

Educated Women Empowered Women

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ABSTRACT

Education opens a whole new world of opportunities for a women, it gives her the confidence to tackle different problems of life, become economically independence, make better choice, resolve family or community issues satisfactorily, stand for her rights and guide her children. The journey to become a successful nation begins with Universal Education for Women. India can reach its true potential as a nation only when its women population are equipped with the power of education.

Neglecting the education of women, who constitute nearly half of population, does auger well for the development of any nation. Beyond the obvious imbalance in the labour pool, education for women is an important determinant of their enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence, helping to build a positive image, developing their ability to think critically, fostering better decision making and helping them make more informed choices about health, employment and even the education of their children. Education will not only ensure more participation in developmental processes, but also enhance awareness of rights and entitlements in society, so that women can enhance their participation in society on an equal footing in all areas. The economic independence that education brings is an added incentive. Economic independence and awareness will help curtail the vicious cycle of reinforcing negative stereotypes and aid women in chartering paths as individuals in their own right, contributing to society, polity and the economy.

1. Introduction

Empowerment of women involves many things - economic opportunity, property rights, political representation, social equality, personal rights and so on. The process of empowerment is taking place at so many levels at that it is quite difficult to gauge the actual nature and extent of empowerment in improving status of women. Certainly the process is entangled in struggles of civil society against the state, and under the weight of historical practice and ongoing debates over the appropriate role of ideologies.

Historically the world over, either by law or buy custom, the status of women is undermined by asymmetrical power relationships in decision- making, personal and social rights, access to resources and entitlements. Women in many countries still lack rights to inherit property, own land, get educated, obtain credit, earn income or work outside home, control their fertility. They are still widely under presented in this involvement in decision-making at the household or social level. Empowerment by means of modest income-generating projects is clearly insufficient to ameliorate the prospectus for a higher quality of life for women.

The question that needs to be answered is that in a society where men control the destiny of women how is it possible to empower women? Before we discuss practical and associated difficulties in the process of empowerment of women let us look at what does the SHGs do for her active members (Didis).

Some Didis (member of SHGs) at grassroots' levels view for empowerment through education is shared here.

1. Education is creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realise their full potential and also support and full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal

basis with men in all spheres-political, economic, social, cultural and civil.

2. Education can give equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation and equal access of women to healthcare, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
3. Education is strengthening legal system aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women and also mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
4. Through education, possible the elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child and also building and strengthening partnership with civil society, particularly women's organisation.
5. The social welfare policies are built on the premise that women lack power, they are denied basic rights as individuals, have limited income and access to resources, it is clear that efforts to improve income and living conditions (the basis of the early social welfare approach) are insufficient in empowering women unless consideration of the basic features of society are brought into the equation and the responsibility of states to address its negative effects is addressed.
6. Policy-makers must also take note to the resistance women have faced in their entry into public space, and co-ordinate vigorous efforts to continue legal

reforms and enhance women's participation in social, economic and political spheres.

Although education is essential for everyone but in case of women it is particularly significant. Education not only opens up vast avenues and opportunity for growth but affects families and future generations as well. Education plays an important role in bringing about awareness on women's rights. Educating a girl child is one of the most effective means to counter gender discrimination and enhance status of women, and higher Education would contribute much more effectively in abolishing gender inequality. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. Educated women are likely to have jobs, marry later and have small and healthy families. Educated women can recognise the importance of healthcare and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Educated mother can pay quality attention to the needs of their children effectively. Usually children's educational attainments are linked to the education of parents, and the mother's education is certainly more influential than the father's as she is primary source of influence on children during early years of socialization. An educated mother's greater influence in household negotiations may allow her to secure more resources for her children. Education of women is a step in direction of ensuring gender equality; education empowers women to make decisions about themselves, their families and their communities.

Post independence, there has been a concerted attempt to improve literacy level of the population in India. Many schemes have been introduced to increase the access, expand coverage and improve the quality of education. Amongst them, the universalisation of elementary education, incentive schemes for retention and non formal education for adults are noteworthy for their scope and intent. Although over the years, India's literacy rate has improved manifold from 12% in 1947 to 70.4 % in 2011, but if we look at the percentage of educated people, there is a huge gap between male like 82.4%, in 2011 and female 65.46%, in 2011 literacy rates in India. Low women literacy rate has huge negative impact on the overall growth and development of the society. (Sources Census Report of India-1947 & 2011) We can summarise the reasons as to why the education is indispensable for women as follows:

- **Social development:** Kothari Commission of 1968 recommend education as a tool for social development. By pacing women education in India, the country can achieve the goal of social development as it will help to solve many issues faced by society.
- **Gender Equality:** It is perceived that woman is part of unprivileged section of society in India. Education is the only tool which can prevent the society from this myth and will help to close a gender gap in society.
- **Economic Productivity:** Educated women can bring in more productive linkage, backward and forward both, which can bring in fruits in multiple accounts. An educated woman means an educated foundation and hence generation of more productive resources. It will not only bring economic gains to women, but will also raise GDP of a nation.

- **Reduction in Infant Mortality:** A well educated woman will have more chances of making better decisions for family's health. Studies have shown that increased literacy among women will bring down infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate and higher the life expectancy.
- **Improved Living Standard:** Education will improve chances of employment for women and hence they can contribute to their family income. This in turn result in better living standards for entire family.
- **Women Empowerment:** Education is powerful tool for women emancipation and empowerment. It's been for long that women have been deprived of her rights in society. By educating herself, she can achieve a place in society also they are less likely to be taken advantage of and lower exposure to domestic abuse.
- **Better Future Prospects:** Women who are educated are able to take charge of their future and also play an important role in shaping the future of their family by bringing up their children in a better way by making them aware and accessible to better opportunities and prospects which are, by and large, ignored by an educated woman or mothers.
- **Holistic and Inclusive Development of the Society:** When women are included in key decision making positions, they take holistic decision for the development of the society.

2. Women's education in India is hampered at different stages

In most of the developing world around the globe including India, women are often denied of education opportunities. Even though, women constitutes 48% of the total population in India- the women literacy rate in urban areas is 79.11% as against 88.76% males, and the figures are even lower in the rural scenario where 57.93% women are literate as against 77.15% literate males. India's GDP growth percentage can be drastically improved if women are educated and start contributing equality in the economy. (Sources Census Report of India-2011)

Why do the statistics reflecting women's literacy, their enrolment in primary, secondary and higher Education or their dropout rates read so poorly? What do they tell us about women's access to education? What systematic errors have in this and what can be done to remedy the situation? This section highlights some of the barriers of women's education.

Some of the barriers of women's education are sociological, rooted in gender stereotyping and gender stagnation and other driven in economic concerns and constraints.

A consequence of gender profiling and stereotyping is that when the parents cannot afford education for their kid, the son is always given preference over the daughter, if at all they try and send them to school. The daughter or women tend to participate more in programmes that relates to their domestic roles. Therefore, the school dropout rates amongst growth rate of adolescent girls stand at 63.5%.

If the daughter wants to go for higher studies, it becomes a matter of discussion among parents, relatives, neighbours. A mindset that views education for girls as unlikely to reap any

returns ascribes to the views that investing in the education of the male child is like an investment as the sun is likely to be responsible for caring for aging parents, and women with largely a reproductive in society have little need for education and any gains from it are anyway likely to accrue to the homes they go to after marriage. Hence, educating the girl child is sometimes viewed as an unnecessary and extravagant indulgence.

We live in a society where the upbringing of children still depends largely on the mother. What good are we going to pass on the next generation if that mother is literate? The chances are that her own daughter might become an illiterate mother one day, thus continuing the vicious cycle.

Despite the clear advantages of female education, parents tend to prefer to educate their sons. A girl's role in life is often perceived solely as a link to the household, expenditure on her formal education may thus be seen as a waste of resources. It is commonly perceived that she would be married into another family and would take with her any advantage, she gains from education. In nearly every country, parents view daughter's education as secondary to her role as homemaker, women work longer hours than men, but are usually paid less. This has implications for investments on education and families are less inclined to invest in the education of their daughters as compared to sons.

The policy of the Government of India for empowerment and development of women lays emphasis on removal of women's literacy and obstacles inhibiting their access to elementary education, women's participation in vocational, technical and professional education at different levels. The Government also lays stress on non-discrimination, thus seeking to eliminate sex stereotyping in vocational and professional courses. It actively promotes women's studies as a part of various courses and encourages educational institutions to take up programs to further women's development, and to promote women's participation in non-traditional occupation and existing and emerging technologies.

As a consequence of the measures taken by the Government, the literacy rate of woman has gone up from 54.16% in 2001 to 65.46 % in 2011. In fact, the increase in female literacy by 11.30% outpaced that for male literacy 6.31%. The male-female literacy gap has reduced from 21.70% in 2001 to 16.68% in 2011. Still, the rate of literacy among males is higher than female. The male literacy rate has increased to 82.14%, which shows an increase of 6.31%. On the other hand, the female literacy of 65.46 % has increased at a much faster rate of 11.30%. Although literacy and school enrolment among both boys and girls has increased. The efforts more than two third of the world's 960 million illiterates are women.

Table :1
Literacy Rate in India

Census Year	Persons	Males	Females	Male-Female Gap in Literacy Rate
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	65.38	75.83	54.16	21.70
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

(Source: Census Report to India 1951 to 2011)

3. Policies and Programme

There are many reforms and strategies by the government towards the betterment of women education in India. Government has developed various schemes and programmes for empowerment of women. Some of these initiatives are taken in education for women empowerments discuss in brief here.

1. Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan: Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan the flagship programme for universalisation of elementary education has special focus on disadvantaged groups including the girl child. In addition the mid day meal scheme has also improved girls involvement and primary school. SSA strategy proposed to realise the ambitious target of Universal of Primary Education by 2010. Launched in 2000, SSA covered all districts in phased manner. SSA incorporated the provision of Operation Black Board and District Primary Education Programme, appropriately modifying the strategies approaches based on the learning from the past efforts. The scheme endeavours to fulfil the following conditions of Universal Primary Education:

- Provision to easy access to an educational facility for all children in eligible age group 6 to 14 years.
- Universal intake of 6 years old children informal, non-formal or alternative modes of education.
- Universal retention throughout the primary and upper primary cycle.
- Universal transition from primary to upper primary cycle of education.
- Comparable and satisfactory level of achievement by all students in primary and upper primary grades.

2. Right to Education (RTE): Right to Education considered education as a fundamental right which will provide free and compulsory education to every child aged between 6 to 14 years. The right to education is legally guaranteed for all without any discrimination. States have the obligation to protect, respect and fulfil the right to education.

3. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya: Gender disparities still persist in rural areas and among disadvantaged communities. To overcome such disparity, the said programme was launched with the aim to ensure that the quality education

is fashionable and accessible to the girls of disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level.

4. National Programme for Education to Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL): The NPEGEL, is a focused intervention of Government of India, to reach the 'Hardest to Reach' girls, especially those not in school. It is for a reduction in the school dropouts by giving special attention to weak girls. In villages, women's group are formed to follow up/supervision on girl's enrolment, attendance. The scheme is being implemented in educationally backward blocks. Where the level of female literacy is less than the national average and the gender gap is above the national average.

5. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan: The scheme was launched with the objective to enhance access to Secondary Education and to improve its quality. It is envisaged to achieve an enrolment rate of 75% at secondary stage of implementation by providing a secondary school within the reasonable distance of any habitation. Infrastructure facilities, such as additional classrooms, laboratories, libraries art and craft rooms, toilet blocks, drinking water provisions and residential hostels for girls and teachers in remote areas, where given top priority under this scheme.

6. Rajiv Gandhi scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (SABLA): It enables the adolescent girls for self development and empowerment. It aims to upgrade home based skills, life skills and integrate with the National Skill Development Programme for vocational skills. It helps in spreading the awareness to the mainstream out of school adolescence girls for getting into formal, non-formal education. It also promotes awareness about health, hygiene, nutrition, adolescence reproductive and sexual health, family and child care.

7. Samagra Shiksha: Under this Scheme, school education is treated holistically from pre-nursery to class 12. Samagra Shiksha has been prepared with the goal of improving school effectiveness measured in terms of equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes. It subsumes the three schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE). Two very critical component of this program are Digital Education and Skill Development.

The focus of digital education is on technology based classrooms. It also implies enhanced use of digital technology in education through smart classrooms, digital boards and DTH channels and strengthening of ICT infrastructure in schools from upper primary to higher secondary level. Technology would also be used to improve access and for provision of quality education. Another feature of this scheme highly connected to youth empowerment is 'skill development'. In the endeavour of reinforce emphasis on 'Kaushal Vikas', the skill development aspect focuses on strengthening of vocational education at the secondary level by integrating it in the curriculum. Vocational education at this stage would also be made more practical and industry oriented. Industry oriented education is an approach to learning from an industry perspective where traditional subjects such as maths, physics and science are taught in the context of application of that knowledge to product design, development and operation. The idea is to enable Students to graduate from high school with industrial oriented learning experience prior to their first job.

8. Saakshar Bharat Mission for female literacy: Another initiative of Government of India goes beyond '3' 'R's that is reading, Writing & Arithmetic. It seeks to create awareness of social disparities. It aims to create a literary society through a variety of teaching learning programmes for non-literate and neo-literate of 15 years and above. The objective of the scheme is achieving 80% literacy level at national level, by focusing on adult women literacy so as to reduce the gap between male and female literacy. The four key elements of the programme are imparting functional literacy and numeracy to non-literates, acquiring equivalency to formal educational system, imparting relevant skill development programme, and promote a learning society by providing opportunities for continuing education. However the principal target of the program is to impart functional literacy to 70 million non-literate adults in the age group of 15 year and beyond.

9. Jan shikshanSansthan (JSS): The scheme of Jan ShikshanSansthan is a unique scheme of Government of India. The Jan ShikshanSansthan are unique in that do not provide just skill development, but link literacy with vocational skills to provide Life Enrichment Education (LEE) to the people. The aim is to shape their beneficiaries into self-reliant and self associate employees and entrepreneurs. The Jan ShikshanSansthan is unique also because they offer quality vocational skills and technical knowledge at a very low cost. They also provide need based and literacy linked vocational training in most courses without insisting on age limit for educational qualification, reach out to the clientele in their areas, offer a multifaceted skill-knowledge-awareness enhancement and outlook formation trainings and inputs and empowerment-oriented intervention in respect of social, economic and health status improvement of women and adolescence girls.

10. Digital India: Another programme linked to youth empowerment is the Digital India campaign. Launched by the Government of India, it aims to ensure that the Government's services are made available to citizens electronically by improved online infrastructure and by increasing internet connectivity or by making the country digitally empowered in the field of technology. The initiative includes connecting rural areas with high-speed internet networks. Digital India consists of three core components, the development to secure and stable digital infrastructure, delivering government services digitally and universal digital literacy. 'Digital India is a program to prepare India for in knowledge future'. The aim is to prepare India for the knowledge based transformation and delivering good governance to citizen synchronised and coordinated engagement with both Central Government and state Government. Digital empowerment of citizens will pay emphasis on universal digital literacy and availability of digital resources or services in Indian languages. The overall goal is to make very household digitally literate to make India the global knowledge hub, with IT being a major driver and engine of growth.

11. National scholarship: It is a well-known fact that the cost of higher studies has only increased over the years and this cost is likely to continue moving upwards. Many deserving students in India not able to afford the cost of higher studies due to financial challenges. To aid the cause of such talented and deserving students, the Government of India has stepped

in to provide a level-playing field to all students irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds. The national Scholarship Portal is the Government of India's initiatives to provide financial assistance to deserving students by provide financial assistance to deserving students by awarding them scholarship to pursue higher education. The National Scholarship Portal is a unique and simplified platform to help students get benefits of educational scholarship in an efficient and transparent manner. It is a one-stop solution through which a number of services like student application, application receipt; processing, sanction and disbursement of various scholarships to students are enabled. National scholarship Portal is taken as Mission Mode Project under the national e-Governance Plan.

12. National Apprenticeship Training Scheme: The National Apprenticeship Training Scheme in India is a one year programme equipping technically qualified youth with practical knowledge and skills required in their field of works. The Apprentices are imparted training by the organisation at their place of work. Trained Managers with well developed training modules ensure that Apprentices learn the job quickly and competently. During the period of apprenticeship, the apprentices are paid a stipend amount, 50% of which is reimbursable to the employer from Government of India. At the end of the training period, the apprentices are issued a certificate to Proficiency by Government of India which can be registered at all employment exchanges across India as valid climate experience.

13. All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE): Schemes under All India Council for Technical Education have various, schemes and special scholarship to promote technical education. Some of these schemes include Post Graduate Scholarship is for qualified students admitted to /M.E./M.Tech/M.Arch. and M.Pharm courses in AICTE approved Colleges/Institutions. Prime Minister's Special Scholarship Scheme which aims to built up capacities in youth of Jammu Kashmir, Pragati Scholarship for girls pursuing Diploma and Undergraduate Degree level AICTE approved institutions programmes/courses, Saksham Scholarship for differently able students, AICTE-Intra Travel Grant Scheme for engineering students who want to present paper per abroad, Prerana Scheme for preparing SC/ST students for higher education, Samridhi Scheme for SC/ST students for sitting in Start-Ups, National Doctoral Fellowship for the scholars who seek admission to Ph.D. in AICTE approved Technical Institutes/University Departments for carrying out research, Support to Students for Participating in Competition abroad aims to provide travel assistance registration fee to a team of students for attending competition at international level, Smart India Hackathon and M.Tech Project as Internship with Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Scheme to nurture and innovation ecosystem. Some other Schemes which would be useful to youth include Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship (scheme), Junior Research Fellowship and DBT Junior Research Fellowship programme.

14. The National Post Doctoral Fellowship: The National Post Doctoral Fellowship is aimed to identify motivated young researchers and provide them support for doing research in science and engineering. This is given by the Department of Science and Technology. The Department also has a Women Scientist Scheme wherein women are given fellowship to conduct research in the area of science and

technology. The fellows will work under a mentor who helps them to develop as an independent researcher. Junior Research Fellowships are given by Indian Council of Medical Research to candidates in the areas of biomedical sciences, life sciences and social sciences. Department of Biotechnology JRF program provides fellowships for biotech students pursuing research in universities and Research institutions in the country. 250 fellowships can be awarded every year under this Scheme.

Young people especially girls in all countries are a major human resources for development and key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation. Hence, investing in them is essential for the continuous development of nation and societies in which day live. Since they are the essential workforce of a country, the problems that young people face as well as their vision and aspiration are essential components of the challenges and prospects of today's societies and future generations. There is also a critical need to involve a young people in decisions that will affect them. At this time, when India is governed by the targets laid down in Sustainable Development Goals, development without the active involvement of youth may not be possible. Their ideas are the key to harness the demographic dividend and would pave the way to hold human rights, gender equality, human capital and dignity at the centre of all investments.

Education is the cornerstone of women's empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities, to challenge their traditional roles and to change their lives. Educating women benefit the whole of society. It has a more significant impact on poverty and development than men's education. It is also the most influential factor in improving child health and reducing infant mortality. Women's education also has an effect on family size. The more years of education a woman has, the higher is the degree of her independence. Education would actually accord women certain advantage in areas where women have historically lacked access or differential rights. Education would empower women to achieve many social, psychological, economic and political dreams which are denied to her traditionally.

The Indian society has accorded differential status of women from time to time. In ancient India, women enjoyed almost equal status with men, during the mediaeval era, the status of women vis-a-vis went down considerably. The position of women in Modern India has changed significantly. Women are striving to achieve equality socially, economically, educationally, political and legally.

Constitution of India guarantees equal rights of men and women. Despite the advantage women have made in many societies, women's concerns are still not the utmost priority. They continue to face discrimination and marginalization, both subtle and blatant and do not share the fruits of development quality.

There is no easy or quick fix of the problem related to empowerment of women in India. The real solution lies in a holistic approach that deals with all the major interrelated issues of economic welfare, social justice, education, health, religious and customary traditions. For such a transformation education for women is must for self-reliance as it empowers them to handle self and surroundings, feeling and relationship without being intimidated. We know that women are not yet empowered. The agenda of empowerment of women would

simply not get accomplished through legal and constitutional provisions but through proper education, the task is challenging yet not impossible. Women will gain power only when both men and women begin to respect and accept the contribution of women. The bottom line is that empowerment is on its way but

a lot is yet to be achieved to realise it in full capacity. The issues and reasons behind are not legal but structural and attitudinal. Education would liberate and equip women with ability to take control of her life, accomplish her dreams and enhance her status, educated women are empowered women.

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