



## Empowerment of women through education: Prospects and challenges

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### Abstract

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 hearth and home but helps her to get status, positive self esteem, and self confidence, necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Apparently it also facilitates them to procure a job and supplement the income of family and achieve social status. Education especially of women has a major impact on health and nutrition as an instrument of developing a sustainable strategy for population control. Moreover educated women can play an equally important role as men in nation building. Thus there is no denying fact that education empowers women. Indeed the different organs of the United Nations and experts on women's liberation argue for women's education as the basic step to attain equality with men. One of the recommendations of National Policy on Education (1986) by the Government of India is to promote empowerment of women through the agency of education and it is considered to be a land mark in the approach to women's education of illiterate. Empowerment is the process of gaining access and developing one's capacities with a view to participating actively in shaping one's own life and that of one's community in economic, social and political terms. This article brings into light the role of empowering women through education.

**Keywords:** education, female literacy rate, women empowerment

### Introduction

Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. The rise of feminist ideas has, however, led to the tremendous improvement of women's condition throughout the world in recent times. Access to education has been one of the most pressing demands of these women's rights movements. 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. India is poised to emerge as one of the most developed nations by 2020, more literate, knowledgeable and economically at the forefront. No doubt, women will play a vital role in contributing to the country's development. Women power is crucial to the economic growth of any country. In India this is yet to meet the requirements despite reforms. Little has been achieved in the area of women empowerment, but for this to happen, this sector must experience a chain of reforms. Though India could well become one of the largest economies in the world, it is being hindered due to a lack of women's participation.

### 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, Iswar 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 boost 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 three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 2001 only 54% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2011 65.46% female were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 11.46% as compared to 6.14 % of that of male literacy rate. The table below describes the literacy in India from the period of 1951 to 2011. The table also highlights the male female gap in literacy rate.

**Table 1:** Literacy in India (1951-2011)

Census Year	Persons	Males	Females	Male – Female gap in Literacy rate
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.3	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

*Source:* Census 2011

### Importance of Women Education in India

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 of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Moreover educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population. Gender discrimination still persists in India and lot more needs to be done in the field of women's education in India. The gap in the male-female literacy rate is just a simple indicator. While the male literacy rate is more than 82.14% according to the 2011 Census, the female literacy rate is just 65.46%.

### **Women Empowerment through Education**

Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at Nairobi in 1985. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. So that we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment India is poised to becoming superpower, a developed country by 2020. The year 2020 is fast approaching; it is just 5 year away. This can became reality only when the women of this nation became empowerment. India presently account for the largest number no of illiterates in the world. Literacy rate in India have risen sharply from 18.3% in 1951 to 74.04% in 2011 in which enrolment of women in education have also risen sharply 7% to 65.46%. Despite the importance of women education unfortunately only 65.46% of women are literate among 82.14% of the man. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plan and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in difference spheres. From the fifth five year plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue indetermining the status of women. The National Commission of Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the right and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of 33% seats in the local bodies of panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local level.

### **Women's Education Prospects and Challenges**

In spite of the forceful intervention by a bastion of female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programmes over the last 66 years and above all, the United Nation's enormous pressure with regard to the uplift of the plight of women in terms education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons. The 2011 Census report indicates that literacy among women as only 65.46%, it is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women India is even much lower to national average i.e. 74.04 %. The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously

means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, the weak, backward and exploited. Moreover education is also not available to all equally. Gender inequality is reinforced in education which is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 65.46% against 82.14% of men as per 2011 Census. The pre-Independence time literacy rate for women had a very poor spurt in comparison to literacy rate of men. The rate of school drop outs is also found to be comparatively higher in case of women. This higher rate of illiteracy of women is undoubtedly attributing for women dependence on men and to play a subordinate role. The lack of education is the root cause for women's exploitation and negligence. Only literacy can help women to understand the Indian's constitutional and legislative provisions that are made to strengthen them. Thus promoting education among women is of great important in empowering them to accomplish their goals in par with men in different spheres of life.

### **Educational Equality**

Another area in which women's equality has shown a major improvement as a result of adult literacy programs is the area of enrolment of boys and girls in schools. As a result of higher participation of women in literacy campaigns, the gender gap in literacy levels is gradually getting reduced. Even more significant is the fact that disparity in enrolment of boys and girls in neo-literate households is much lowered compared to the non-literate householders. The state wise female literacy rate had an average of 65.46% in all India basis in 2011 census the high literacy rate is 92.0% in Kerala and least literacy rate is 52.7% in Rajasthan in 2011 census while comparing literacy rate of female 11.46% increase in 2011 census is increased from 54.16% to 65.46%. Women's are growing well in the last 10 years. Government of India has been taken various steps and plans especially for women in every movement.

### **Conclusion**

The women play a strategic role in the society and in the economy. The status of women in India is not even in all the times. In ancient period they enjoyed equal status with men, in the medieval period, the position of Indian women deteriorated. During British rule and after independence many efforts are being made for improving the status of women in India. The government of India, by passing timely and essential Acts and implementing rules and regulations trying to empower and strengthen the women. No doubt the government of India has many weapons to fight for women empowerment, the prompt and strict implementation is quite essential. Unless the Acts, Policies, Rules, Regulations, etc, are strictly implemented the idea of women empowerment remains unachieved. Hence the efforts of the government are still inadequate and the process of empowering women in India is long way to go.

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