

Role of Higher Education in Women Empowerment : Some Challenges

*Suman Kumar**

The Oxford American Dictionary defines “empowerment” as “to make (someone) stronger and more confident, esp. in controlling their life and claiming their rights”. When we talk about women’s empowerment, we talk about women taking more of a leadership role. Empowering women is an important end in itself and as women acquire the same status, opportunities and social, economic and legal rights as men, as they acquire the right to health and gender based violence, human well-being will be enhanced. Higher 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. Higher educational provide opportunities to women to fulfill their Needs. These needs comprise both learning content such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decision making and to continue learning.

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“To educate your women first and leave them to themselves, they will tell you what reforms are necessary”.

-Swami Vivekananda.

* Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, S. D. Post-graduate College (Ch. Charan Singh University), Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh (India) E-mail: <suman1041984@gmail.com>

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1. Introduction

Women were regarded sacred and enjoyed respectable place in primitive societies because of her ability to reproduce human race till the time men realized their role to impregnate women (Goel, 2004 & Smith, 2008). The concepts of Goddess rather than God in Greek mythology and Devi, Mata etc. in Hinduism may be the manifestations of women reproductive role in primitive societies.

Education of women in India has been a major issue for both the government and civil society, as the educated women play a very important role in the development of the country. India, at present has largest number of illiterates in the world. As we all know that education is must for everyone but unfortunately, in this male dominating society, the education of women has been neglected for a long time. Mostly people think that to spend money on daughters would be vain. Now, we see the change in people's mentality that they are worried about the future of their daughters and they are ready to give the same place to position their daughters as they want for their sons. But in rural areas, we see that there are negligible changes in rural people's thinking.

A higher women literacy rate improves the quality of life both at home and outside home, by encouraging and promoting education of children, especially female children, and helps in reducing the infant mortality rate. It is true that empowerment can be gained with the help of education because it gives the knowledge of right and wrong, truth and lie.

2. History of Women Education in India

Although in the Vedic period women had access to education in India. They had gradually lost this right. However, in the British period there was revival of interest in women's education in India. During this period, various socio-religious movements led by eminent persons like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar emphasized on women's education in India. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Baba Saheb Ambedkar were leaders of the lower castes in India who took various initiatives to make education available to the women of India. However 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 six

decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate.

3. The Role of Higher Education in the Empowerment of Women

Higher education definitely raises women's status whether she contribute in the income of the family or not. She can be at par with men. Majority of the women in our country are uneducated that is why they are suppressed. It is the duty of school teachers to tell them that becoming a wife is not their ultimate goal. Their standing up on their feet and being something is important.

Education can bring phenomenal change in women's life resulting in social transformation in the long run by inculcation following attributes among them:

- » Enhancing their confidence.
- » Raising their status in the family and society.
- » Bring awareness about their rights.
- » Boosting their self esteem.
- » Increasing their self efficacy.
- » Reducing their dependency.
- » Better up bringing of their children.
- » Enhancing their mobility.
- » Opening career opportunities.

Increased knowledge, self-confidence and awareness of gender equity are indicators of empowerment process. There is evidence that these components are usually developed during and as a result of higher education. Women, who are educated and earning, are in much better position in our society as compared to uneducated women worker.

To be involved in the dialogue about education systems around the world today is to understand and articulate the key role played by higher education. Through higher education flow of the ideology, values, and culture of a nation, state, and its people. Misinformation and constricted learning behaviors that women internalize can also be filtered through higher education.

Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. Educated women not only tend to promote education.

4. Challenges of Education

The vast majority of the world's poor population is women. "Around the world, healthy, educated, employed and empowered women break poverty cycles not only for themselves, but for their families, communities, and countries too". According to United Nations World's Women 2010 Trends and Statistics, two-third of the world's illiterate population is female. The majority of school age children, not in school are girls. Women all over the world are challenged by a number of obstacles that restrict their ability to play significant roles in their communities and the broader society.

When we talk about our country, the country has grown from leaps and bounds since its independence where education is concerned, the gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. Some other challenges faced by women are as follows:

- » About 01 percent of total women population has under graduate level education.
- » Women accounts for one third of the total student at collage/university level.
- » In professional courses the proportion of female students is much smaller.
- » In education courses the nearly half of the students are women.

5. Barriers to Female Education

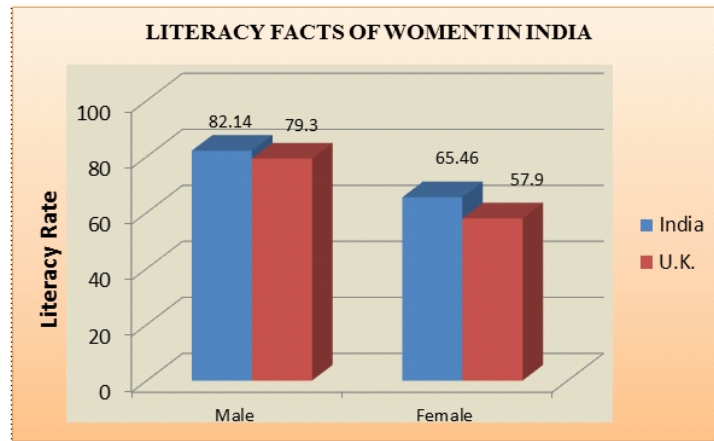
Some of the main barriers to female education in India are as follows :

- » One-fourth of Indian population still lives below the poverty line.
- » Social value and parental preferences. Inadequate school facilities.

- Shortage of female teachers 29% at primary level and 20% at university level.
- Gender bias in curriculums.

Additionally, the norms of culture that the man of the family is the be-all and end-all of family decisions is slowly spoiling the society of the country.

Women face many social challenges today whether it be making soaps and incense in order to secure an income for her family to raise children amidst the harsh economic crisis. A woman is dynamic in many roles she plays. In the village of Warwarhere in Maharashtra 400 women stood up and raised their voices to ban alcohol and drugs. Women have withstood perennial health problems due to the lack of toilet facilities and are forced to use fields and open spaces.



6. Conclusion

On the basis of above detailed analysis it could be concluded that there is no doubt about the essential need of empowering women through higher education. Now it is cleared that only literacy is not the ultimate solution but women should be highly educated to know their rights and duties. And should be able mandatory that there should proper implementations what policies are made and what government of India has made different programmes regarding women empowerment.

Education among women is the most powerful tool of attaining power in the society. Higher Education of women plays a very important role in releasing their energy and creativity and enabling

them to meet the complex challenges of the present world. It helps in lessening inequalities and functions as a means for improving their status within the family. The higher education increases the women to take independent decisions, to reduce violence, women's ability to claim legal rights, participation in civic society, economic independence and many more. The biggest challenge before the Government and NGO's is to create awareness and sensitization among people of all levels, especially in rural areas, about the special needs of women and girls.

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