



Empowering Women through Education

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Abstract

Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. In our day to day life we witness so many cases of how women become victimized by various social evils. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. Education on the other hand is the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life. So in this paper we would discuss about the role of education in achieving the goal of women empowerment and gender equality.

Key words: Women empowerment, Education, Gender Inequality.

Introduction: *“If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered”*

. -- **PT. JAWAHARLAL NEHRU.**

Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. Education has been recognized as an essential agent of social change and development in any society and any country. Education considered as a potent instrument through which processes modernization and social change come into existence. Education exposes people to new thoughts and ideas and provides necessary skills hence, to think harmonies development without educating women is impossibility. Moreover it is rightly said that to educate the women

is to educate the whole family. Empowerment particularly includes control over resources and ideology. According to Sen and Batliwala (2000) it leads to a growing intrinsic capability- greater self confidence, and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barrier. This view mainly emphasizes on two important aspects. Firstly, it is a power to achieve desired goals but not a power over others. Secondly, idea of empowerment is more applicable to those who are powerless- whether they are male or female, or group of individuals, class or caste. Though concept of empowerment is not specific to women, yet it is unique in that and it cuts across all types of class and caste and also within families and households (Malhotra et al, 2002). Women empowerment is also defined as a change in the context of a women's life, which enables her increased capacity for leading a fulfilling human life. It gets reflected both in external qualities (viz. health, mobility, education and awareness, status in the family, participation in decision making, and also at the level of material security) and internal qualities (viz. self awareness and selfconfidence) [Human Development in South Asia (2000) as quoted by Mathew (2003)].

Definition of Women Empowerment: Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as:

- freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity,
- have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace,
- to make their own choices and decisions,
- have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities,
- have equal social status in the society,
- have equal rights for social and economic justice,
- determine financial and economic choices,

- get equal opportunity for education,
- get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias,
- get safe and comfortable working environment

Gender Inequality: Gender' is a socio-cultural term referring socially defined roles and behaviours assigned to 'males' and 'females' in a given society; whereas, the term 'sex' is a biological and physiological phenomenon which defines man and woman. In its social, historical and cultural aspects, gender is a function of power relationship between men and women where men are considered superior to women. Therefore, gender may be understood as a man-made concept, while 'sex' is natural or biological characteristics of human beings.

Gender Inequality, in simple words, may be defined as discrimination against women based on their sex. Women are traditionally considered by the society as weaker sex. She has been accorded a subordinate position to men. She is exploited, degraded, violated and discriminated both in our homes and in outside world. This peculiar type of discrimination against women is prevalent everywhere in the world and more so in Indian society. Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles.

Importance of Education: If it is said that education is the key to all problems, then it won't be improper. Thinkers have given a number of definitions of education but according to Swami Vivekananda Education means the process by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, and intellect is sharpened, as a result of which one can stand on one's own feet. Education has many benefits and has positive impact in our life. An educated person is an asset for any country. In today's world, human capital is considered the best national resource. On one hand, he or she can explore better opportunities for him or herself, and on the other hand, the entire nation would get benefited from his or her works. Education means a lot in everyone's life as it facilitates our learning, knowledge and skill. It completely changes our mind and personality and helps us to attain the positive attitudes.

Necessity of Women Education: Women education refers to every form of education that aims at improving the knowledge, and skill of women and girls. It includes general education at schools and colleges, vocational and technical education, professional education, health education, etc. Women education encompasses both literary and non-literary education. Since women constitute the half of the population, their education is of much importance because it not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Moreover educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population. There are many obstacles in front of a female from the very beginning of her life. When she is a foetus from that very point of time this male dominant society tries to grab her and continues so till her old age. In such conditions if a women is not educated enough to know her rights, to understand the good or bad situations and how to make her strongly and firmly independent in this patriarchal flow then their existence will be gradually put on a question mark. That is why it is very necessary to educate a girl.

Education as a tool for Women Empowerment: *Vivekananda considered men and women as two wings of a bird, and it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.* So, according to him, there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of woman is improved. Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power .The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at NAROIBI in 1985. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. So that we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment. Education is an

can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment. Education is an essential means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the development process. Sustainable development is only possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunities to reach their potential. Women and girls experience multiple and intersecting inequalities.

Structural barriers in the economic, social, political and environmental spheres produce and reinforce these inequalities. Obstacles to women's economic and political empowerment, and violence against women and girls, are barriers to sustainable development and the achievement of human rights, gender equality, justice and peace.

Women are significantly under-represented in decision-making at all levels.

While the economic benefits of educating girls are similar to those of educating boys, recent Findings suggests that social benefits are more.

Women have the potential to change their own economic status and that of their communities and countries in which they live yet usually women's economic contributions are unrecognized, their work undervalued and their promise undernourished. Unequal opportunities between women and men hamper women's ability to lift themselves from poverty and secure improved options to improve their lives. Education is the most powerful instrument for changing women's position in society.

Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. It is indispensable that education enables women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside of health and home but helps her to get status, positive self-confidence, necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Apparently it also facilitates them to procure a job and supplement the income of family and achieve social status. As for as education is concerned, Wolfensohn (1999) remarks "All agree that the single most important key to development and poverty alleviation is education, which must start with universal primary education for girls and boys equally". Educating girls is viewed as a "strategic investment" for the individual, the family, the local community and the whole nation, greatly improving the nation's development indicators by providing numerous beneficial outcomes. Socio-economic research conducted by several agencies including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Department for International Development (DFID)

indicates that educated women are far better equipped than uneducated women to improve opportunities for themselves by obtaining better-paid and higher-status jobs (Prah 2002). The developmental impacts of literate woman include: better environmental protection; improved health and nutrition for women and their families; lower child mortality rates; increased work productivity, and a tendency to marry later and have fewer children thus lowering the population growth rate (Casely-Hayford, 2002 Situational Analysis of Gender Issues in Education). With education comes enhanced self-worth, empowerment and improved opportunities overall.

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Conclusion: Women empowerment is a much debated topic in 21st century but empowerment doesn't mean giving power to women on papers only. In fact empowering a women start from the very beginning of her life by protecting her to be killed in the womb of mother. If women will be educated then will rise the voice against this ill practice similarly an educated women is an asset for the society as well as home because the future is shaped by her. Power and equal status in society will transmit a positive energy and make women self-confident, independent and decision maker of their life. Thus it is very important to empower women through education.

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