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**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: THROUGH EDUCATION FOR RURAL WOMEN IN INDIA**


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**Abstract:** Women have always played an important role in any society as daughter, sister wife, mother and mother in law, grandmother and in various other manifestations. As nature has bestowed the ability to conceive, nurture and bring forth the offspring in to this universe on the woman in her role as a mother, she assumes great significance in myth as well as in reality. Man realized this truth even during the ancient ages that resulted in the worship of mother goddess. In most countries, women spend about twice the amount of time doing unpaid work who are employed full time do most of the domestic work in their households.<sup>1</sup>

Women's total work time per week in 53 hours in Bangladesh, 69 in India 77 in Nepal as compared to men's work time in these countries of 46,56, and 57 hours respectively. There is one remarkable similarity among countries, the role played by father in child care- they do it for, on average, less than one hour per day<sup>2</sup> In the field of higher education, advanced science and technology women are universally underrepresented. Indian women society is a potential powerhouse of innovations and explorations.

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**Introduction:**

**Empowerment:** The word empowerment has become a new 'buzzword' in international development language but is often poorly understood. The need to 'empower' women responds to the growing recognition that women in developing countries lack control over resources and self-confidence and opportunity to participate in decision-making process. At the same time, the realization that women have an increasingly important role to play in social and economical development has become widely accepted.<sup>3</sup> Unless women are empowered to participate alongside men in the development process, development efforts will only have partial effect. Empowerment strategies must carefully defined their meaning of empowerment and be integrated into mainstream programmers rather than attempted separately. Since the mid-1980s the term empowerment has become popular in the development field, especially with reference to women. However there is confusion as to what the term means among development is the outcome of important critiques gendered by the women's movement, particularly by 'third world' feminists. They clearly state that women's development empowerment requires the challenging of patriarchal power in relations that result in women having less control over material assists and intellectual resources. Women participate in their own oppression so they must first become aware of the ideology that legitimizes male domination. The empowerment process starts from within but access to new ideas new consciousness and the strength of solidarity, women can assert their right to control resources and to participate equally in decision making.<sup>4</sup>

**Women Education in post independence:** India acquired independence from British colonial rule in 1947. The constitution of India declared in 1952 firmly affirms the equality of all citizens before the law. Impressively it goes far beyond this, by identifying the countries aboriginal tribes (indigenous people), former untouchable castes, and women's as weaker sections of society, wronged and discriminated against for generation, and therefore deserving special facilities and

support for advance in the five year plan that followed, the Indian government has consistently emphasized education as one of the principal instruments for the advance of each of these categories of people. Because of these provisions Indian women have the benefits of affirmative action by the government long before the practice was accepted in other parts of the world.

It is now more than five decades since the constitution of the country promised free and compulsory elementary school education to all children up to the age of fourteen. Nevertheless barely 70-80 percent of the children in the country are in school. Only 65% of those who join school complete schooling that is qualification requirement for entrance to university education.<sup>5</sup> the inability to enroll all children in school and to retain those who are enrolled until they complete their primary school education is acknowledged to be one of the most serious failures of development. It is, as may be imagined not only a source of great embracement to the government but a matter of grave concern from the point of view of country's future. All government and public effort is therefore currently concentrated on view of country's future. All government and public effort is therefore currently concentrated on Universalizing elementary school education, and thus, although in principle there is a strong commitment to the higher education of women, for purpose of finding and concentrated action the country has to make way for the urgent and more compelling responsibility to universalize primary school education.<sup>6</sup>

The Indian Government has made heroic efforts to provide universal literacy and education. The literacy rate (ages 5 & up) of India increased to 62% in 1997 from 52.21% in 1991, but the 1997 female literacy rate was just 50% and the rural female literacy rate was just 43%. The adult rates (ages 15 and up) were 54% total, 40.7% for women<sup>7</sup>. The total enrolment in secondary schools in 1997-98 was still only 50% of the eligible population of which 44% were girls in primary school, 40% in middle school and 37.1% in secondary school So the percentage of students who qualify, for higher education is still small, particularly among female students. And while

the Government has aggressively promoted the construction of facilities and preparation of teachers, there still is a distressing inadequacy. On top of this, the vast majority of the population is very poor, so that attendance of students must be subsidized. Education is free through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and scholarships are available for university, education. There are set-aside positions and counseling provisions for special cast and tribal students at all levels of the educational systems. While again, the Government has made great efforts to address all these problems, higher education funding has suffered by the priority placed on universal availability of primary education and literacy, leaving inadequate resources for higher education. The end result is that only 6% of the eligible population attends institutions of higher education today, 34.7% of them women, about 2% of the eligible women and less than 1% of the eligible rural women.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, as of 1997-98 there are 229 universities in the country, 16 central universities and remaining operated by the states. And there are some 9,274 colleges, 7,199 of them colleges for general education and 2,075 colleges for professional education. Together they enroll some 7 million students and employ 331,000 teachers.<sup>8</sup> In addition the Indira Gandhi National Open University provides flexible higher education opportunities to large segments of the population who have no access to the colleges and universities. Established in 1987, it now has 47 programs consisting of 553 courses. In 1999, it reached over 172,000 students.<sup>9</sup>

**National Commission on Higher education:** Almost ten years after the appointment of the University Education Commission, in 1948 the government of India appointed a National Commission on Women. The National Commission on women recommended special hostels, special colleges and special scholarships for women. It recommended special syllabi for women and specified that these syllabi should focus on creating the right attitudes among them.<sup>10</sup> The recommendations of the Commission lead to the establishment of the National Council for Girls, the establishment of a Comprehensive Development Plan for Women, to the allocation of special funds for women, and in the central and state ministries of education, to the establishment of separate units to attend to the educational needs of women. The Commission said nothing about equipping women for equal careers, but it did make one major contribution on this issue. It looked carefully into the needs for occupations in which women were preferred, and pointed out that qualified women were needed, in large numbers, to function as pre-primary school teachers, nurses, midwives, women doctors, pharmacists and social workers. On this basis it firmly recommended the promotion of education for women in these fields.<sup>11</sup>

**National Educational Policy on Women education:** From the decade of the seventies onwards there is a visible change. The National Policy on Education declared in 1986, talks of education for the

"empowerment of women." It further promises that "this will be an act of faith and social engineering". The Eighth Five Year Plan of the country' launched in 1991 categorically states that education of women is imperative in order to improve health and nutrition levels in the country and to succeed with the country's efforts to control its population explosion. It speaks of women as "partners in development." In the Ninth Five Year Plan, which became operative in 1997, the title of the chapter on women's education is Education for Women's Equality. It is pertinent to point out that the ambivalence about equality and about the objectives of education, which were so conspicuous earlier, are now completely gone. Both the tone and the substance of these documents and other policy statements of the eighties and nineties exude a new urgency and determination.<sup>12</sup> Three different factors seem to have contributed to the change. First the findings from the country's review of its development efforts, second the feminist movement, and third the revolution of rising expectations and standards of living which has made it necessary for women to be gainfully employed.

**Women in Higher Education:** Retraining to the statistics and focusing on the role of women in higher education, more than two million women are enrolled for higher education in India today. The figure may sound impressive to those who are not fully aware of the size of the population of the country. But it is not, as may be acknowledged from the fact that these 2 million women constitute just 34% of the total enrollment of 6.5 million students in higher education. It is interesting that the percentage of women is slightly higher at the postgraduate level (39%) than at the under graduate level (34%), and that this is higher at this level than the enrollment in the diploma level (26%). Data on the faculty-wide distribution of women show that of all the women enrolled in higher education the largest percentage (54%) are enrolled in the faculty of Arts and the Humanities, 20% are enrolled in the faculty of Science, 14% in the faculty of Commerce, 4% in Medicine, Agriculture, Management, 2% in law and 1% in Engineering.

The data clearly reveal that the overall representation of women in higher education is poor, and that they are poorly represented in the faculties that lead to prestigious and lucrative occupations such as engineering and management. However it is significant that the decade! Increase of enrollment in higher education has consistently been larger for women than for men. The figures are as follows. In the 1950's enrollment of women in higher education increased by 27.5% and of men by 12.64%, in the 1960's women's enrollment increased by 187.33% and men's by 108.78%, in the 1970's women's by 73.55% and men's by 31.60%, and in the 1980's women's by 92.11% and men's by 49.18%. General literacy in 2001 was 64.83 it is increased into 74.04 in 2011. Male literacy in 2001 was 75.26 it is increased into 2011 in 82.14. Women literacy in 2001 was 53.67 it increased into just 65.46 in 2011. Women's

representation, in all disciplines, has also gone up substantially. Today one sees increasingly larger numbers of women in every field, including those from **Basic reasons for empowerment:** The greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. It is indispensable that education enables women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside of her hearth and home but helps her to get status, positive self-esteem, and self-confidence, necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Thus there is no denying fact that education empowers women. Indeed the different organs of the United Nations and experts on women's liberation argue for women's education as the basic step to attain equality with men. The low literacy among Indian rural women is associated with combination of many factors including social, cultural, economic, educational, demographic, political and administrative and so on. The following are the some of the important factors which could be attributed for the present poor state of affairs of womenfolk in education.

- \* The Lower Enrolment
- \* Poor Political Will and Conviction
- \* Higher drop-out rate among girls from schools
- \* Girl Child as Second Mother
- \* Bonded Labor System
- \* Cast System as a Barrier
- \* Dowry as cordon
- \* Child Labor Practice
- \* Poor School Environment for girls
- \* Female age at marriage:
- \* Inferiority, subservience and domesticity
- \* Poverty as a Barrier
- \* Ineffective Law Enforcing Machinery

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