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Women Empowerment through Education

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Abstract

“Educate your women first and leave them to themselves: then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them”.....Swami Vivekananda.

‘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 upliftment of women in social, economic and political spheres where they are able to play an equal role at par with men in society. But women who constitute half of the population in India yet they have been subjected to the oppression of patriarchal order and suffered from fewer rights and lower social status than men for centuries. This widespread discrimination and exploitation of women evoke the need for empowerment of women. In spite constitutional guarantees, enactment of laws, initiations of social reformers, efforts by the government through different schemes and programmes and U.N.O.’s directives, the equal status of women in India is not still achieved to the desired goals after 68 years of Independence. According to Census, 2011, 74.04% of the population is illiterate, comprising 65.46% females and 82.14% males. As per report of UNDP, 2013 on Human Development Indicators, women constitute 48% of the population in India of which 29% is national workplace and 26% women have access to formal credit. This situation encourages the present writer to find out the effective measures for women upliftment. Hence an attempt is made to depict the present scenario of women empowerment, its possible determinants and how education can be used as an instrument of women empowerment. This paper attempts to find out the possible problems faced and possibilities ahead in promoting women empowerment through education. 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. Lastly, a strategy of broad educational programme along with favourable attitudes of all concerned has been recommended for women empowerment.

Key Words: Women empowerment, Education, Census, UNDP, U.N.O.

Introduction: Women empowerment irrespective of cast, creed, religion and gender is a constitutional mandate, a basic human right and a decisive force of national development. “Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power”. Women empowerment is a global issue and it was raised at the International Women Conference T NAROIBI in 1985. Women empowerment is the process of providing rights, powers, opportunities and responsibilities to women so that they are able to develop their potential, think, and act freely at par with men

equally in society, It is the expansion of women's ability and freedom to exercise full control over their action. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of social, economic and political status of women and it involves the building up of a society wherein women can live without the fear oppression, exploitation and discrimination that go with being a woman in a traditionally male-dominated society. Although women constitute half of the population and an active agent of social change, yet they are still being oppressed and suffered from fewer rights and lower social status. The widespread discrimination and exploitation upon women evoke the need of empowerment of women and education can be used as an effective instrument for achieving it.

Objectives of the Study: The objectives of the study of women empowerment through education are stated precisely 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 identify the barriers of women empowerment.
5. To identify the importance of education for achieving women empowerment.
6. To offer suggestions for women empowerment through education.

Structure of the Paper:

The present study is structured in the following manner:

In Section I, an attempt is made to realise the need of education in women empowerment.

In Section II, it has been focused on the present scenario of women empowerment in India.

In Section III, the Constitutional Provisions and Government efforts for women empowerment in India have been reviewed.

In Section IV, the barriers of women empowerment in India have been identified.

In Section V shows that how education can play as an effective instrument of women empowerment.

Finally, **in Section VI**, the concluding remarks have been made which reflects the author's own evaluation.

Section – I:

Need of Education in Women Empowerment: Women empowerment is a tool of development not only of women but also of whole families and thereby a nation. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, "To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves."

Education empowers women more effectively which would help to abolish gender inequality, develop their potentials, increase social and economic return, improve the quality of life, produce educated and healthy children and reduce fertility and mortality rates. Education is key to empowering women's participation in decision making in democracy, dynamic transformation of society and shaping the destiny of future generations. Swami Vivekananda said "There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved." It is education which can do so by empowering women.

In spite of constitutional guarantees, enactment of laws, efforts by the government through various schemes and programmes and U.N.O's directives, the equal status of women in India is not still achieved up to the desired goals after 68 years of Independence. Hence education can be used as powerful tool to help the women to understand the constitutional directives and legislative

provisions for reducing women's exploitation and negligence upon them, to reduce the gender gap in literacy levels, to create awareness about the existing social problems and to fight for fulfilment of the basic amenities and welfare of the community. Education helps to enable women to exercise their rights on equal footing with men and participate in national development. "Education is the milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life." The target of becoming superpower, a developed country by 2020 will be achieved only when the women of India will be empowered through education.

The National Policy of Education (1986) has emphasized the need of women education for their effective participation in social and economic activities. The NPE, 1986 has stated, "Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women.

The National Educational system will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. "The National Policy of Empowerment of Women (1990) has emphasized on education for-

1. Creating an environment to enable women to realize their full potential,
2. Providing all human rights and fundamental freedom to women on equal basis with men,
3. Participation of women in decision-making in every spheres of life,
4. Equal access to health care, quality education, guidance, employment, remuneration and social security,
5. Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girl children.

Section- II:

Women Empowerment: In Present Scenario: Women empowerment and gender equality in India is an alarming issue. Some problems such as dowry, domestic violence, sex selective abortion, female infanticide are still prevalent. As per the 2011 Census, women are subject to disadvantages as compared to men in terms of literacy rates, labour participation rates and earnings. The Census, 2011 reveals that the total literate population is 74.04% comprising 65.46% females and 82.14% males. As per report of UNDP, 2013 on Human Development Indicators, women constitute 48% of the population in world of which 29% is national work force and 26% women have access to format credit. It is witnessed that in software industry women enjoy equal wages and roles with men, but in other sectors women are mostly ill paid. The percentage of IPC crimes committed against women has increased during the last 5 years from 9.25 in the year 2009 to 11.2% during the year 2013. A women is raped once in every 10 minutes. Women perform about 2/3 of total hours, get 1/10th of the world's income and own less than 1/100th of the world resources. Women occupied only 10% seats in World Parliament and 6% seats in National Cabinet. India is ranked as the 135th country in the World in imparting free and compulsory education between the age group of 6 to 14 years (Right to Education, 2010). In Indian society, preference is still continuing for a son over the birth of a girl and biased attitude of the parents is seen in favour of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities.

Section- III:

Constitutional Provisions and Government Efforts for Women Empowerment in India:

A. Constitutional Provisions: The constitution of India has given provisions for empowering women. Some of these are as follows:

1. Equality before law for all persons (Article-14)

2. Prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15(1))
3. Special provisions to be adopted by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3))
4. Equality of opportunity for employment to any office under the State (Article 16), right to secure adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally (Article 39(a)).
5. Equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)).
6. Maternity relief (Article 42).
7. Promotion of dignity of women (Article 51A©).
8. Reservation of not less than one third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies (Articles 343(d) & 343(T)).

B. Government Efforts: The government has taken initiatives for women empowerment through enacting laws and implementing several schemes operated by different departments and ministries. The National Commission of Women was set up by an act of parliament in 1990 for safeguarding the constitutional right and legal provisions for women. The reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women has been provided by the 73th and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution which is needed for socio-political empowerment. The Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) under the MHRD was established to implement various schemes relating to women advancement. The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW)2010 has emphasized to facilitate the process of integrating all programmes for welfare and upliftment of women undertaken by the ministries and department. The National Resource Centre for Women acts as a national convergence centre for all programmes for women. The National Literacy Mission is being set up towards eradication of literacy in the age group of 15-35 years. The Functional Literacy for Audit Women (FLAW was started in 1975-76 to provide illiterate adult women to gain functional skills and to awaken desired awareness for health, hygiene and children practices.

Government Schemes: The Government of India has undertaken different schemes for welfare upliftment and security of the women. Some of these may be noted here—

‘Rastriya Mahila Kosh’ (RMK) 1992-93, ‘Mahila Samridhi yojana’ (MSY) 1993, ‘Indira Mahila Yojana’ (IMY) 1995, ‘Swa Shakti Group’, ‘Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women’ (STEP), ‘Creches/Day-care Centre for the Children of working and ailing mother’, ‘Hostels for working women’, ‘National Mission for Empowerment of Women’, ‘Integrated Child Development Services’ (ICDS), ‘Rajib Gandhi Scheme for Employment of Adolescence Girls’ (RGSEAG),2010, ‘Women’s Development Corporation Scheme’(WDCS), ‘Working Women’s Forum’, ‘Indira Priyadarshini Yojana’, ‘NGO’s Credit Schemes. The present Prime Minister Modi Government has launched the programmes of ‘Beti bachao, beti padhao’ aims at tackling the low child sex ratio of 918 girls child in resources and savings of a family which is helpful to meet the expenses of higher education and marriage. The first year of New Millennium (2001) was declared as “Women Empowerment Year”. It is necessary to supplement Government efforts by non-government organizations for facilitating women empowerment. Yet India has not achieved the expected goals, hence comprehensive programme for empowering women is still demanding.

C. Legislative Provisions: The Government of India has also enacted specific laws to safeguard the interests of women and uplift their status in society. Some of the notable legislations are as follows:

- ❖ The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 which provides women the right to parental property.
- ❖ The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 which declares the taking of dowry an unlawful activity.
- ❖ Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 which provides the payment of equal remuneration with men for equal value of work.
- ❖ The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983 which prohibits various types of crimes against women.
- ❖ The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 which prohibits the vulgar presentation of women in the media.
- ❖ The protection of women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 protects women from domestic violence committed against them.
- ❖ The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013.

These legal provisions would help women to gain socio-political empowerment.

D. U.N.O. Directives: The third Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of the United Nations Development Program has directed to the Indian context–

“Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education by no later than 2015”. India is nearly on track. The MDG Report 2009 pointed out, “Participation of women in empowerment and decision making remains far less than that of men, and the disparity is not likely to be eliminated by 2015”. However the opportunity of women to labour market has marginally increased from 13% to 18% between 1990-91 and 2004-05.

Section-IV:

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. patriarchal order and the subordinate status of women.
8. lack of health care and safety.
9. professional inequality, particularly workplace harassment.
10. inequality in sharing the burden of house hold 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.

Section-V:

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.

Section-VI:

Concluding Remarks: To conclude the present scenario, it may be said that education is the cornerstone of women empowerment which could be achieved through hearty and co-operative efforts of the Government and NGO's and also eliminating the traditional attitude, norms and practices through proper education and guidance. The efforts of women empowerment by the

government and social reformers will go in vain unless the women are well educated, self-supportive and independent in all spheres of life.

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