

## Contribution of Education in Women Empowerment and Gender Discrimination

**Dr. Radha Yadav** Asstt. Prof., Education Department,  
Sahu Ram Swaroop Mahila Maha Vidhyalaya, Bareilly U.P. India.

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### Abstract

If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a women, you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered. "Empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both controls over resources and over ideology. Women empowerment is one of the essential factors that promote human development. "Women have a much lower literacy rate than men. Far fewer girls are enrolled in the schools, and many of them drop out. In the patriarchal setting of Indian family girls have lower status and fewer privilege than boy children. Conservative cultural attitude prevents some girls from attending schools. The number of literate women among the female population of India was between 2 to 6 percent from the British Raj onwards, the formation of the republic of India in 1947. Concerted efforts led to improvement from 15.3% in 1961 to 28.5% in 1981. By 2001 literacy for women had exceeded 50% of the overall the female population, though this statistic were still very low compared to world standard and even male literacy within India. Recently the Indian Government has launched SAAKSHAR BHARAT for female literacy. This mission aims to bring down female illiteracy by half of its present level.

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to bring down female illiteracy by half of its present level.

Since 1947, the Indian Govt. has tried to provide incentive for girl's school attendance through programmes for midday meals, free books and uniforms. This welfare thrust raised primary enrollment between 1951 and 1981. In 1986 the National Policy On Education decided to restructure education in tune with the social framework of each State, and with larger national goals. It emphasized that education was necessary for democracy, and central to the improvement of women's condition. The new policy aimed at social change through revised texts, curricula, increased funding of schools, expansion in number of schools and policy improvements. Emphasis was placed on expanding girl's occupational centers and primary education, secondary and higher education and rural and urban institutions.

The education of women in India plays a significant role in improving the living standard in the Country. A higher women literacy rate improves the quality of life both at home and outside the home, by encouraging and promoting education children, especially female children and in reducing the infant mortality rate. Several study have shown that a lower level of women

literacy rate results in higher levels of fertility and infant mortality, poor nutrition, lower earning potential and the lack and ability to make decisions within a household. Women lower educational levels also known to adversely affect the health and living condition of children.

During the freedom struggle, our national leaders took up the cause of women's uplifts as a part of comprehensive strategy to involve the masses in the struggle. As a result, women made their valuable contribution in the struggle. As a sequel to the ideals of the freedom struggle, after independence the government gave priority to the uplift of women and make them contribute their part to the national development. The founding fathers of our constitution ensured women their rightful and honorable place in the society. Equality of opportunities was assured to them. To release this constitutional ideals women developments was given high priority in the policies of government. Education has been recognized as a powerful agency in the development and empowerment of women. Women constitute about half of our human capital and without their development and improvement in the skills the country's development cannot be complete. No nation can flourish keeping half of its population in negligence and ignorance. It is through education that they can be brought out into sun shine of national life by assuring them social political and economical status. It is to reach to this goal; women's education has been given an important place in five year plan.

In the first Five Year Plan, a special provision for women's education was emphasized by Durgabai Deshmukh, Women's Education Committee. The Committee made a provision to raise the percentage of women literacy from 8% to 60%. Unfortunately, the recommendations of the committee were not implemented. With the result, women illiteracy is proportionately very high till now. In the second Five Year Plan, among 80% school going children of 6 to 11 years of age group, the percentage of girls was only 40%. In the Third Five Year Plan, among 90% of enrolled students of the age group of 12 to 16 years, girls were found touching the mark of 61.6%. Similarly, in the fourth, fifth and sixth five year plans, the percentage of women education was tried to be uplifted but failed. And at the end of

the Seventh Five Year Plan, according to 1999 censuses, women's literacy is put only at 39%.

If we just scan over the percentage of literacy among women, we can imagine that we have yet miles to go, before we achieve hundred percent literacy among girls. No doubt, our government is striving hard to gear up women's education but some social, political and economic obstacles are still hampering down this percentage. These obstacles can be listed as follows:

1. Attitude of parents towards education.
2. Reluctance of the parents towards the girls' education.
3. Parents' illiteracy coupled with narrow-mindedness.
4. Poverty of parents.

It is because of their illiterate. Parents think that education spoils the character of their daughters. They also think, if their daughters go to College, they will not enter kitchens and will not prove to be modest daughters-in-law in the long run. In a school of co-education, she will not only adopt the changing fashions but also will spoil her milky-white character too. They fail to appreciate the importance of personality development of their daughters, which is the prime need of our society now. It is the conservative attitude of the parents and society that is arresting the growth of women's education.

Financial difficulties are also responsible to hamper down the women's education. Parents of middle, lower middle and lower class think it wise to save money for their dowry rather than spending on their daughters' education. Whenever the purses of parents get tight, they, at first, stop the expenditure on education of their daughters. Most of them consider it an unnecessary expenditure as "*Empty stomachs do not need culture and civilization*". Inadequate schooling facility and ill-equipped and ill-staffed institutions in rural areas also contribute as major factors in hampering women's education. Besides, in most of the remote rural areas, we cannot find even a single high school. When the girls' schools are not available, how can the rate of their literacy are raised?

It is in this connection that Ramamurthy Committee recommended for the location of schools within the walk able distance in the rural areas. The National Policy of Education, 1986 made the provision of Early Childhood Care and

Education (ECCE), which, in the words of Ramamurthy Committee, would relieve the girl child from the desperate duty of collecting 'food, fodder and fuel'. If a high school in a rural area is located, it is always a co-educational Institution which leaves unhealthy impression on the rural parents. So, separate girls' school properly equipped with well-qualified staff must be arranged. Unfavourable attitude of the teaching staff to work in the rural areas is also being observed. A well-qualified teacher struggles to move in the urban areas, with the result, the rural institutions suffer for want of talented and dedicated staff. In order to raise the percentage of women literacy and to make education relevant to the needs of society- we should so organize our curriculum for girls that their vocation skills be improved and their psychological needs be satisfied. By doing so women would feel themselves vocationally and socially adjusted and secure..

If we are not providing equality to women, if we are not giving them opportunities to contribute to the process of development with all their capacities, we will never be able to achieve that we deserve to. In the present social set-up of our country, women are deprived of the status and position they deserve. However, it was not so in ancient India as the proofs available tell us. How the status of women has deteriorated in our country? To find an answer, we need essentially to have a look on the historic aspects of social status and education position of women in India.

### **Women's Social & Educational Status in India: A Historical Review**

If we trace back the development of civilization, in the stone age of 10,000 B C, the society was matriarchal. There was prevalence of matrilineal and matrilineal institutions in primitive communities and the fact that in some of them women held a social position equal to and sometimes superior to that of men (Briffault, 1927). Scholars and Anthropologists are of the opinion that the higher status of women was due to her central place of agriculture and dairy. She was the food-gatherer of the family. But with the change in the process of the development of civilization, mechanization came in. Women found themselves unable to cope up with the new mechanized methods of farming. This resulted in narrowing of her role in the production sector and

consequently their participation as the main source of family income became negligible and patriarchy originated. The patriarchy is the symbol of deterioration of women's position & status in the society.

In the Vedic Period, through men-oriented society had got established, still the women had enjoyed a privileged place. They had participated equally in the religious performance and had equal social and economic rights. They had full freedom to choose their life partners (husband through "Swayamvara"). In Vedic Period, usually, girls got married on attaining purity and even marriage was not a compulsion to them (Rigveda). In ancient India, women were free to study the Vedic literature. In view of intellect, they were equal to men, Matreyi, Gargi, Ghosha, Lopa, Mudra, etc. had also composed Vedic verses. There are instances when women had not simply participated in the Shastrarthas equal to those of men but also acted as judges of mediators (Prasad & Sharma, 1982). Manu's "Shloka" sums up the position of women in the Vedic Period.

'Yatra naryastu pujayanty, ramanty tatra deveta'  
Women continued to enjoy this status in the post Vedic period also. The male-female relationship was similar to that of 'Shiva's "ardh narishwara" (half man & half woman). She had no purdah. She could move as freely as any male in the royal entourage. But gradually the status of women started falling. The change in the status is evident in Manusmriti. "She was expected to follow the man as his shadow. Due to limited freedom, the development of women's personality was suppressed which resulted in further decline in their status and position in the society. The position of women continued on further deteriorating in the medieval period. Due to humiliating behavior of Muslim invasions, social evils crept-up in the society. "Sati Pratha", Purdah Pratha", Bal Vivah" and "Bigamy" became common. "Purdah pratha" closed and doors of education for women in general. Only few women belonging to royal or rich families could receive education within the four walls of their houses. There was no sign of improvement in the social condition of women even in the British Period. The East India Company showed total apathy and indifference towards education of women. During this period some efforts were made by missionaries and local govt. & non-govt. organizations in this direction.

Some recommendations regarding the need and expansion of girl's education were made in Wood's Despatch (1854) and Hunter Commission (1882) etc.

However, our social and political leaders struggled for the upliftment of women and to remove the social evils from the society but the achievements were not very encouraging. In free India, since 1947, special attention is being paid towards and expansion of women education and to raise their social status. They have been granted rights equal to men. The legal protection and awareness are changing the position of women in the family and society.

Various commissions and committees set up in India after independence have all advocated the need and importance of women education. The University Commission (1948-49) noted the importance of women education and stated that "There cannot be educated people without educated women. If general education has to be limited to men or to women, the opportunity should be given to women for them it would most surely be passed on to the next generation". The National Committee on 'Women's Education in 1958, under the chairmanship of Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh, examined the problems of women education very comprehensively. As a result of recommendations of the committee, a National Council for Education was setup in the 1959 under the chairmanship of Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh, State Councils have been set up in the states and union territories. Smt. Hansa Mehta Committee was appointed in 1961 by the National Council for Women's Education to examine the problem of curricula for girls at the stages of education. Another Committee was appointed by the Council in May 1965 with Shri M. Bakta Vatasalam, the then Chief Minister of Madras, as the chairman to look into the causes of lack of public support, particularly in rural areas, to girls' education. The Education Commission (1964-66) also made valuable recommendations regarding women education in India. The resolution of the National Policy on Education (1974) studies various aspect of the status of women and their education and made useful recommendations. National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector (1988) made certain recommendation on the education of women. Commission stated that education is an

important instrument for increasing the improving the chances of women's employability and for of recognizing, more actually, the areas of exploitation. According to the commission, emphasis has to be given on vocational aspect of education.

Education is a life -long process. Education preserves and develops culture and culture develops our values of life. Education too is a birth right freedom. It is the educated woman who can help her family economically, and can rear her children keeping them free from social taboos. Educating one woman simply means that we are educating a whole generation. There are evidences that increase in female literacy increases enrolment in schools. Education virtually changes the thinking, feeling and actions of women. It gives them training to develop some very important skills such as child care, health, sanitation, nutrition and productive art and craft etc. National Policy on Education (1986) clearly stated that, " Education can be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women." Women empowerment can not be thought seriously unless we provide economic independence to women and that can be achieved only by educating them.

The aim of education for any individual is empowerment to take decision which influence life patterns, to think critically about situations, to participate equally in the process of nation building, to have a positive self- image and confidence to become socially and economically independent. If we can ensure education for women, we can ensure for them a life free from the shackles of ignorance, inability and taboos, a life that is truly meaningful as a constructive citizen of the world's largest democracy.

The Stage of World Population Report, 1994, states clearly, "Empowering women means extending choices, choice about if and when to get married, choice about education, employment – opportunities, controlling the social and physical environment, choice about if and when to get pregnant and ultimately about family size. Empowerment requires that husbands, partners, family members and communities help to promote a healthy environment free from violence or abuses, in which women are free to use community service on the basis of equality."

Women become empowered through collective reflecting and decision making. The parameters of empowerment are –

- Building a positive self image and self confidence.
- Developing ability to think critically.
- Building up group cohesion and fostering decision making and action.
- Ensuring equal participation in the process of social change.
- Encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society.
- Providing the economic independence.

Education, which results empowerment, is thus necessary for the advancement and progress of women.

Education plays a changing role in shaping society's perceptions about women, their roles & structures and values of religion, culture & politics. In many ways, educational institutions supersede the roles of the family and the community in socializing young people whose understanding of culture, politics and even religion come to be derived more from what they read in their text books and learn from peer groups, and political socialization as student and teachers. Their social aspirations, values and sense of political identity do not always reflect or follow to those of previous generations or the family.

Our education system has been criticized for its failure to challenge the social ethos of inequality of class, caste and gender, by becoming an instrument of "Sanskritisation process". The large scale participation of educated youth in communal, castesem, ethnic or culture-based revivalist movement is often cited as evidence of education's role in aggravating social divisions. But many who oppose these movements, politically or otherwise are also products of the same educational process and forms of intellectual and political socialization and identify formation that they experience..

Similar divergences exist in perception of issues of women's status, roles, participation and rights among members of educational institutions, undoubtedly as a response or reaction to the women's movement.

Yet, they have never been documented nor analyses in any depth. Though, the Education Policy of 1986 and the recent perspective Paper

on Education by the Review Committee (Acharya Rama Murty) emphasis the responsibility of the education system to provide "education for women's equality. "The National Education Policy (NPE), 1986, makes a radical departure from the first National Policy of Education (1968) and many committees and commissions (formulated for women education in free India). NPE, 1986, does not rest at provision of equal education opportunities for males & females but puts the more fundamental issues of equality between sexes.

The 2001 Census report indicates that literacy among women is only 54%, it is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women in India is even much lower to national average i.e. 65.38. The growth of women's education 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 equality. Gender inequality is reinforced in education which is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 54% against 76% of men as per 2001 Census.

Table: State-Wise Percentage Of Female Literacy In The Country As Per 2001 Census

S.No.	Name Of The State	Female Literacy
1	Andhra Pradesh	59.7%
2	Arunachal Pradesh	59.6%
3	Assam	67.3%
4	Bihar	53.3%
5	Chattisgarh	60.6%
6	Delh	80.9%
7	Goa	81.8%
8	Gujarat	70.7%
9	Haryana	66.8%
10	Himachal Pradesh	76.6%
11	Jammu and Kashmir	58.0%
12	Jharkhand	56.2%
13	Karnataka	68.1%
14	Kerala	92.0%
15	Madhya Pradesh	60.0%
16	Maharashtra	75.5%
17	Manipur	73.2%
18	Meghalaya	73.8%
19	Mizoram	89.4%
20	Nagaland	76.7%
21	Orissa	64.4%

22	Punjab	71.3%
23	Rajasthan	52.7%
24	Sikkim	76.4%
25	Tamil Nadu	73.9%
26	Tripura	83.15%
27	Uttar Pradesh	59.3%
28	Uttarakhand	70.7%
29	West Bengal	71.2%
<b>Union Territories</b>		
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	81.8%
2	Chandigarh	81.4%
3	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	65.9%
4	Daman & Diu	81.2%
5	Pondicherry	88.2%
6	Lakshadweep	79.6%
<b>All India</b>		<b>65.46%</b>

**Conclusion :**

According to the Country Report of the Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power." Education of women is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. To encourage the education of women at all levels and for dilution of gender bias in providing knowledge and education, established schools, colleges and universities even exclusively for women in the state. To bring more girls, especially from marginalized families of BPL, in main stream education, the government is providing free books, uniform, boarding and lodging, clothing for the hostilities, midday meals, scholarships, free circles and so on.

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