

Education and Women Empowerment

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Abstract: *"It is widely acknowledged that education is the foremost and essential means for social empowerment. It is believed that based on education, women can develop expertise, knowledge, skills, and abilities."* Education is essential for acquiring any kind of skill and developing a discerning perspective. This article discusses the necessity of girls' education in the context of economic factors, increasing awareness in employment opportunities, and evolving financial conditions. It also presents an overview of the current scenario of education." Educated women play a crucial role in the social, political, cultural, democratic, economic, administrative, and civic development of the country. This is the process of women empowerment. Currently, there has been significant progress in literacy and education, but the overall picture still does not reflect the proportion of the female population. The number of women at higher levels of education is still comparatively low."The first Prime Minister of the nation, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, once said, *"You can judge the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women within it."* Progress in any country is not possible without the education of women. The hallmark of an empowered woman is her ability to face challenges and remain resolute in achieving her goals. Keeping this in mind, India's first female teacher, Savitribai Phule, along with her husband Jyotibarao Phule, opened a school for girls in Pune, Maharashtra, in 1848, recognizing the importance of education. In this way, their remarkable contribution played a significant role in empowering women in the country.

Keywords: education, empowerment, education, women, literacy, significance

Objectives

The eminent scholar and modern India's creator Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar stated that without learning knowledge cannot come, and without knowledge, power cannot come. Encouraging women for higher education is extremely essential. The development of any country is based on the foundation of education. In the Context of Indian Society, the process of empowerment for women emphasizes the values of tolerance, restraint and sacrifice, as a result, the ability to determine, option for oneself is less prevalent among average women.

The objective of this article is to discuss the importance of educating girls in the changing financial situation, increasing awareness of economic factors, and opportunities for employment and housing. Educated women make a positive impact on society through their contributions to their families, professions, and fields of expertise. From a democratic perspective, women's education and empowerment hold special importance as women play a remarkable role in nation-building.

Currently, there is a discussion on global level participation in efforts towards women's equality and empowerment. At this juncture, the educational aspect of women's empowerment becomes highly significant. Until there is an improvement in the status of women, the progress of the world towards prosperity is not possible. *"Just as a bird cannot fly with one wing, it is impossible for the world to achieve well-being without the upliftment of women"* - Swami Vivekananda".

Introduction

In ancient times, education for women was considered imperative in India. Women were revered and held the status of *"Nari Tu Narayani"* (A woman is a deity). However, during the medieval period, several barriers were imposed on women's education, and in this era, the status of women declined in various fields. Therefore, this period is often referred to as the dark age for women, or it can be considered a challenging era for women's empowerment. After gaining independence, with the enactment of the Constitution, the government ensured that women were provided with equal opportunities for education. They were made aware of their rights and duties. To bring about improvements in economic, social, educational, and political conditions, women were actively integrated into the mainstream of development by the government. Additionally, various welfare schemes were implemented to promote developmental activities. In the current era, efforts are being made to protect women's education based on the principle of gender equality.

The Asian Pacific Center for Women and Development, while defining women's empowerment, states that an increase in decision-making power by women, especially in situations where decisions are traditionally made by men, is the true essence of women's empowerment. Education serves as an aid in overcoming economic, social, and cultural barriers, and it fosters the development of decision-making abilities. In the past few years, there has been significant progress in the field of education for Indian women. Many educational institutions have been established in rural areas with the aim of providing education, including Jawahar Navodaya Schools, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Schools, Eklavya Model Residential Schools, and schools for girls belonging to marginalized communities, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other economically disadvantaged sections of society. Since the enactment of the Right to Education Act in 2009, there have been important improvements in the enrollment and educational outcomes of girls and women (Prata et.al., 2017).

Education is a fundamental right of every citizen. Education acts as a cornerstone for women's empowerment. Women constitute nearly half of the country's population. If women are not educated, half of the nation will remain uneducated. However, there has been progress in the status of women in the field of education in recent times. Without the development of women, the progress of the country is not possible. This is why there is a focus on gender equality in the current era. Importance is given to providing women with equal opportunities in education, just like men. For the overall development of the country, women's education and empowerment are crucial. Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar emphasized this when he said, "*Get educated, be organized, and struggle*" in order to empower women (Bhat, 2015).

The current scenario of women's Education

In India reflects that the goal of women's empowerment extends not only to women belonging to the affluent and privileged sections confined to high positions. It encompasses women from ordinary and disadvantaged sections, those residing in rural areas, and even those dwelling in the slums of cities. The aim is to bring about positive changes in the lives of all these women, who may not have access to resources and who may feel vulnerable in making decisions for themselves. According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate for women is 64.46%, whereas for men it is 82.14% (Rao and Shokeen; 2021). Urban female literacy rate is 64% and rural female literacy rate is 31%. There is a significant disparity in female literacy between rural and urban areas. The 2011 census data also indicates that the female literacy rate of 64.46% is lower than the overall literacy rate of 74.04% in the country. In 6 out of 24 states, 25% or fewer women are literate in rural areas. In Rajasthan, the percentage of literate rural women is even less, at 12% or lower (MoSPI, 2016). As per the national sample Survey Organization report from August 2017, the literacy rate among males aged over 7 years in rural areas was 83%, while for females, it was 67%. The survey conducted in 4577 villages with 36479 families revealed that only 71.2% of women had received primary education, and 37.6% were illiterate. In comparison, 19.8% of men were illiterate. Additionally, 7.1% of men and 4.5% of women received education up to the higher secondary level, with only 4.5% of men and 2.9% of women attaining graduate or postgraduate degrees (Press Information Bureau 2019).

According to a report released by the National Commission for protection of Child Rights in 2018, it was stated that approximately 39.4% of girls aged between 15 to 18 years were not enrolled in any registered educational institution. Most of them were either engaged in household chores or involved in activities like begging for a living (NUEPA, 2014).

As of October 19, 2019, according to the part from Drishti Women's Education, the unemployment rate among young women aged 15 to 24 in India is 11.5%, while for young men in the same age group, it is 9.8%. According to various studies, it is also evident that there are still about 145 million women in India who are functionally illiterate, unable to read or write. Furthermore, the situation in rural areas of India is significantly more severe compared to urban areas (Dristi IAS, 2022).

Education plays a crucial role in women's empowerment. It yields numerous positive outcomes for women's empowerment, such as:

1. **Increased Decision-Making:** Education enhances women's knowledge, skills, and self-confidence, making them capable of making informed decisions in various aspects of life (UNESCO, 2013).
2. **Economic Opportunities:** Highly educated women are successful in identifying economic opportunities, enabling them to earn higher incomes, thereby improving their own and their family's standard of living. This, in turn, contributes to the country's economic development (UN-Women).

3. **Health and Well-being:** Educated women have access to health-related information, allowing them to take care of their own and their family's health (Davidson et.al., 2011).
4. **Empowerment of Future Generations:** Educated mothers place significant importance on their children's education, leading to an improvement in the educational standards of successive generations (Vikram and Vanneman, 2020).
5. **Reduced Fertility Rates:** Studies show that educated women understand the significance of smaller, happier, and more prosperous families, positively influencing the family's well-being and leading to an enhancement in their quality of life (Thomas et.al., 2017).
6. **Community Development:** Participation in community activities by educated women leads to an increase in leadership skills, bringing about significant positive changes within their communities.
7. **Political Participation:** Political participation leads to opportunities for working in various councils and bodies due to political empowerment.
8. **Problem Solving:** Education fosters the ability to think critically and make decisions, aiding in better problem-solving.
9. **Reduction in Child Marriage:** Educated women are more aware of their rights, leading to a reduction in child marriages.
10. **Innovation and Progress:** Educated women contribute to innovation, research, and scientific development, resulting in progress in various fields (UNESCO, 2023).

Education nurtures qualities like empathy, intelligence, and positive thinking, resulting in personal development. Consequently, women's education leads to comprehensive benefits in social, economic, cultural, political, creative, administrative, leadership, and democratic aspects, providing encouragement to women's empowerment.

Government Schemes for Women Empowerment in India:

The govt. initiative for women education in India include the "*Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*" scheme, "*Balika Samridhi Yojna*," "*Sukanya Samridhi Yojna*," "*Mukhya Mantri Rajshri Yojna*," "*Mukhya Mantri Ladli Yojna*," "*CBSC Udan Yojna*," "*Mukhya Mantri Kanya Suraksha Yojna*," "*Maji Kanya Bhagya Shri Yojna*," "*Nanda Devi Kanya Yojna*," and "*Madhyamik Siksha Rashtriya Protsahan Yojna*." These schemes are helping women progress in the field of education.

Leadership skills, proficiency in various subjects, and a focus on economic independence should also be emphasized for women. Women's education needs to be given extra edge, and there is a need to promote women's education as that of men. Economic independence and self-reliance will promote the spread of women's education. Providing opportunities for skill development is essential. Encouraging greater participation of women in the Indian workforce is necessary (NCERT, 2019).

Without achieving better goals in women's health, education, and empowerment, development cannot be considered complete. Moreover, it is essential to work systematically on issues related to women's welfare. Swami Vivekananda once said that if a poor person cannot reach education, education should reach them (Satyajit Saha, 2020).

To achieve continuous development goals and eliminate gender inequality in order to ensure the nation's progress, it is imperative that every woman in the country receives technical education. Recognizing the importance of women's education, the National Education Policy, 2020 mandates the integration of vocational education in all schools. Education at lower levels not only affects women's lives but also has a negative impact on their families and the country's economic development.

Conclusions

Empowering women with the right life skills to empower children is essential in the present times. They should be empowered without discrimination and should have equal rights. India, despite being a rapidly growing economy and being discussed as the world's third-largest economy after the United States and China in the near future, still lags behind in terms of gender equality. Inclusive development suggests that women should actively participate in the development process. Women possess qualities such as resilience, sacrifice, and determination, and

if every woman becomes educated, these qualities can lead to creativity, innovation, and leadership capacity development.

The education of women promotes gender equality, comprehensive development, and nation-building. Education fosters decision-making ability and adaptability at all levels of leadership, contributing to progress. Thus, education is crucial for the empowerment of women in all aspects of life (Segovia-Perez, 2019).

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