimination between men and women still exists. In India we worship various goddesses in the form of mother, daughter etc. But only respecting women can never fulfill the development of a nation. In order to provide equal status in the society women need to be educated to unlock the golden door of empowerment. Therefore the purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of literacy and education on empowerment of women as well as the affirmative suggestions to improve the changes that need to be considered for women empowerment and economic development.

## 1. Introduction

*Empowerment of women leads to development of a good family, good society, and ultimately a good nation.*

-A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Education is that qualification which not only completes human being with the enlightenment of knowledge and power but also builds a nation strong and progressive. Every child has a right to equal educational opportunities. It is very painful to state that women education is still neglected due to gender bias. Education increases empowerment of a nation. Education and empowerment substitute for each other. Higher level of literacy and education leads to better attainment of health, population control, economic growth, nutritional status, empowerment of the weaker sections and community as whole. In the society men are always empowered but women are considered to play the role of a domestic servant, to bring up children, to fulfill all the wishes of family. But an ideal society, nation can never be built without active participation of women. An empowered woman is the wealth of a nation. An educated mother can rare up her child with all forms of knowledge. According to a proverb, "An educated mother is a hundred times valuable than a teacher." In order to provide equal status in the society, women need to be empowered. Education is the milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to face to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life.

With the evolution of changing society women empowerment is increasing day by day. Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International Women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, in favor of women <sup>2</sup>. The United Nation's Organization had announced the year 1976-1985 as women's decade on an international level <sup>3</sup>. Women empowerment not only leads to the benefit of an individual woman or women groups, but also to the families and community as a whole through collective action for development. Women empowerment can never happen until

they achieve higher education. In India women education plays a vital role for the overall development of a country.

## 2. Women Education and Empowerment in Vedic Era

There is no clear evidence about women education in Veda. But the efficiency of women education can be easily found through hypothesis and epistemology. The Brāhmaṇa, the Kṣatriya and the Vaiśya women had complete right to read Veda. Even they had performed the role of instructor. We can see a lot of female Ṛṣi, Adhyāpikā, Śiṣyā, Tapasvinī, Brahmācārīnī, Brahmavādinī in various mantras of Saṁhitā. Among the female Ṛṣi Viśvavārā, Lopāmudrā, juhu, Paulomī etc are specifically notable for their efficiency <sup>4</sup>. There are twenty seven female Ṛṣi in the book of Bṛhaddevatā. Nodhā, Gopāyānā, Śimatā etc had been immortalized in Sāmaveda. At that time there was a ritual of female Upanayana <sup>5</sup>. They pronounced the mantra of Brahmagāyatrī. Female Upanayana was a regulation in the Vedic era. It is said by Smṛtikāra Yama:

*"Purākālpe kumārīṇāṁ maunībāndhanam iṣyate /  
Adhyāpanam ca vedānāṁ sāvitṛvacanam tathā /"* <sup>6</sup>

This custom declines during the Indo- Aryan period. The introducing of women education and empowerment is notable in the time of the Mahabharata. The evidence of women empowerment is found from the words of Adhyāpikā, Āchāryā, Upādhyāyā. These incidents are actually the instance of liberty, education and empowerment.

In ancient India, women enjoyed equal status with men. They were educated. They were trained in the art of warfare by choice. The Ṛgveda mentions about some warrior queens. Viśpalā and Mudgalānī are trained in the art of warfare, a true example of women empowerment. The character of Viśpalā is further explored by Saiswaroopa Iyer in her book Avishi, which was recently released. Women had freedom to choose their husband at a matured age. Everybody is familiar with the concept of 'Svayamvara' where a woman has the liberty to

select their husband of her own choice from amongst a group of suitors. The instance of women empowerment is noticeable in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Gārgī and Maitreyī mentioned in the Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad are the examples of women education and empowerment. Maitreyī often involved in the logical dialogues with her husband Yājñavalkya. Yājñavalkya, a scholar, philosopher, elucidated his most significant and philosophical ideas to two women namely Gārgī and Maitreyī.

### 3. Women Education and Empowerment in Mediaeval Era

In the mediaeval period there are scattered a lots of examples that proved women education and empowerment in India. Rani Rudramani Devi of Warangal, the queen of Keladi; Velu Nachiyar, the queen of sivagangai, Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, Jhalkaribai etc are the archetypes of women empowerment. It is so painful to say that the women education and empowerment was not to continue for long. After the Islamic invasion, the education, empowerment, status for women gradually decreased. Women were permissioned to get training in the fine arts i.e. dancing, music, painting from early time. In the different books, we can see that the ganikas or the courtesans and nautch girls had a recognized place in the society. Even they were honored by village assemblies for their public benefaction. In the Mughal period Purdah and child marriage had become common. The Muslims women observed Purdah much more than Hindus. Another custom among Hindu Rajput women is Jauhar. In both of the systems, liberty of women was crucified by their family, community and society. At the time of British Period in spite of all these examples, status, education and empowerment of women were underprivileged. They were not having any right to claim succession in the property of their own family members. Though, women played very important role in the freedom fight against British Raj. Annie Besant, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sarojini Naidu are the great example of women empowerment <sup>7</sup>. Many social workers, i.e. - Raja Rammohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and many more had fought for women education and empowerment. In the time of British rule they fought against all the evil custom in our society and gave them chance to make themselves empowered.

### 4. Women Education and Empowerment in Modern Era

In the Modern era, there is a new hope for women education and empowerment. During the last few decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, excessive change had happened in the role, ambitions and attitude of women. Women have departed from their traditional role of reproducers, mothers, and wives only. Being educated, they have been able to establish their independent identity from insubstantiality. But still women feel insecure, unhappy and dissatisfied with their position and

social empowerment. They have played multiple roles in life. Modern women have proved that they are second to none not only in home but also at outside. The mentality of women has been changed. Now a days they have encircled themselves into various professions such as schools, industries, media, politics, administrations, armed force, IT sectors etc. They are working 'shoulder- to- shoulder' with men almost in every field. They are now educated, independent, and empowered <sup>8</sup>. They worked hard to get equality, liberty and after all opportunity.

In the present time, the active participation of women is noticeable in every field. The presence and activity of women are visible from the seabed to the space, from the field of politics to the playground. Srimati Pratibha Patil, Kalpana Chawla, Saina Newhal, Sania Mirza, Indra Nooyi, Arundhati Bhattchariya, Mitali Raj, Nishita Matre etc are the burning example of women empowerment in this 21th century. The darkness under women empowerment in the present time is clearly visible just like 'the near the church, the further from god'. In modern age, with the improvement of human mind women empowerment is progressing just like a turtle's speed. The percentage of increasing women empowerment is much more notable in the whole World, but in India we cannot see so much progression. We have to be aware of those obstacles which create complications in the path of women empowerment.

### 5. Challenges of Women Education and Empowerment

#### 1. Educational Bias:

Education is the birth right of every people. As a car disables without fuel, human being also incapacitate without education. Education is only the search-light to find empowerment for women. After the independence, India has grown from leaps and bounds where the gap between men and women is severe. By declaring as a fundamental right, India ensures constitutional provisions for providing free and compulsory education to all children between 6-14 years of age. There are numerous difficulties that prohibit a girl or woman from actually getting education. According to census 2011, whereas male literacy rate is 82.14%, only 65.46% of adult female are literate in India <sup>9</sup>. The literacy gap between male and female has several reasons. Domestic duty, social factor, conservative mentality, lack of adequate education facilities, lack of women teachers for the women education etc are the main factors of being illiterate women in India. Defective policies are also obstructed for women education. The following table proved the educational discrimination between male and female clearly:

Table 1: Literacy rate in India1951-2011

Census Year	Persons (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Literacy Gap (%)
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98

1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India, 2011

## II. Unequal Mortality:

Healthy women always get better empowerment. So they have to get proper nutrition. But unfortunately due to gender bias in health and nutrition, the mortality rate among women is reducing women population. The maternal health care among Indian women is very poor. In the report of UNESCO, 2009 stated a shocking figure on the status of newly mother of India<sup>10</sup>. The maternal mortality in India is 301 per 1000. With as many as 78000 (approx.) women are dying of childbirth complication in India. Some steps are taken by government and NGO. They are trying to reduce the mortality that exists till now in our society. Education gives power to women to become strong by giving them knowledge of health-related aspects; this will definitely benefit their mental health also.

## III. Child Marriage:

According to report of UNICEF, 2014, child marriage is a global problem affecting 15 millions girls per year. Despite national laws and international agreement, child marriage remains a real and present threat to the human rights, lives, health, especially girls. Moreover, according to UNFPA today, one in three girls in low and middle income countries marries before the age of eighteen. Such a large age gap between partners can make it difficult for girls to assert their rights. Due to lack of adequate education, the guardian prompted their daughters to marry before the age of eighteen. As a result, the girls suffer a lot such as domestic violence, early pregnancy, sexual violence etc.

## IV. Professional Bias:

Due to professional discrimination, women always faced lots of problem in male customized and dominated environment in government and private sectors. They are molested in and out, home and office by physically and mentally. Having same abilities with men to do the job, they always are victimized for the discrimination.

## 6. Steps for Women Education and Empowerment

After getting the independence, the constitution framers were well known of the issue of women education and empowerment. The principles of gender equality, women empowerment are inclusive in Indian constitution. The constitution of India provides us provisions to secure equality in general and gender equality in particular. The constitution of India has different articles that safeguard women's right by putting them at par with men economically, socially and of course politically. The preamble, the fundamental rights, different state policies provide the light on the way of women empowerment.

### ❖ Constitutional Preamble:

The constitutional preamble of India ensures justice, social, economical and political equality of status and

opportunity, dignity to the individual both men and women equal.

### ❖ Fundamental Rights of Women:

In the constitution of India, education is the fundamental rights to all Indian people. There are also many policies for women empowerment as the Fundamental Rights<sup>11</sup>. The following are given in below:-

- Article 14 ensures to women the right to equality.
- Article 15(1) specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.
- Article 15(3) empowers the state to take affirmative steps in favor of women.
- Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office.

These fundamental rights are justifiable in court and the Government is obliged to follow the same.

### ❖ Directive Principles of State Policy:

Directive Principles of State Policy holds important provision regarding women empowerment and it is the responsibility of the government to implement these principles while making laws. These policies are not justifiable in the court but essential for the government. Some of them are-

- Article 39(A) ensures that the state to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to a sufficient means of livelihood.
- Article 39(D) provides equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- Article 42 mandates that the state to make provision for securing just and human condition of work and for maternity relief.

### ❖ Laws for women Empowerment in India:

The parliament of India has passed some specific laws in order to fulfill constitutional obligations for women empowerment. Some of them are bellow:

- The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
- The Commission of Sati(Prevention) Act, 1987
- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Protection and) Act, 2013.

In spite of the above mentioned laws, there are several other laws which not only provide specific legal rights to women but also give them a sense of security and empowerment.

## ❖ Government Schemes and Policies:

### 1. Women Education:

The government of India has initiated various programs and policies to ensure that a girl does not miss out any opportunity of getting education. After independence, the government of India had set up different committee to make women proper educated. Such as:

- National Committee on Women's education, 1958. It recommended that female education should be at par with male education.
- The Education Commission, 1964. It talked about focusing on educating the girl child.
- New Education Policy, 1968. It focused on the overall education at both rural and urban areas.

The government of India has announced '*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*' to make girls educated and empowered. The state government of West Bengal has also declared '*Kanyashree Prakalpa*' to motivate girls for getting school education.

### 2. Women Empowerment:

The Indian Government has launched different schemes and policies in favor of women empowerment. In the year 2001, a national policy has been introduced for the empowerment of women. The objectives of the policy are as follows:

- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of a nation.
- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.
- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, employments, safety, security etc.

There are lots of schemes of the government of India such as Swa-shakti, Swayamsiddha, Swawlamban, Swadhar Greh, Nari Shakti Puraskar, Ujjawala etc, which not only make women empowered but also enriches themselves in the field of social, political and economic life.

Ministry of women and child development of India has drafted a National Policy of Women, 2016 to create a society in which women are able to involve themselves to change their status completely<sup>12</sup>. The objectives of this policy are as follows:

- Creating a graceful socio-cultural and political environment to enable women enjoys *de jure* and *de facto* fundamental rights and realize their full potential.
- Mainstreaming gender in all round development processes.
- Improving and incentivizing access of women/girls to universal and quality education.
- Increasing and incentivizing work force participation of women in the economy.
- Equal participation in the social, political and economic spheres including the institutions of governance and decision making, etc.

### 7. Conclusion and Suggestion

At last, it can be said that women education and empowerment is a great footstep in this *micro-world*. It is time to think about women education system which has been continuing for a prolonged period. The social status, position, education, and empowerment of first- world's women is better than Indian women. The Rural Indian women education still exists in backward. In spite of so many programs and policies of the government, we are still unable to provide adequate education to the girl child and women. The problem here is not in implementation but in the commitment of people in general. Until we create awareness amongst people about the benefits of women education all these programs would not bring about the desired result. We fail to understand that education and empowerment are the two sides of the same coin. A girl is as much a part of the society as is a boy. We are still far behind in achieving the equality and justice which the preambles of our constitution talk about. The real problem lies in the Patriarchal and male dominated system of our society which consider women as subordinate to men and creates types of methods to subjugate them. The males have to change their dominative mentality for women. Some certain changes inside mind-set of women as well as men are required. Every people play some essential role in society so why we consider women is secondary to men. Technology has developed in modern times and it has been proved that around 2020, India will establish itself as one of the leading countries and its business will spread all over the world. Therefore, we can say that the role of women in building an appropriate nation will increase if we provide proper education for women.

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