WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

A woman is an important part of the family, which is the basic unit of the society. Women’s contribution to national development is also very important. Education is the most important tool for a woman’s physical, emotional, economic and social development. Empowerment is a process through which a woman is able to have the ability to make choices, control resources or enact decisions. The empowered woman can become the agent of their own development, exercising choices to set their own agenda & be strong enough to challenge & change their subordinate position in the societies. Government of India launched various schemes to girls through education such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiya, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya, Mahila Samakhya etc.

Keywords: Women; Empowerment; Education

INTRODUCTION

“The lord divided his body into two parts, half male and half female and thus was created the universe.”- Manusmriti

A woman is an important part of the family which is the basic unit of society. She is considered to be the pivot not only in domestic life but for society also. Indian philosopher and educationist, Swami Vivekananda revealed that women are not only to be treated as mere flesh and bone with biotic potential but as embodiments of Shakti – ‘the female principle of creation’ (Kapoor, 2013). Women’s contribution to national development is crucial and their emancipation essential for economic development and social progress of the nation. Women must be recognized as a power in the developmental process (Devdas,1990). Dar (2011) has also argued in his study that the status and position of women in any society is an index of the standard of its social organization. Similarly, The commitment to the cause of the fairer sex was also clear from the words of our first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru said ‘You can tell the state of a nation by looking at the status of women there (Swamy,2012)’.

Women empowerment enables autonomy and control over their lives. The empowered woman can become the agent of their own development, exercising choices to set their own agenda and be strong enough to challenge and change their subordinate position in the societies. By women’s empowerment, we are referring to the expansion in women’s ability and freedom to make strategic life choices, a process that occurs over time and involves women as agents who have the ability to formulate choices, control resources or enact decisions that affect important life outcomes ( Malhotra & Schuler, 2002).

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

1. To know about the importance of empowerment in women’s context.
To study about the impact of education on women empowerment.

To know about the impact of Government education policies on women’s empowerment.

**Status of Indian Woman from Ancient Time**

Nowadays the women are becoming a more of a perspective to people; however in the earlier days, women were not seen in the workplace. They were seen as mothers taking care of children, or doing any household duties like cooking and cleaning. Prime, Welbourne, and Carter (2009) revealed in their study that the stereotype perception does exist for men and women managers. The women managers were found in ‘take care’ behavior whereas the male managers for ‘take charge’. Since ancient time the position and status of women in India was very degrading. The caste, class, education, income differentials sharply affected the low status of woman. They have been oppressed, suppressed, depressed, exploited and victimized by the male dominated society. Gurhold and Scholar (2004) found in his study that in ancient time institutions were established to control female sexuality such as the burning of widows, prohibition against remarriage, prohibition of women’s initiation of divorce, purdah system and child marriage etc. These are the evils which contribute to lowering the self concept of the women. Due to these evils society views woman as a burden.

In the 21st century India is fast emerging as a global power but for half of its population, the women across the country, struggle to live life with dignity continues. Women are facing problems in every spheres of life whether employment, access to health care or property rights. India is fast developing but women's in India continue to be discriminated. The declining sex ratio in India amply portrays the discrimination shown towards women at the stage of birth. Women may have stardom in any stream but are getting harassment every day by their surroundings. They are victims of crime directed specifically at them, rape, kidnapping and abduction, dowry related crimes, molestation, sexual harassment, eve-teasing, etc. The crimes against women in India are growing at a rampant speed. Women, irrespective of their class, caste and educational status, are not safe. (Nagindrappa, Radhika 2013).

The position of women is same everywhere, whether the country is developed, the developing or under developed. According to Sen (2005) historically, India has been a male dominated society, in which a woman has expected to marry, have a family and take care of the household. Women play major roles during various stages of their life as a daughter, wife, mother and sister etc. In spite of her contribution to human beings, she still belongs to a backward class on account of various social, political economic and psychological barriers. As Eagly (2007) noted that there continued to be widespread recognition that women often come in second to men in competitions to attain leadership positions. Similarly Moran (1992) also said that women shouldn’t be leaders because leaders have to be strong, intelligent and make tough decisions and those characteristics are better suited to men.

The importance of women hardly needs emphasis. Woman is the mother of race and is the liaison between the generations. Our culture attaches much importance to women; therefore, India has been symbolized as ‘MOTHER INDIA’. Jawaharlal Nehru once said, “To awaken the people it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves.” But we see girls facing discrimination everywhere, in each corner of the world. Sonwal (2013) stated that the discrimination of women from womb to tomb is well known. There is continued inequality of women in all sectors- economic, education, social, political, health care, nutrition, right and legal etc. women oppressed in all spheres of life. Gurhold and Scholar (2004) said that gender hierarchy was established from a very young age as Brahmin boys usually obtained an extensive education, while young women rarely received any education beyond domestic skills. Agezo(2010) reveals in his study that in Ghanaian culture, women are still discriminated against in all sectors of the economy and this system makes it difficult for female leader to aspire to leadership roles. Further he said that women are not perceived as leader and stereotypically, women are perceived as home maker and men are perceived as decision maker. The concept of gender can also be understood well in many social and cultural institutions like religious places, various functions such as marriage, birth, death,
family celebrations and in social, economic and political connotations of power relations. Charlotte, (2010) reveals in his study that women workers are mainly discriminated on the basis of sex and social origin, as they are often considered incompetent to take up certain jobs because of their feminine disposition and because of their reproductive roles. (Kapoor, 2013) in his study quotes the words of Swami Vivekananda who believed that women could excel in all fields of human activity, if treated at par with men and given proper education and training. Women in India have been deprived of equal education, equal employment, equal pay and equal status with men, robbed of dignity, pride and self worth. They see themselves as prisoners doomed to obedience and conformity to find release and freedom only in death.

The most recent approach to women in development has been empowered which implies empowerment at grass root level with emphasis of self reliance, build up potential for improving one’s own welfare and bring about constructive changes in the lives of other people (Devdas et al, 1989). The term empowers means to give power or authority and to enable or permit. Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing an individual to think, behave, take action and work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one’s destiny and the circumstances of their lives. Sisodia and Singh (2009) defined empowerment as a means of creating a social empowerment in which one can make decisions and make choice individually and collectively for social transmission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Male-Female gap in literacy rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>27.16</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>18.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>15.35</td>
<td>25.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>34.45</td>
<td>45.96</td>
<td>21.97</td>
<td>23.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>43.57</td>
<td>56.38</td>
<td>29.76</td>
<td>26.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>52.21</td>
<td>64.13</td>
<td>39.29</td>
<td>24.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>64.83</td>
<td>75.26</td>
<td>53.67</td>
<td>21.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>74.04</td>
<td>82.14</td>
<td>65.46</td>
<td>16.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Population Commission

Women Empowerment and Education

(Kumar, 2013) stated that 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. Pazhani (2014) revealed in his study that education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Sonwal (2013) also agreed that education is the key factor for women empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Kallave
find out in his study that higher education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. 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 health and home but help her to get status, positive self esteem and self confidence, necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Warner, Malhotra and McGonagall also said that when girls are exposed to a quality education, they acquire information and skills which can yield literacy, numeracy and cognitive skills. Further, they said that a quality education can also enhance girls’ aspiration, autonomy and decision making ability.

(Srivastava, 2012) revealed that education of girls in contemporary India is a mixed baggage or achievement, success stories and pitfalls. Forces that have contributed in motivating communities parents and girls in pursuing education are rooted in constitutional commitments, recommendations of committees and commissions, policy initiatives and formulation of schemes and programmes and their implementation.

Education is the instrument of growth and development to create an awareness of oneness on one hand and useful for the service of mankind on the other hand no doubt our government is taking all possible measures to improve girls’ education. A large number of non-govt voluntary organizations are actively involved in promoting education among girls, especially for education of girls belonging to SC/ST from rural & remote areas & other dis-advantaged group. Govt. of India including all State Govt. continuously trying to universalize the elementary education through various programmes like National literacy Mission, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Midday Meal, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya etc. Special measures have already been in operation to eliminate discrimination, universalize elementary education, eradicate illiteracy, create gender sensitise education system, increase enrolment & retention of girls & improve the quality of education to facilitate lifelong learning as well as ensuring social empowerment of women to facilitate education of girls.

Programmes Conducted by the Government to Empowered Girls through Education

Government of India launched a scheme; known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in the year 2001-02 in partnership with the state Government and local self Government. It is a comprehensive and integrated flagship programme of Govt. of India to attain universal elementary education. The SSA programme is an attempt to provide basic education to the girls especially those belonging to the SC, ST and Minorities. The programme recognizes the need for special efforts to bring all out-of-school girls including girls belonging to the SC/ST, Minority Communities to school. This would require a proper identification of out of school girls. (Sharma, Rani, Sharma, 2010)

The programme which introduced to promote girls education was a new scheme called Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya. The Govt. of India has launched this scheme for setting up to 750 residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level for girls belonging to the SC, ST, OBC & minorities in difficult areas. This programme provides opportunities to dropouts and never enrolled girls from marginalized groups for revisiting education after a gap of few years, so they are able to complete the elementary cycle of schoolings.

(Srivastava, 2012) stated in his study that the most promising initiatives undertaken in the 1990s was the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), 1994. The programme aimed at providing access to primary education to all children, reducing dropout rate to less than 10% increasing learning achievement of primary school students by at least 25%, and reducing the gap among gender and social group to less than 5%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total no. of KGBVs sanctioned</th>
<th>No. of KGBVs operational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>743</td>
<td>743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The other motivational scheme of the government of India is the Mahila Samakhya (MS) programme in 1989. The educational component of the programme attempts to address social issues such as, child marriage, child widows’ child labour and all those who are victims of social and emotional violence. MS has evolved educational institutions which cater exclusively to needs of girls victimized by the above social practices and to marginalized girls belonging to SC, ST, OBC and minority communities. (Srivastava, 2012) Further, revealed in study that some of the significant recommendations of commissions and committees that had an overall bearing on girls’ education were the Durga Bai Deshmukh Committee (1958-59), the Hansa Mehta Committee (1962-64) and the Education Commission (1964-66). The major thrust of their recommendations was on accelerating the pace of girls’ education in the areas of access, enrolment, retention and achievement for girls at all stages of school education, by looking into issues related with both demand and supply in rural and in the urban context. (Swamy, 2012) studied that after independence there was an increase from 20 universities and 496 colleges in 1947-48 to 634 universities and 33023 colleges in 2010-11. The total enrollment increase from a meager 0.1 million in 1947-48 to 17 million in 2010-11 a remarkable increase indeed.

**CONCLUSION**

(Suguna, 2011) Women education in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. (Ajuzie, Okoye, Chukwuemeka, Mohammad, 2012) stated that The present day women thus need empowerment through the acquisition of the skills and knowledge which education offers in order for them to be self reliant and contribute to national development. However, no doubt that our government is taking all possible
measures to improve girls’ education. A large number of non-government/voluntary organizations are actively involved in promoting education among girls. But still the growth of girls’ education in our society is very low. This means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, the weak, backward and exploited. Therefore, there is a need to make efforts to bring more and more girls to school and improvement in school facilities with special focus on basic necessities like sanitation and water. It is high time not only to undertake a variety of policy implications but also to develop a variety of strategies for its effective implementations to school level. It is essential to make girl children more and more comfortable in school, so it is important to focus an appointment of more and more female teachers in rural village schools. Security of girl child is a major issue for the girls so the hostel facility and transport facility for the girl children should be there. These are the strategies which would help women to take off themselves. The path is clear for women, only strong and positive attitude with assertive efforts on the part of higher education sector and society at large are needed. Then there will no limit for women except sky.

REFERENCES


