
EMPOWERING THE POWERLESS THROUGH EDUCATION

J.MADAN MOHAN

Abstract: One key factor for the gap in implementation of laws and policies to address discrimination, economic disadvantages, and violence against women at the community level is the largely patriarchal structure that governs the community and households in much of India. As such, women and girls have restricted mobility, access to education, access to health facilities, and lower decision-making power, and experience higher rates of violence. Political participation is also hindered at the Panchayat (local governing bodies) level and at the state and national levels, despite existing reservations for women. 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. 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 India is poised to becoming superpower, a developed country by 2020. The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, the weak, backward and exploited. Education of women in the education of women is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family.

"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

Introduction:In the simplest of words it is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. Women want to be treated as equals so much so that if a woman rises to the top of her field it should be a commonplace occurrence that draws nothing more than a raised eyebrow at the gender. This can only happen if there is a channelized route for the empowerment of women. Education means an all round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. The imperative character of education for individual growth and social development is now accepted by everyone. Investment in the education of its youth considered as most vital by all modern nations. Such an investment understandably acquires top priority in developing countries. The end of all education, all training should be man making. The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow. The training by which the current and expression are brought under control and become fruitful is called education.

Women's empowerment is a new phrase in the vocabulary of gender literature. The phrase is used in two broad senses i.e. general and specific. In a general sense, it refers to empowering women to be self-dependent by providing them access to all the freedoms and opportunities, which they were denied in the past only because of their being women. In a specific sense, women empowerment refers to enhancing their position in the power structure of the society. The word women empowerment essentially means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day- to- day lives in the social, political and economic terms -a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage. Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power. Women's

empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (caste and class), and age. Policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state, and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. However, there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level.

Among rural women, there are further divisions that hinder women's empowerment. The most notable ones are education levels and caste and class divisions. Women from lower castes (the scheduled castes, other backward castes, and tribal communities) are particularly vulnerable to maternal mortality and infant mortality. They are often unable to access health and educational services, lack decision-making power, and face higher levels of violence. Among women of lower caste and class, some level of education has shown to have a positive impact on women's empowerment indicators.

Mobility restrictions for women are dependent upon how the family and community view women's rights. They also, however, are intrinsically dependent on the prevailing levels of violence against women in the household and the community. Abuse and violence towards women is predominantly perpetrated within the household, and marital violence is among the most accepted by both men and women. Wife beating, slapping, rape, dowry related deaths, feudal violence towards tribal and lower caste women, trafficking, sexual abuse, and street violence permeate the Indian social fabric, and create one of the most serious obstacles in achieving women's empowerment. In India, women are devalued traditionally and the men are

normative reified. According to Hindu mythology, the word 'Ardhanarishvara' meaning "The Lord whose half is a woman". What is the value of a man without a woman? We shouldn't forget that there are many temples in our country devoted to the Goddesses and men also use to visit the temples for worshipping them. We need both male and female each other. We must work all together and both needs each other to survive and flourish.

These days, women have established themselves that they are equal to men. They have now forsaken their homely image and are making a major contribution to global innovation of the country. They are working in different fields with man by doing hard work.

It is said that women are the pillars of the economy of the world. We just need to think that women particularly from India who purchase the precious ornaments like gold, diamond, silver, platinum and et al. They also pay money for cosmetics items which brings livelihood to millions. They have the most imperative role of the family who keep it together.

Need of Women Education: Women empowerment can only be achieved through the provision of adequate and functional education to the women folk. The need for women education is also informed by the fact that purposeful occupational achievement and satisfaction is ensured by deep self-awareness and understanding which can only be achieved through the provision of effective and functional education and guidance & counseling. This, has been noted is likely to guarantee women empowerment with its root based on women struggle to improve their status. The empowerment suggested is such that entails the process of challenging power relations and of gaining wider control over source of power. This, however, cannot be achieved without the provision of reasonable access to formal and functional education to the women folk. This is based on the premise that education has been adjudged to be a viable instrument of change in the positive direction. Provision of formal and functional education is needed for the women folk, because:

- It would empower them to know and ask for their rights to education, health, shelter, food clothing etc.
- It would empower them to fight against every form of discrimination against their folk, assert themselves about their right to equal treatment with their men counterpart as bonafide citizens of this nation.
- It would enable the women take decisions and accept responsibilities for taking such decisions concerning themselves.
- It would give economic power to the women and there by enable them to contribute their quota to the economic growth of the nation.
- It would empower the women scientifically through exposure to science and technological education for the challenges of the present technological age and information computer technology break through unfolding world wide.

- It would help women to reduce maternal and infant mortality through improved nutrition, improved child rearing practice, health care and prevention against killer diseases.

- It would avail women with the opportunity of participating keenly in the world of sophisticated politics and governance as enlightened citizens.

Importance of Women Education

Napoleon was once asked, what the great need of France was. He answered, "Nation's progress is impossible without trained and educated mothers. If the women of my country are not educated, about half of the people will be ignorant." A woman has to play three roles in the course of her life. Each of these roles expects some duties from her. It is only with the help of education that she would be able to do them successfully. The first duty of a woman is to be a good daughter. The second duty is to be a good wife and third duty is to be a good mother. Education teaches a woman what she should be. It also teaches her how she should do it to be good daughter, a good wife and a good mother. Many men spend their evening time at clubs and societies. But a gentleman with an educated wife will not feel the need of a club or a society. He can share his thoughts with her. He can have her advice in trouble. He can spend his leisure in her pleasant company. An educated lady is a good friend, a clever nurse and a useful adviser to her husband. So she is a true help-mate. She can get her husband's affection and regard. An educated lady is always able to share his sorrows. There is a saying in English "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". The meaning is that the mother exercises a very great influence over the lives of her children. She is able to mould their thoughts and character. If she is educated, she will make such impression on the mind of her children that will enable them in the later life to grow into a great man. Jeeja Bai mother of Shivaji wished to make Shivaji a great man. It was Shivaji who overthrew Mughal Empire and became what his mother wished. It is true that education will enable women to make their parents, husbands and children truly happy. Hence it is very necessary that women should be educated.

Women Education in Ancient Period: It cannot be clearly stated whether equal rights between men and women prevailed or not during the Vedic period. But available sources show that liberal attitudes and practices pertaining to women did exist. Women were actively involved in religious and social matters. They had some freedom to choose their partner in marriage and a widow was permitted to remarry. As India started taking steps towards civilization, social discrimination increased. Jainism and Buddhism emerged as potent religious reform movements. According to Buddha, women's spiritual capacities were equal to men's. "Buddhism began as a religion that treated women as equal to men in their capacity for personal spiritual development."¹ "The universal prejudices against women, who are said to be weak-minded, fickle, treacherous and impure are shared by the Jains and

expressed in several passages of the canon and in the form of maxims." The high status that women enjoyed during early Vedic period gradually started deteriorating in the late Vedic period. Lineage began to be traced in the male line and sons were the sole heirs to family property. As the economic and social status of sons began to rise, the position of women saw a steep decline. The position of women reached an all-time low during the age of the Dharmashastras. It is during this age that codes of conduct prescribing behaviour norms for women were evolved. This period saw the exclusion of women from both economic and religious sphere. During the period of Dharmashastra, child marriage was encouraged and widow marriage was looked down upon. The birth of girl child was considered as an ill omen and many parents went to the extent of killing the female infants.

The practice of Sati became quite wide spread because of the ill treatment meted out to widows.

Although in the Vedic period women had access to education in India, they had gradually lost this right. In cultural reality, the women enjoyed a privileged position in the Vedic period. The women had special customs, rituals and spirituality, with which men were not allowed to interfere.

Women Education in Medieval Period: The condition of Women in society deteriorated more during the medieval period with the entrance of Muslims. At this point of time several evil practices like child-marriage, sati, and female infanticide were practiced largely. 'Purdah' system was started. These women were also forced to practice 'Zenana'. Rajput women of Rajasthan practiced 'Jauhar'. Polygamy was common in Hindu Kshatriyas. At the same time many women excelled in arts, literature, and music. Women were also rulers in the medieval period. Some of the great women rulers were Razia Sultana, the only women monarch to rule the throne of Delhi. The Gond queen Durgavati ruled for 15 long years, before she lost the battle to Asaf Ali emperor Akbar's general. Chand Bibi also fought the Mughals in 1590's. Nur Jahan is still considered as the most effective ruler. In spite of all these successful women the condition of poor Indian women was the same. At this time, girls were married at a very tender age. Sati was also practiced where women were forced to jump in the burning funeral of their dead husband. Devdasi tradition was common in southern India where girls were married to deity or trees.

The Bhakti movement tried to restore women's position. Mirabai was most popular Bhakti movement figure. In this period, education for women's was not common at every level, only few girls of rich and famous families could achieve the basic and religious education.

Women Education after Independence: Women's education got a fillip after the country got independence in 1947 and the government has taken various measures to provide education to all Indian women. As a result women's literacy rate has grown over the three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher

than that of male literacy rate. While in 1971 only 22% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2001 54.16% female were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 14.87% as compared to 11.72 % of that of male literacy rate. The constitution of India guarantees the right to equality to all Indian women without discrimination. The literacy rate before independence was 2.6% rose in 1961 to 15.3% and 50% by the year 2001. And now, according to the 2011 Census, the male literacy rate is 82.14 while female literacy rate is 65.46.

Women Education in Modern Period: Kerala and Mizoram are the only states in India that have achieved universal female literacy rates. The improvement in social and economic status of women is said to be one of the reasons for literacy. In cities the literacy rate is almost equal between girls and boys in the country however the rate in rural areas continues to be less than the boys. 40% of the centers under NFE, non formal education programs are set apart for women.

According to statistics of women education in India, today 0.3 million NFE centers have primary education to 0.12 million girls out of 7.42 million children. However in tribal areas there is not much of a gender bias as compared to all other castes, tribal community statistics show lower male ratio in spite of much low income, literacy, education and other facilities several efforts are being made towards women education and empowerment. The government is taking steps to increase the rate of women education and employment.

Women Empowerment through Education: Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. 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 respond 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 India is poised to become superpower, a developed country by 2020. The year 2020 is fast approaching; it is just 13 year away. This can become reality only when the women of this nation became empowerment. India presently account for the largest number no of illiterates in the world. Literacy rate in India have risen sharply from 18.3% in 1951 to 64.8% in 2001 in which enrolment of women in education have also risen sharply 7% to 54.16%. Despite the importance of women education unfortunately only 39% of women are literate among 64% of the man. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plan and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in difference spheres. From the fifth five year plan (1974 -78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission of Women was set up by an Act of

Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the right and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local level.

Barriers and Problems against Women Education

In spite of certain outstanding examples of individual achievements, and a definite improvement in their general condition over the years, it remains true that Indian women still constitute a large body of under-privileged citizens. Women of course do not form a homogenous group in class or caste terms. Nevertheless, they face distinctive problems that call for special attention. The Backward Classes Commission set up by the Government of India in 1953 classified women of India as a backward group requiring special attention. The Ministry of Education classifies girls with Scheduled Castes and Tribes as the three most backward groups in education. The educational, economic, political and social backwardness of women makes them the largest group hindering the process of social change. It is inevitable that when this 'backward' group has the major responsibility of bringing up future generations the advancement of society cannot be rapid or take any significant form of development. In the report of the committee appointed by the National Council for Women's Education it was emphatically stated that what was needed to convert the equality of women from de jure to de facto status was widespread education for girls and women and a re-education of men and women to accept new and scientific attitudes towards each other and to themselves.

A changing society and a developing economy cannot make any headway if education, which is one of the important agents affecting the norms of morality and culture, remains in the hands of traditionalists who subscribe to a fragmented view of the country's and the world's heritage. The differences between the positions of men and women in the society will not lessen; leave alone disappear, as long as there are differences between the education levels of men and women. Inadequate education or no education is the most important factor contributing to the backwardness of our masses, especially women. The low literacy among women brings down the national literacy. This gap which exists between the literacy rates of the two sexes also exists between the enrolment of girls and boys at all levels of education. Right from the primary school to the university, we find that the number of girl students is considerably lower than boys.

The plight of women, in terms of education is further compounded by the negative attitude of parents toward female education. Some parents are usually reluctant to send their girl child for formal education especially to higher levels like their male counterpart. Another problem closely related to this is the reluctance to

acquire western education and misunderstanding on the part of the girls themselves about the values of the acquisition of formal education. In education, equity means equal access to good schooling. Restricted access to education by women in this country is profoundly rooted in history, religion, culture, the psychology of self, law, political institution and social attitudes which interact in several ways to limit women's access to formal education when compared with their male counterparts. It has been observed that Indian women are lagging behind their counterparts in developed and some developing nations due to the late start in educating them. This is caused by our traditions and culture which are hostile to women. This tradition reduces them to kitchen manageresses and producers of babies. Thus, their education ideally, is expected to end in kitchen a condition which ironically is detested by many parents thereby discouraging their investment in girl-child education. Other problems against women education include the familiar problems like lack of funds, inadequate facilities, inadequate manpower, sexual harassment, conflicting societal role expectations, government policies and lack of political will power to implement the entire educational programme. The inferiority complex observable in Indian women can be attributed to the influence of environmental manipulation. Through the traditional socialization process of the typical society, women are made to accept negative self-fulfilling prophecy, stereotyping and stigmatization that they are members of a weaker sex. At present, the forces which combine to hamper women education and development in India could be viewed broadly to include denial of access to education, early marriage, confinement to solitary living, subjugation by culture to accept choices forced on them, discrimination and harassment at work, political disenfranchisement from elective and political appointment and exposure to cruel mourning rites upon the death of their husband.

Conclusion: According to the Country Report of the Government of India, education of girls is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. To encourage the education of women at all levels and for dilution of gender bias in providing knowledge and education, established schools, colleges and universities even exclusively for women in the state. To bring more girls, especially from marginalized families of BPL, in mainstream education, the government is providing a package of concessions in the form of providing free books, uniform, boarding and lodging, clothing for the hostilities mid-day meals, scholarships, free circles and so on. Education for All (EFA) programme and other many educational programmes are providing various facilities to enhance the education for women, so these programmes are very helpful to improving the girl's education in India.

References:

1. Government of India, Census of India 2001.
2. Government of India, Census of India 2011.
3. Gupta, N.L. (2003). Women's Education Through Ages, Concept Publications Co, New Delhi.
4. Karat, B. (2005). Survival and Emancipation: Notes from Indian Women's Struggles, Gurgaon, ThreeEssays Collective.
5. Mahajan, V.D. (2010). Modern Indian History, Delhi, S. Chand.
6. Nair, J. (1996). Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History, Delhi, Kali for Women (published in collaboration with the National Law School of India University, Bangalore.
7. Rao, R.K. (2001). Women and Education, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi.
8. Selected Educational Statistics (2003-04). Planning, Monitoring & Statistics Division, Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.
9. S.P. Agarwal (2001), Women's Education in India (1995-98) Present Status, Perspective, Plan, Statistical Indicators with Global View, Vol. III Concept Publications Co, New Delhi.
10. Women in Indian Religions (Ed.) (2002). Arvind Sharma, Oxford University Press. Online sources:
11. <http://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol3/3>.
12. <http://portal.unesco.org/education>

Asst. professor, PG Dept of commerce, sir C.R Reddy College, Eluru.