
“WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION”

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Abstract: Open and Distance Education is a global and rapidly growing phenomenon which offers formal learning opportunities to people who would not otherwise have access to schooling or college education. Teaching- learning are separated by physical distance and the means by which they communicate range from basic print material and the use of postal services to highly sophisticated communication technologies. Open and Distance Education has offered access to many people who have previously been denied access to educational opportunities because of the place they live or work, poor-economic conditions, cultural issues and social status. In the past, Indian female child had always been denied formal education due to various cultural and social partialities. Open and Distance Education has emerged as a powerful instrument for augmenting opportunities in the field of vocational education, especially for girls and women. To bridge the educational gap between males and females in the country distance education plays an important role. Thus, the need for Women emancipation through empowerment all over the world is imperative. In recent times, distance education has emerged as a boon to women of all ages to equip themselves intellectually through acquisition of knowledge. This has led them to new essential methods of perspective thinking, constructing knowledge on existing information thus rendering them more autonomy and enlightened. This paper therefore stresses the use of open and distance learning as an avenue to attain knowledge and education that would put women on a better path toward achieving their desires in Life.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Women empowerment, Technology.

Introduction: Woman refer to a person's gender identity. The term woman is used to identify a female human, regardless of age, as in phrases such as women's rights. The position and status of women all over the world has risen incredibly in the 20th century. We find that it has been very low in 18th and 19th centuries in India and elsewhere when they were treated like 'objects' that can be bought and sold. For a long time women in India remained within the four walls of their household. The total dependence on husbands was witnessed. A long struggle going back over a century has brought women the property rights, voting rights, an equality in civil rights before the law in matters of marriage and employment. In India women had not to struggle for voting rights as we find in other countries. In addition to the above rights, in India, the customs of purdha (veil system), female infanticide, child marriage, sati system (self-immolation by the women with their husbands), dowry system and the state of permanent widowhood were either totally removed or checked to an appreciable extent after independence through legislative measures. There are still uneducated and poor women fiscally reliant on their relatives, despite the fact that they are persevering and have their own particular capacities to be monetarily self-subordinate. Still, they won't land any great position and no money-related backing to begin their own particular family unit businesses and additionally fare well. Education plays a very important role in upliftment of the women community. Women form the pivotal point around whom family life and living revolves. When economic level of a family goes down,

women are the worst sufferers. Empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Women empowerment is a global issue. Large increase in population coupled with a growing awareness of the benefits of education are leading governments to explore the possibility of using alternative means to provide education on a large scale, particularly as conventional educational methods are becoming increasingly expensive. One such alternative that countries in the region are considering is Distance Education. The concept of distance learning is continually evolving and expanding as new technologies are developed and integrated into the wide spectrum of existing ones. The need and demands of society coupled with the technological advancement created the necessary conditions for establishment of distance education in India.

Women Empowerment: The subject of empowerment of women has become a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. Many agencies of United Nations in their reports have emphasized that gender issue is to be given utmost priority. It is held that women now cannot be asked to wait for any more for equality. Inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women have also been age-old issues all over the world. Thus, women's quest for equality with man is a universal phenomenon. Literary empowerment denotes 'to invest with power'. Power is defined as the ability to influence the behaviour of others with or without restraint. The

extent to which a person or group holds such power is related to the social influence they can wield. According to Cambridge English Dictionary empowerment means "to authorize". In the context of development the particular segment of the population: the poor, the women, the vulnerable, the weak, the oppressed and the discriminated have to be 'empowered' to have control over their lives, to better their socio-economic and political conditions. The best way to empower the women is through education. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population. As per their social status women are not treated as equal to men in many places especially in the east, though in the western countries women are treated at par with men in most of the fields. They have demanded equality with men in matters of education, employment, tradition and marriage, politics and recently in the field of religion, to serve as cleric (in Hinduism and Islam). To what extent legislative measures have been able to raise the status of women in India? Are women now feel empowered in the sense that they are being equally treated by men in all spheres of life and are able to express one's true feminine urges and energies? Women empowerment has five components: (1) women's sense of self-worth (2) right to have and to determine choices (3) right to have access to opportunities and resources (4) ability to influence (5) provide the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order nationally and internationally.



Fig.1 Women empowerment

Women Empowerment through Education: There was a time when women's education was not a priority even among the elite. Since the last quarter of the 20th century and more so after 1991, a growing number of women have been entering into the economic field, seeking paid work outside the family. Women are playing bigger and bigger role in economic field: as workers, consumers, entrepreneurs, managers and investors. According to a report of The Economist, 'Women and the World Economy', in 1950, only one-third of American women of working age had a paid job. Today we

witness that two of the powerful countries like Germany and Britain have Women leaders. Women constitute about fifty percent of the total population, but they form only nine percent of the total productive work force. The main reason for this poor share is low literacy level among women. When this major chunk is educated, no doubt, they can contribute significantly for the development of the country and can there by empower themselves. Today, two-thirds of American's workforce are women. In fact, almost everywhere, including India, more women are employed, though their share is still very low. Manufacturing work, traditionally a male preserve, has declined, while jobs in services have expanded, reducing the demand for manual labour and putting the sexes on equal footing. We can now see women in almost every field: architecture, lawyers, financial services, engineering, medical and IT jobs. They have also entered service occupations such as a nurse, a beautician, a sales worker, a waitress, etc. In traditional marriages the relationships were hierarchical and authoritarian. The modern marital relationships are based on freedom and desire rather than convention. People's attitudes about marriage are also changing. The facts about working wives suggest a basic change in Indian family. The traditional (nuclear) household, in which the husband works and the wife remains at home to care for the children, though still a dominant pattern, is changing gradually but steadily. A new pattern is emerging in which both partners work outside the home but do not share equally in housework. In India, the paternalistic attitude of the male has not undergone much change.



Give me some sunshine

Fig.2: Women empowerment is possible through education

Educated women now feel that there is more to life than marriage. They can get most of the things they want like income, status, identity without marriage, while they find it harder to find a suitable accomplished mate. Literacy among women opens the possibility of unlimited exposure to new information and more importantly to new ways of thinking and new perspectives on existing information. The issue of women education is essential for rural development and women were not

well equipped to contribute their useful quota to the society as a result of illiteracy. Also literate women are able to constructively express their talents and give direction to their aptitude. This enables them to lead a life which is fulfilling and satisfying.

Obstacles in Women Education : Though woman has stepped out of the home there are many obstacles which stand as a barrier in overall growth and development. The obstacles mentioned below have started its journey since conventional times which continuous till today.

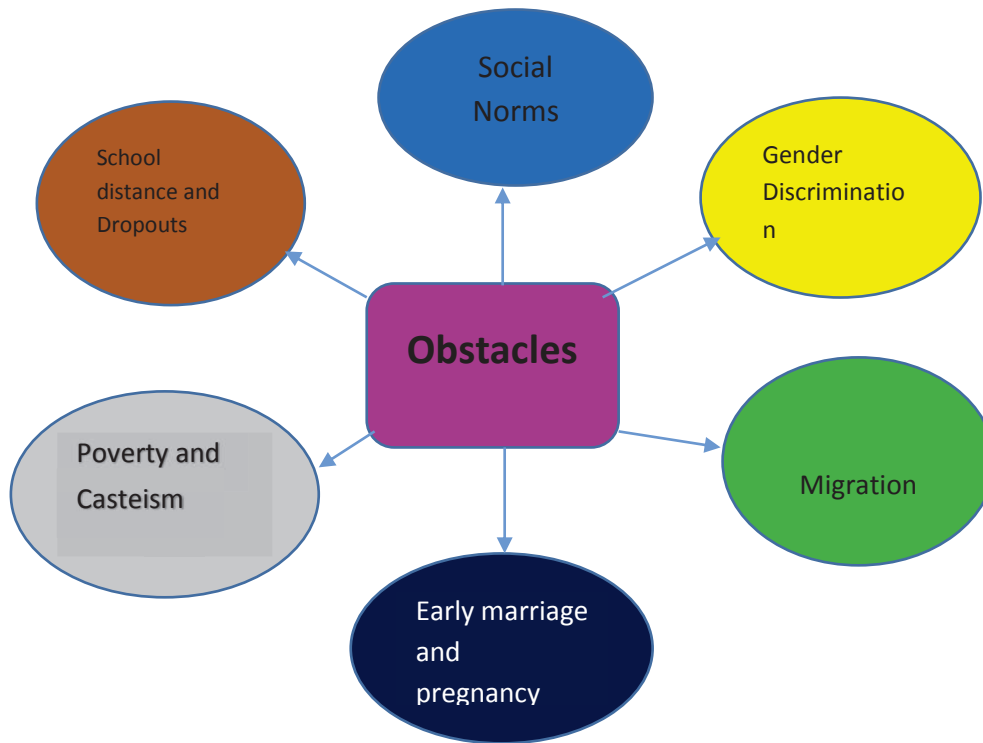


Fig.3. Obstacles in Women education

The nature of problems in every obstacle has changed due to the socio-economic conditions and societal norms. In every way women has to face many challenges to achieve her dreams and prove herself in all facets of life. This is where distance education plays a vital and supportive role to overcome these obstacles.

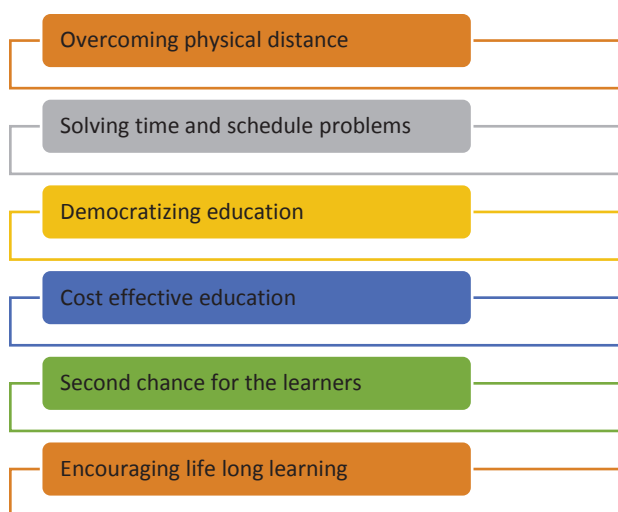
Women Empowerment through Open and Distance Education : Women Education includes areas of gender equality and access to education, and its connection to the alleviation of poverty. Also involved are the issues of single-sex education and religious education in that the division of education along gender lines as well as religious teachings on education have been traditionally dominant and are still highly relevant in contemporary discussions of educating females as a global consideration. Open and Distance Education is a global and rapidly growing phenomenon which offers formal learning opportunities to people who would not otherwise have access to schooling or college education. Teaching- learning are separated by physical distance and the means by which they communicate range from basic print material and the use of postal services to highly sophisticated communication technologies. Open and Distance Education has

offered access to many people who have previously been denied access to educational opportunities because of the place they live or work, poor-economic conditions, cultural issues and social status. In the past, Indian female child had always been denied formal education due to various cultural and social partialities. Open and Distance Education has emerged as a powerful instrument for augmenting opportunities in the field of vocational education, especially for girls and women. Distance Education has emerged as a boon to women of all ages to equip themselves intellectually through acquisition of knowledge, leading them to new radical methods of thinking, and alternative, lateral perspectives on existing information thus rendering them more autonomous and liberated. Distance Learning is steadily increasing as a viable form of education for many institutions and its students. This steady increase has appealed to so many because of its accessibility as well as the flexibility of the scheduling. Many non-traditional students are attracted to distance education because they are able to remain in a career and also take courses to advance in their professional life, possibly get higher wages or simply enroll for personal fulfilment. Women especially, who have a consistently higher enrolment

rate in distance learning than their male counterparts, like distance education because of the flexibility it offers to take classes and yet meet family, work, and community obligations. However, although distance learning has its appeal, 70% of students enrolled drop out before the completion of their program, and the majority of these dropouts are women (Parks, 1997). The advent of technology and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) could go a long way in widening accessibility to education for the majority of children and or people with disabilities, flexibly so that the learning process can go on. These groups may be able to access materials from home, which is seen as the safest, least expensive environment. This could be incorporated with occasional attendance at local study centres and a form of blended learning that incorporates. Many Indian women from all walks of life seize the opportunities of ODL programmes in order to improve on their education, get better jobs, and improve on their standards of living. An empirical example can be found in the number of women who have been empowered through completion of one programme or the other. Today, ODL has brought support to women education and subsequently, empowerment. The social realities in contemporary times have shown that the limitation in the access of many women to Education opportunities which would have enhanced their empowerment is due chiefly to the inability of the learner and the instructor to be in face-to-face contact. The concept of open and distance education is a scheme that affords a nation the opportunity to effectively transmit educational benefits to all its citizens cheaply and more effectively, especially those previously unreached or denied access on the basis of one social consideration or the other. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been a tool for open and distance learning to ensure that women have equal access and are able to contribute to their full potential. It provides a practical tool for those working in the field, highlighting lessons learned from previous the research material and comparing regional differences. There are many reasons why women enroll in distance learning courses and persist in their programs. During online discussions women are able to inquire not just about course content but about each other lives as well. Women receive satisfaction from interaction with their classmates and instructors, and while interaction is important for women, so is the support from classmates and faculty. Another reason women enjoy online classes is for personal growth which is consistent. Finally, some women persist in their education online because of the worth, whether intrinsic or financial.

Role of Distance Institution in empowering women : Distance learning educators and institutions have an intrinsic role in the success of students in their distance education courses as well. If distance education is going to be successful educators and institutions must take their responsibilities to these students. Educators must make themselves familiar with the characteristics of returning women to design effective courses. They must consider the needs of adults and use teaching methods and evaluation procedures accordingly. They must also be familiar with the barriers women face in online courses and work to remove them. Institutions have the responsibilities of providing support services to these students. For example, extended administrative office hours may be necessary to reach these students. Support services may need to be online. Policies and procedures must be in place to be successful. Give exposure to several communication media through use of print, broadcast, internet and discussion forums with teachers and other students. Advancement of technology has also given opportunity to the institution to deliver virtual classes, online chats, computer based assignments and computer based examination which gives encouragement to the distant learner. Above all, educators must make themselves available to prevent the isolation which leads to failure that some students feel.

Advantages of Open and Distance Education: The key benefit of distance learning is that the learner can learn at his own time and place. However, since learners usually do not come face to face with each other, what they often lose in terms of face-to-face interaction they also gain in terms of decreased possibility of embarrassment or fear of learning.



Conclusion: Therefore distance education institute should give the best opportunities and facilities to empower especially women student through education. Special vocational training programmes in

institutions like NIOS, IGNOU, SCDL and such other institutions imparting education in the distant mode across the country should be promoted. For generations, women in these societies have been denied access to quality education of whatever form due to the peripatetic nature of their livelihood. Women in all the categories should be properly sensitised about the advantages that education holds

for them and their families through open and distance learning model. Therefore, introducing the ODL scheme, which does not take them out of their social environments, yet seeks to deliver qualitative education about their social environment and other societies seriously, reinforces this. Everyone should live happily and let others live in their own way that is the basic mantra to live in peace.

“ODL is a god-send opportunity for unequal to be equal”

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