



Higher Education and Women Empowerment in India : A Critical Appraisal

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ABSTRACT: The present paper is an attempt to analyze the "Women Empowerment through Higher Education in India". Women in India have been experiencing different status since the inception of the civilization. Though women form half of the population, yet the masculine principles made the women suffer a lot. They were denied equal opportunities and importance as men. India was no different from the rest of the world. Indian women have been struggling for equal rights over the past millennium. Hence, the history of women in India has been very eventful. The uprising of various female reform movements all over the country resolved the condition of women India gradually. However, in India women were assigned to certain rights in the ancient days. Interestingly, Women Education in Ancient India augmented. India's higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. The higher education system in India has grown in a remarkable way, particularly in the post-independence period, to become one of the largest systems of its kind in the world. However, the system has many issues of concern at present, like financing and management including access, equity and relevance, reorientation of programmes by laying emphasis on health consciousness, values and ethics and quality of higher education together with the assessment of institutions and their accreditation. These issues are important for the country, as it is now engaged in the use of higher education as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based information society of the 21st Century. In India the female education has its roots in the British Regime. In 1854 the East India Company acknowledged women's education and employment. Initially this education was limited only to primary school level education and only the richer section of the society enjoyed this facility. There is a possibility of revolutionary change in India's higher education system and this is women participation. In some elite institutions we find that number of female students is more than male students and there is a possibility to increase this trend. It is true that number of males is outnumbered in comparison with female. India is country where man dominance in the society prevails. It is very essential for the harmonious development of the country that women should go hand by hand and shoulder to shoulder with men. And for empowering the women, higher education will play a vital role.

KEYWORDS: higher education, women empowerment, India, values and ethics, employment, society, knowledge, system

I.INTRODUCTION

Knowledge and education is the birthright of every girl child born in India. But sadly, due to the highly patriarchal nature of our society, most of the women in the country are devoid of this right. As we are now beginning to understand, the society cannot function without the active contribution of women but in the majority of the rural[1,2] (in some cases, even urban) parts of the India, Indian women are still considered to be incapable of taking independent decisions. In order to collectively evolve as a society,



women need to be empowered. However, women's empowerment in India is highly dependent upon various factors such as geographical location (rural/urban), educational status, social status etc. Policies on women empowerment currently exist at both national and local levels in various sectors, including education, economic opportunities, healthcare and political participation but there are substantial gaps between the formulation and implementation of said policies at the community level.

Education is the master key to unlock the door to women empowerment at the grass root level. As per the 2011 census, the female literacy rate in India is 65.46% in contrast with the male literacy rate of over 80%. We have a long way to go to bridge the gap just in the context of literacy rate and even that is not enough to enhance productivity or obtain high-paying jobs, but is essential for women to pursue higher education. Online Education can do wonders for women's rights, security, dignity and their overall empowerment. The only way through which we, as a society, can move forward and aspire to economic growth is through education among the female citizens.

There are several reasons on role of education in Women Empowerment in India:

1. **Education Liberates:** Education liberates the mind and opens it up to places, people and possibilities we would have never thought of otherwise. Whether you're studying language, history, science or literature, you are gaining knowledge and educating yourself about the world. About how nature, people, nations and the world works. Therefore, an educated woman is a liberated woman.
2. **Education offers Independence:** As education opens up the doors to a new enlightened world, it enables women to make their own life choices about anything and everything, whether it is lifestyle, career, sexuality, life-partner, food etc. Education is the key to understanding the difference between right and wrong, standing up against oppression and gender discrimination and making correct choices in life. Education allows women to ignore moronic societal diktats and live life on their own terms.
3. **Eradicating Social Evils:** As mentioned earlier, education is the key to understanding the difference between right and wrong and standing up against oppression; it galvanizes women to take a stand against social evils which plague the society. An intellectual and enlightened woman will actively participate in the fight against dowry, sexual harassment, objectification, misogyny and patriarchy.
4. **Financial Independence:** Education has enabled women to go beyond generic professions. Today, women are becoming models, actors, architects, engineers, journalists, lawyers, managers, CEO's, scientists, joining the army and police forces, and even running the entire nations. There is no profession left which can be said is the sole domain of man. The 21st century's liberated and emancipated woman is breaking the glass ceiling and finding her own place in society. The educated woman is no longer dependent on a man to provide her shelter and food. She is very much capable of earning her own keep, buying her own house and feeding herself.

Quoting one of 20th Century's greatest educators, Dr James Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey (1875-1927), "educate a man and you will educate one person, educate a woman and you will educate a whole family." An educated, liberal, independent and professionally successful woman can shape generations. Only a society that educates and empowers its women can become an advanced society. Education is a woman's birthright and it is high time we started acknowledging that. [3,4]

II.DISCUSSION

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said: "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". In our country women contribute almost half of the population. By empowering women it will



automatically strengthen the national economy. According to the Literacy Rate 2011 census, the female literacy level is 65.46% where as the male literacy rate is over 80%. Education is considered as a milestone for women empowerment. Education is the only key to unlock the golden door of freedom for development. Education play a major role for supporting women's right, dignity and security. Women Education in India has been a major preoccupation of both the government and society because educated women play a vital role in the development of the country. Education of women is the most powerful tool which help to change the status of women in the society. For the harmonious development of the country women should go shoulder to shoulder with men. For empowering the women, higher education will play a major role. This paper discuss the impact of higher education on women empowerment. Knowledge is a distinguishing characteristic of human beings with a tremendous capacity to acquire and transfer knowledge from one generation to another, gaining prominence with advanced science and technology. Higher education is the gateway to economic security and opportunity particularly for women in India. Women are part of socio-economic system and they up hold rich cultural and traditional values. Their progress is equated with the progress of the nation. From 2000, many Indian women play a major role in Knowledge Societies as leaders, addressing issues on creating and adapting information and ideas at an accelerating speed to support economical growth and improved quality of life in India addressing issues such as Equity, Quality, Relevance and Access, proving that Indian women with any background becomes a contributing member of society through learning. The Indian Government has introduced policies and procedures with the goal of sensitizing the higher education system, recognize gender equity and increasing the number of women enrolling for higher education. Higher education for women in India has witnessed an impressive growth over the years and the Government is pooling resources needed to promote female education at all levels.

Higher education- "A Boon to Woman"

Knowledge is life of every Indian woman. It results with the experience that she gains from environment and the supporting world around her, which allow her to live as knowledgeable productive members of the society.[5,6]

The homely environment with mother's love is the first source of learning for the child a and an educated mother would create an environment, allowing her children to gather and analyse information , which helps in adapting to bigger society in future. Critical thinking and analysis will make the children better members of society. To educate someone is to deliberately teach them something new and higher education for women is most powerful means to evolve through/beyond current economical and social crisis in India and to teach her children the art of thinking and analysis before entering the school for education.

Higher education leads a woman to "Complete living" with:

Self-confidence

Higher Education helps the women not only in gaining knowledge but also enables her to earn a living.



1. Necessity of life

Money is necessity in maintaining life and education helps in preserving life.

2. Family welfare

An educated woman plays an important role in a family, dealing with both Health care and financial support to the family.

3. Involvement in Social and political activities

Higher education helps women to have a better understanding of social and political processes beyond the home in far-reaching social structure and makes her a wise citizen with effective social and political action.

4. Complete Living

Complete living includes, being physically strong, earning a living, being a responsible parent and an earnest citizen.

All these are not sufficient for a complete living if a woman does not consider:

- a. Ethical Value
- b. Spiritual value
- c. Social Value
- d. Intellectual Values

The higher education helps women to be mentally and emotionally stronger and to face challenges and overcome obstacles in life and to be a complete woman. Role of Indian Government in promoting gender equity in education ^[1] Women constitute around 48% of the total population of India. Equity in education especially gender equity was one of the major issue in India and there has been a tremendous growth in women enrolling for higher education since independence (risen to 42%) , reducing the gender gap in higher education. 14.72% women have enrolled in professional courses and the highest being in Goa and the lowest in Bihar .

After independence various commissions and committees set up in India advocated its need for gender parity in all the stages of education. Kothari commission and the national policy on education and the programme of Action in 1992 put enormous emphasis on promotion of gender equity in education by reducing the gender gap in access, retention and transition from one stage to other. The national policy on education stressed that education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralized the accumulated disadvantages of the past. The national policy for empowerment of women has been a remarkable achievement for women. The year 2001 was celebrated as women's empowerment year, which recognized women as agents of socio-economic change and development in the country.[7,8]

Indian Government continues to encourage higher education for women through programmes like,



Indira Gandhi scholarship for single girl child for pursuing higher and in order to support higher education through scholarships and by constructing women hostels and by capacity building for women managers in higher education. Women Leader Women appointed as Chairpersons, Board of Governors of apex technical education institutes and in National Institutes of Technology (Nits). For the first time in the history of IITs, two women scientist nominated on the IIT council.

The following approached have been made during XI Plan,

- To offer training programmes focused on increasing sensitivity to gender issues in respect of women managers
- To make capacity building a women's movement.
- To involve Vice-chancellors of the Universities or Principals of the concerned

Colleges in the development of the programme with capacity building is through activities like sensitization, awareness, motivation workshops, development and distribution of resource material, research stimulation workshops, management skill workshops etc.

To improve the Social Group Equity, Government of India had Established Equal Opportunity Cells (EOC) for SC/ST/ OBC/Minorities. The UGC has assisted institutions to establish "Equal opportunity Cells" to oversee the effective implementation of policies and programmes for disadvantaged groups and to provide guidance and counselling in academic, financial, social and other matters. The Cell would also take up programmes to sensitize University/ Colleges on problems faced by Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) categories in higher education.

Government has also established Residential Coaching Academy for SC/ST/ Minorities and Women in Universities and Colleges and the aim of these schemes is to prepare students for NET and All India & State Civil Services examinations and UG/ PG level examinations.

Indian Government has also introduced Post-Doctoral Fellowship for SC/ST and Women and Post-Graduate Scholarships for SC/ST students in professional courses.

The Udaan program of the CBSE is dedicated to the development of girl child education, so as to promote the admission of girl students. About 951 students have been selected by the CBSE. The aim is to address the teaching gap between school education and engineering entrance examinations. It seeks to enhance the enrolment of girl students in prestigious technical education institutions through incentives & academic support. It offers free online supplementary lessons in physics, chemistry and maths specially prepared in the form of videos, text and practice tests on a tablet.[9,10]

PRAGATI - Scholarships for Girl Child for Technical education aims at providing encouragement and support to girl child to pursue technical education. The scheme envisages providing a scholarship of Rs. 30000 and tuition fees Rs. 2000 for 10 months until the duration of the course. 4000 girls will be benefited every year with the restriction that only one girl per family with income less than 6 lakhs/annum will be considered. The Candidates will be selected on merit through the qualifying



examination of the State.

The dropout ratio at various levels of education for girls is much higher than that of boys. Keeping Swami Vivekananda's ideas of women education and to promote girls education, UGC has introduced the Swami Vivekananda Scholarship for Single Girl Child for research in Social Sciences with an aim to compensate direct costs of higher education especially for such girls who happen to be the only girl child in their family.

Possible reasons for Indian women opting for Higher Education:

- Encouragement by Government and Society
- Ability to combine studies and work with family life
- Decreasing discrimination against girls in families
- Higher preparation for higher education, (evidenced by the scores in secondary education)
- Higher aspirations to obtain tertiary degrees.
- The feminisation of the teaching profession and a learning environment more conducive to girls' social and cognitive dispositions.

III.RESULTS

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "If you educate the man, you educate the person but if you educate the woman, you educate the nation". One of the most significant transformations in education in India over the past several decades is the drastic increase in women's access to colleges and universities. Formulating and implementing stringent and powerful laws and policies have addressed the malice of gender discrimination of Higher Education. Most Indian women, with the possibility of economic independence, through respectable employment, have become an important earning member of the family. An educated woman has the skills, the self-confidence and the power to be a better citizen. Women have all the power and capacity as that of men and they are manifesting themselves amongst different opportunities provided through higher education. Empowerment of women is a necessity for the development of a society, because it improves both the quality and quantity of individual resources available for development. It is one of the major practical concerns when concentrate on human right and development. Women empowerment is essential for our society to ensure the sustainable development of the country. Without the empowerment of women, it would be a fable to dream about the target of sustainable development. Women contribute almost half of the population and empowered women will strengthen the national economy. Education is one of the key aspects that enable the women to respond to the challenges, to confront the traditional role and change their lives. Education has also been considered as a key to unlock the golden door of freedom for the development. Education helps in reducing inequalities and function as a means of improving the status of women within the family and society. Empowering women provides an opportunity to acquire practical information and learning for their improved livelihoods. Our country can become a developed nation only if large women folk contribute the best of her ability and capacity which is possible when she is empowered and educated. This paper will discuss the role of education and its impact in empowerment of women and challenges that come in the pathway. Empowerment of women in 21st century play vital role in the development of the country. Women represent almost half of the population in the world and access to education has



been one of the most pressing demands of the women's right movements. Women Empowerment is a worldwide concern and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns globally. The idea of women empowerment was introduced in 1985, international women conference at NAROIBI . Women's education has too been a key concern of both the government and community as educated women can also play a crucial role in socio-economic aspect. The first year of New Millennium 2001 was declared as "WOMEN EMPOWERMENT YEAR". Education of a women leads to a better family and ultimately an ideal society to a progressive nation. A developing nation is one where all the people of the country irrespective of their caste, religion, sex, colour and creed are socially, economically, politically and culturally are independent. Education facilitate a women to develop into strong intellectual by giving her knowledge . Agarwaal and Salve (2013), Each and every field like teaching, Nursing care, Social work, medicine, Women proved to be better than men. It is a dominant means for reducing inequality as it can give the capability to become independent. Women, who come transversely discrimination in any field, have particular needs of this. Education is considered as an important milepost of women empowerment because it permits them to face the confronts, to deal with their traditional role and change their life. Education of women is the vital instrument of change of their position in the society. Still huge womenfolk of our nation are illiterate, weak, backward, and exploited. Empowerment and competence building afford women an avenue to acquire practical information and knowledge for their improved livelihoods. India can be converted into a developed nation only if women contribute to the best of her capacity and ability which is possible when she is educated and empowered.

Education portrayal in empowerment of women

1. Education Liberate: Education liberalizes the thinking, mind, thoughts, imagination, power, principle in various fields for easy to survive and achieve knowledge through education. Education makes the women's self-sufficient in every aspect, she is not depends on her father, husband nor son neither brother.
2. Education stay away from obstacle: Education gives equal rights to women in socially, politically, culturally, gender, religiously manner. She will fetch equal status with men and that is the basis for the development of both national and international integration.
3. Education gives decision making power: As education opens ways to take decision according to their choice whether it is relates to life style, life partner, job, career etc. Education trains to learn what is right and what is wrong and it also push to stay independently on their own feet.
4. Education stow away: Education will garnishing women to defense against crime, social devil, sexual harassment, marital rape and mental stress of society etc.
5. Educated women endow to economy: If women are qualified and helpful for family to earn money that means she able to develop the economy status of family and also for nation. Women can facilitate through their work, get free from problems prevailing in India like high maternal mortality rate, high rates of gender violence and other crime against women i.e. child abuse, female feticide, implement family planning and other schemes etc.



6. Education strengthens the women lives: Education enhances the quality of women and makes some strategies to grow upward, to gear the entire education system to play positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. To enlarge the women's access to vocational, technical and professional education at all levels and breaking the gender stereotypes of the society.[11]

7. Analysis of UNESCO about education role in empowerment: UNESCO data proves education transforms development. It says that if all children enjoyed equal access to education, per capita income would increase by 23% over 40 years. And if all women had a primary education, child marriages and child mortality could fall by a sixth and maternal deaths by two-thirds.

UNESCO proves that education empowers women, promotes tolerance, improves job opportunities and increases economic growth avoids early marriages and also saves mother's lives

Hindrances of women empowerment

There are some major problems that were faced by women from history and still today up to some extent.

- Gender discrimination
- Lack of education
- Household responsibility
- Child marriage
- Child labour
- Partial attitude of parents
- Domestic violence
- Endogamy marriage
- Family responsibility
- Social status
- Dowry

IV.CONCLUSIONS

India is a democratic and a developing country but its fact that still there is deep ignorance in the society about the values of women. Women's are deprived and discriminated by our society. There was much progress in our society in everywhere but gender inequality exists in many dimensions of life, not only in India but many countries of the world. There still exist a wide gap in between male and female. In Indian mythology women is treated as divine, holy and pure, the position of women in "Vedas" and "Upanishads" was put on a high pedestal but now, in actual we know the position and status of women

in our progressive society because still we are talking about “Women empowerment”, India has a strong written constitution proclaiming laws for equality and welfare of women, barbaric and cruel practices still continue to haunt women in the form of female feticide, infanticide, girl child labour, Dowry related death, molestation, sexual harassment, rape, eve-teasing, gender inequality, domestic violence etc. are very common in Indian counterpart. Still a large section of women specially the rural women face increasingly violent from of gender bias. Perhaps the highest form of violence against the women is to deny life on gender basis; data shows that there is still a very high preference for a male child in states like Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh etc. We must remember that girls are indispensable part of our society and an asset to our family and nation. We need to constructively work against the outdated traditions, prejudices, practices, superstitions and customs which lower the status of the women. Economic, social and political empowerment can be achieved to a great extent through education.

Constitutional Provisions, Special Laws And National Policies In Support Of Women Empowerment

The importance of women as a central human being resource was recognized by the Constitution of India which has not only accorded equality to women but also empowered the State. There are a number of Articles in the Indian Constitution that safeguards the socio-economic development of women and their participation in decision making process of society.

1. Art. 14- Grants equal rights and opportunities to men and women in the socio, economic and political spheres.
2. Art. 15(1) - It prohibits discrimination against any people on the basis of their sex, caste, religion, race and place of birth.
3. Art. 16- Equality opportunities in matter of public employments to all citizens.
4. Art. 39(d) - Grants equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
5. Art.42- The state has to make provision for ensuring of humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Government of India has also enacted some specific laws to protect the interests of women and for up gradation of women status. These are:

- The Hindu Succession Act, 1956- It provides equal right to women in parental property.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961-This act declares the taking and giving of dowry an unlawful activity.
- Equal Remuneration Act, 1976- It provides equal remunerations compare with men to women for work of equal value.
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971-This act legalizes the abortion granting the right of women to go for abortion on the basis of physical and mental health.



- The Criminal Law Amendment Act 1983- It seeks to stop a various number of crimes against women.
- The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986- It prohibits the vulgar presentation of women in the media such as- newspapers, cinema, T.V. etc.
- The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005- This act provides more effective protection of women guaranteed in the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and society.
- The goal of National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The policy states that: "Equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured. Special safeguards will be taken to eliminate discrimination, eradicate illiteracy and create gender sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of vocational or technical skills of women. Sinking gender gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus area.
- Specific moment goal in existing policies will be achieved, with unique focus on girls and women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the SC/ST/OBC and Minorities." [10,11]

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