



EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT: A STRATEGY FOR WOMEN DEVELOPMENT

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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

Education is one of the significant social indicators and most important aspect of human life. It has an impact on the achievement and the growth of an individual as well as community. Education is perceived to be essential and indispensable component for providing employment and measuring a scale to lead a quality of life. The progress and all round development of a country depends upon harnessing the skills and abilities of all sections of society, regardless of caste, creed, religion and sex. Women constitute nearly fifty percent of total population. The development of the society, therefore, depends on women and their level of education. Unfortunately, the women have been discriminated against for ages and they have not been given equal opportunities in many social, economic and cultural spheres. If we do not involve women in development activities, it not merely obstructs their own development, but also affects the progress of the entire nation. The status of women could be the best indicator of a nation's progress. Women's active role is regarded as an integral part of a progressive social system and the holistic development of the society as a whole.

Education plays a very vital role in transformation of human life be it at primary, secondary or tertiary level. Education also plays a pivotal part in transforming something constructive. Education is the mantra for personal growth and also development of the society. The more one has knowledge, the more one grows. Good education is essential for everyone to be a good citizen and a dependable worker. It allows us to think rightly and make better decisions for better society in future.

Importance of Women Education:

The importance of women education is outlined below:

- ✓ **Education has Threadbare Link With Prosperity:** Education empowers women to come forward and contribute towards the overall development and prosperity of the country.
- ✓ **Education Ensures Economic Empowerment:** So long as women remain backward and economically dependent on men, the helpless condition of them cannot be changed. Economic empowerment and independent creations on their own will come through proper education and employment of women.
- ✓ **Education Enriches Individual Development:** Education helps a woman to live a good life. Her identity as an individual would never get lost. She can read and learn about her rights. Her rights would not get trodden down. The life or condition of women would improve a lot, if a broad outlook in the field of women's education is essential.
- ✓ **Education Facilitates a Healthy Life Style:** Educated girls and women are aware of the importance of health and hygiene than the illiterate women. Hence, through health education, they can lead a healthy life-style. Educated mothers can take better care of both herself and her baby.
- ✓ **Education Brings Dignity and Honor:** In the modern society the educated women are now looked upon with dignity and honor. Educated women would become a source of inspiration for millions of young girls who make them their role-models.
- ✓ **Education Protects the Women Rights:** Educated women are more informed of their rights for justice. Education would eventually ensure to decline in instances of violence and injustice against women such as dowry, forced-prostitution, child-marriage, female foeticide, etc.
- ✓ **Choice to Choose a Profession of her Choice:** Educated women can prove be highly successful in all her personal, professional life endeavours. If a girl-child gets equal opportunity for education, she can plan to become a successful doctors, engineers, nurses, air-hostesses, cook, or choose a profession of her choice.
- ✓ **Education is a Tool to Eliminate Poverty:** Women education is a pre-requisite to alleviate poverty. Women need to take equal burden of the massive task of eliminating poverty. This would demand massive contribution from educated women. There cannot be many social and economic changes unless girls and women are given freedom to avail the benefits of education.

Status of Women Education:

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 the report of UNDP, 2013 on Human Development Indicators, women constitute 48% of the population in the world, of which, 29% constitute national work force and 26% women have access to form a 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. According to UNDP report, a woman is raped once in every 10 minutes and they 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.

Table 1: Sex-wise literacy rate and male – female gap in literacy rate in India

Year	Persons	Male	Female	Male-Female Gap in Literacy Rate
1901	5.3	9.8	0.6	9.2
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1	9.5
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8	10.4
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9	12.7
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3	17.6
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3	17.6
1961	24.0	34.4	13.0	21.4
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7	20.8
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8	22.1
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2	24.7
2001	65.38	76.0	54.0	22.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census Reports of India

Table 2: Level wise Enrolment all Categories of Students (in lakhs)

Level/ Year	Primary (I-V)			Upper Primary (VI-VIII)			Secondary (IX-X)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1950-51	138	54	192	26	5	31	NA	NA	NA
1960-61	236	114	350	51	16	67	NA	NA	NA
1970-71	357	213	570	94	39	133	NA	NA	NA
1980-81	453	285	738	139	68	207	NA	NA	NA
1990-91	570	404	974	215	125	340	NA	NA	NA
2000-01	640	498	1138	253	175	428	116	74	190
2005-06	705	616	1321	289	233	522	145	105	250
2006-07	711	626	1337	299	246	545	149	110	259
2007-08	711	644	1355	311	262	573	159	123	282
2008-09	706	647	1353	314	270	584	165	130	294
2009-10	697	639	1336	317	278	595	169	138	307
2010-11	701	646	1348	327	292	619	175	143	319
2011-12	726	672	1399	331	299	630	186	155	341
2012-13(P)	681	639	1321	329	314	643	181	162	343
2013-14(P)	672	628	1300	337	320	657	195	175	370

P: Provisional, NA: Not Available

Note: from 1980-81 to 1990-91, figures for Class XI-XII include

Data Source: figures taken from the publication Statistics of School Education publications.

Table 2: Level wise Enrolment all Categories of Students (in lakhs)

Level/ Year	Senior Secondary (XI-XII)			Higher Education		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1950-51	13	2	15	3.5	0.5	4.0
1960-61	27	7	34	8	2	10
1970-71	57	19	76	26	7	33

1980-81	76	34	110	35	13	48
1990-91	128	63	191	34	15	49
2000-01	61	38	99	54	32	86
2005-06	78	56	134	88	55	143
2006-07	81	60	140	96	60	156
2007-08	93	70	163	106	66	172
2008-09	95	74	169	112	73	185
2009-10	99	79	178	124	83	207
2010-11	109	86	195	155	120	275
2011-12	116	94	210	162	130	292
2012-13(P)	106	92	198	163	133	296
2013-14(P)	117	104	222	NA	NA	NA

P: Provisional; NA: Not Available

Note: from 1980-81 to 1990-91, figures for Class XI-XII include

Data Source: figures taken from the publication Statistics of School Education, Higher and Technical Education publications.

Table 2 reveals the growth of sex-wise enrolment in different stages of education form 1950-51 to 2013-14. Since 1950-51 the total enrolment at the primary, upper primary and senior secondary stages increased by 8, 21 and 15 times respectively. The girl's enrolment increased by 12, 64 and 52 times respectively during the same period.

As may be seen from table 2 the participation of girls at all stages of education has been increasing steadily through the years. However, in totality their participation is still below fifty per cent at all stages of education. Underlying factors that contribute to skewed enrolment ratio and perpetuate gender inequalities in school and society between the two sexes are many.

As a result of number of initiatives and measures taken up by the Government one notices a rise in the percentage of enrolment of women. The rate of literacy among women too has gone up from 0.6% in 1901 to 65.46% in 2011. In fact, the increase in female literacy (by 64.86 per cent) outpaced that of male literacy (72.34 per cent). The male-female literacy gap has reduced from 9.2 % in 1901 to 16.98% in 2011. Still, the rate of literacy among males is higher than females. The male literacy rate has increased to 82.14, which shows an increase of 72.34%. On the other hand, the female literacy of 65.46% has at a much faster rate of 64.86 %. Despite the fact that literacy and school enrolment among both males and females has increased yet the male-female gap in the rate of literacy has widened and much remains to be done.

In India the gender gap in literacy has been decreasing since 1981. The data in table 1 indicates that despite the improvement in rate of literacy, there continues to be a large gap between the literacy levels between men and women.

Table 3: Drop-out rates of all categories of students from 1999-2000 to 2009-2010

Year	Primary (I-V)			Elementary (I-VIII)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1999-00	39.8	41.0	40.3	53.3	57.7	55.1
2000-01	39.7	41.9	40.7	50.3	57.7	53.7
2002-03	38.4	39.9	39.0	52.9	56.9	54.6
2003-04	35.85	33.72	34.89	52.28	53.45	52.79
2004-05	33.74	28.57	31.47	51.85	52.92	52.32
2005-06	31.81	25.42	29.00	50.49	51.28	50.84
2006-07*	28.71	21.77	25.67	48.67	48.98	48.80
2009-10**	30.25	27.25	28.86	40.59	44.39	42.39

Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2007-08, Ministry of Human Resource Development, GOI, *DISE report. ***Combined dropout rate for India after consideration for all states and UTs. Source: Abstract of Selected Educational Statistics 2009-10; Ministry of Human Resources Development; GOI

Even though the vitality of women's contributions to social and economic development has well been established, the girls are still perceived to be playing roles mainly in non-public domains. Women as a whole are still disadvantaged in terms of education and enjoying benefits of economic growth. Social and economic systems supported by patriarchal values continue to influence women's education right from the beginning. One of the major reasons for lack of education among women in India is high dropout rate among girls at the early stages of schooling as compared to boys. As per data shown in table 3, 41% of girls and 39.8% boys were dropped their studies after the completion of primary education in 1999-2000. whereas the dropout rate is 57.7 and 53.3 girls and boys respectively at the end of elementary education 1999-2000. As per 2009-2010 data in primary education, the dropout rate is reduced to 27.25 and 30.25 among girls and boys respectively. The dropout rate is reduced from 57.7 to 44.39 among girls from 1999-2000 to 2009-2010. The same tendency is

observed even among the boys during this period i.e., from 53.3 to 40.59 percent. The figures relating to drop-out percentages at different stages of schooling among the boys and girls are presented in table 3.

Problems of Women Education:

The following are the some of the important factors which could affect the literacy rate of women in India-

- ✓ **Prevalence of Poor School Environment for Girls:** In general the school environment for girls in India is not really interesting and encouraging. There are still many schools with poor basic amenities such as drinking water, latrine and toilet facilities, lack of suitable school buildings and equipment which tend to create poor school environment.
- ✓ **Poor Enrolment to School Education:** Many societies and a vast population in India still believes that proper place for women is to remain at home, serve the husband and his family and give birth to the children. This function can be performed irrespective of the fact whether the girl is educated or not. In fact, they feel that educated women begin to get some enlightenment and start demanding. Especially, children belonging to low caste families are forced to learn skills and work and not encouraged to go to school due to various factors in the sphere of strict instruction from high caste communities for their selfish motives of keeping them as domestic servants. The data on school attendance collected by the World Bank shows the proportion of girls attending school decreases with age while for boys it remains stable. On the 21 February 2005, the Prime Minister of India said that he was pained to note that “only 47 out of 100 children enrolled in class 1 reach class 8, putting the dropout rate at 52.78%”.
- ✓ **Absence of sufficient Women Teachers:** Absence of sufficient women teachers in primary and middle schools has been very largely responsible for the low enrolment of girls. It is an accepted fact that the primary schools should be sub-staffed by women teachers.
- ✓ **Dowry System:** In India, the dowry system is thought to put great financial burden on the bride’s family. Dowry system and other social factors act as main causes for the neglect of the girl child and discrimination against girl child including the deprivation of right to education. In some cases, the dowry system leads to the crime against women ranging from emotional abuse, injury to even deaths.
- ✓ **Early Marriage:** Early or child marriage in India, according to Indian law, is a marriage where either the woman is below the age of 18 or the man is below age 21 years. Most child marriage involves underage women, many of whom are in poor socio-economic conditions. Jharkhand is the state with highest child marriage rates in India. In rural areas, early marriages were three times higher than women in urban India as per 2009 data. There is high association of female literacy with female age at marriage. By and large the female age at marriage of 18 as prescribed by various legislations not at all followed in India. It is very much ignored and neglected by the families of parents with low literacy.
- ✓ **Priority to Son’s Education Compared to Daughter’s Education:** In India the vast majority of the population is poor. They cannot afford to give education to all their children. When the choice comes, they prefer to invest on the education of sons rather than daughters. Parents believed that the sons with side with the father in old age and on the other hand after some time the girl will get married. She goes to and lives with her husband’s families and the parents will not benefit directly from their education.
- ✓ **Extreme Poverty:** Poverty happens to be the single biggest cause of which women cannot afford the expenses of education. This leads to illiteracy in India and a precursor to all other effects. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men. Poverty is considered to be the greatest threat to peace in the world. Sex slaves are a direct outcome of poverty. In a poor family, girls are the main victims; they are malnourished and are denied the opportunity of better education and other facility. If poverty is not a concern, then the girl child is able to follow her dreams without concerns of sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and any education or work.

Besides the above, the following are the some other problems causing for low enrolment literacy in India especially among the women.

- ✓ No zeal in education
- ✓ Financial constraints
- ✓ Engaged in domestic activities
- ✓ Engaged in economic activities
- ✓ School is far away from the village
- ✓ Lack of educational resources especially in rural areas
- ✓ Privatization of schools and colleges
- ✓ Social customs and traditions
- ✓ Cultural ethos
- ✓ Lack of awareness and understanding of the value of formal education
- ✓ Conflict and gap between the home and school

Strategies Adopted by the Government for Increasing Female Literacy:

- ✓ **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):** The government of India introduced a new scheme called Beti Bachao Beti Padhao on 22 January 2015 in Panipat in Haryana, which will help in generating awareness and improving the efficiency of delivery of welfare services meant for women with an initial corpus of Rs 100 crores. The 'Beti Bachao Beti padhao scheme' is for survival, protection and education of the girl child. The prime objectives of this program are to bring a change in people mindset towards girl child on or after her birth. This is, indeed, a new and innovative step taken by the government of India to improve the condition of women in the society. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme is one step towards empowering girls through education. The objectives of the scheme are-
 - Prevent gender biased and selective elimination
 - Ensure survival and protection of the girl child
 - Ensure education of the girl child

There is a long term strategy of the government to accelerate the efforts. According to women and Child Development Minister, Maneka Gandhi, Central government will launch a mega scheme for saving and educating the girl child.

- ✓ **Contribution of Literacy Campaigns to Female Literacy:** The provision of educational opportunities for women has been an important part of the national endeavour in the field of education since India's independence. The government of India launched the National Literacy Mission in 1988 for eradication of adult illiteracy. The mission of this national literacy campaigns is to create an environment where in women demand knowledge and information, empowering themselves to change their lives. The 1992 education policy envisaged free and compulsory elementary education of satisfactory quality to all children up to the age of 14 before India entered the 21st century. Besides, the Supreme Court in its 1993 ruling held that children had a fundamental right to free education.
- ✓ **Heightened Social Awareness:** Literacy campaigns have heightened social awareness among women regarding the importance of education, both for themselves as well as for their children. Large numbers of women have been participated whole-heartedly in the literacy campaigns as learners and volunteers. Because of the campaign mode and creation of a positive environment for literacy, women receive a social sanction to participate in the literacy programs. The literacy campaigns have given women an opportunity to break the isolation which is socially structured into their lives, giving them a chance to meet other women and learn collectively rather than learn singly as individuals. The newly acquired literacy skills have enhanced their ability to solve family problems and learn new skills. Literacy campaigns have also played a significant role in improving the status of women within their own families.
- ✓ **Increased Girls Enrolment in Primary, Secondary and Higher Education:** The literacy campaigns have also motivated and encouraged women learners to educate their children, particularly girls by enrolling them in formal schools. The need to provide equal opportunity to both girls and boys has also effect of generating greater demand for the quantity and quality of primary schooling. Primary and secondary education can bring literacy to the women but real empowerment will come from higher education in difference fields. Higher education is the key which will bring women to the role of decision maker and that will also enshrine them with real empowerment. So we need to focus on these fields.
- ✓ **Gender Equity:** There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India. The constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Literacy campaigns have actively promoted gender equity and have sought to empower them to decision making about themselves, their families and their communities. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. As a result of higher participation of women in literacy campaigns, the gender gap in literacy level is gradually getting reduced.
- ✓ **Health and Hygiene:** Literacy campaigns in most districts have taken up health and hygiene issues as an internal component of adult education programs. Literacy campaigns have helped to spread knowledge about health care and nutrition, thereby enabling mothers to keep their family in better health and to care better for their children. Literacy campaigns have also disseminated information for creating awareness about problems of early marriage, spacing and small family norms. Healthy and educated women are more likely to have healthier and more educated children.
- ✓ **The Girl Star Project:** There are a series of films which document the stories of girls from the most disadvantaged communities across five Northern States who, through attaining education, have managed to break the shackles of socio-economic constraints to make a success of their lives and become self sufficient. These young women have grown to become role models in their communities,

who inspire younger girls to go to school and continue their education. The selection of characters for the films is from ordinary rural settings which the masses can identify with. These short films can be used as a tool at different levels- To motivated parents to ensure that their daughters go to school and do not drop out.

Conclusion:

Until the middle of nineteenth century, girls and women were educated only for traditional household works. Now, the society is witnessing changes in the role-status of women. There has been a greater emphasis on girl's and women's education. The modern-day parents want to fulfil the aspiration of their children without gender discrimination. Thus, the educated women should insist on exercising their civil, social, political and economic rights. This will help improve the overall conditions of women in the society. One can hope for better days while all women of our country are enlightened.

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