

## **A Critical Study on the Role of Education in the Empowerment of Women in India**

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### **Abstract:**

Education is commonly seen as a barometer of women's status and, more significantly, as a catalyst for their empowerment. Women have an important role in a society's well-being, and education is the key to unlocking the golden door of development and welfare. Women's education is critical for a country's future growth because, its women mostly educate the future of a country. Women's empowerment has become a major topic in today's world of globalization. Now whether there is a western society or a Muslim World, at all the forums including United Nations Organization, women's rights, and issues regarding women empowerment are being discussed. It has been the concern of all the countries to draw out their women from provincial culture and trying to utilize them as skilled human resources. The basic objective of this article is to highlight the need of women empowerment and role of education.

**Keywords:** empowerment, discussed, empowerment, provincial

### **Introduction**

Both men and women are equal and have common human features, which is a universal reality. There is a reciprocal love and affection between the woman and the man that helps them establish the foundation of their relationship, allowing nature to achieve its aim of man's survival in this way. We should recognize the woman's natural demands and capabilities because she is half of the body of society. The creator of nature reveals his word to the mankind as: "And be steadfast on the nature where upon God has created mankind. There can be no alteration in the nature made by God that is the right religion".

In previous civilizations and religions women were just like slaves, who were deprived of freedom, rights, position and status. There were no opportunities for them to play their role in the human society. They were lashed with the whip of religion, tradition and man-made ideologies. They were allowed to be alive, only for, to be bed, to bake the bread and to breed the babies. In short, before women were badly crushed between the milestones of tyranny and cruelty, both in the east and the west.

According to Manu, dominance was a fundamental value in India. Women needed to be held by their guardians at all times. Women in Athens had the same conditions as women in Rome or India. Athenians were always considered to be juveniles under the authority of a male, such as their father, brother, or male relatives. Under Roman control, women were completely reliant on men even in the past. If a woman marries, both she and her possessions become her husband's property, and she was bought like a slave and obtained solely for his advantage. The code of Hammurabi treated woman as a pet. According to Buddhism, woman is unknowable as the way of a fish in water is the nature of a woman. As far as China is concerned, things did not get any better; the practice of crippling young girls' feet in an effort to keep them defenceless and feminine exposes the mindset of the Chinese. In the Arabian Peninsula woman was facing such crisis which were experienced never, by history, before. They used to bury their daughters alive soon after birth. Beyond this cruel tradition, women were treated like servants, she had no share in the property and was deprived of her rights and honour, polygamy and polyandry were in vogue. It must be kept in mind that in early times, not only women were in the bad condition but total system of human life in disturbance and in corruption and it seemed that humanity is swiftly advancing towards the mass destruction and suicide.

Taking an account of this background, one can conclude that the whole world was facing piled and pitched darkness of ignorance and tyranny, therefore the basic need was to empower the women that can be

achieved only by the means of imparting education to all, in particular to women. As a result, women should become more literate. In the post Independent Era, women's literacy rates do not meet expectations. Our country aspires to become a Super Power by the year 2020. Every aspect of our society or nation should participate in the process of nation building if we are to become a Super Power. But if the majority of this society's female population cannot read and write, we cannot expect to become a Super Power. Therefore, it is critical for us to understand the value of women's education since doing so will inspire the process of women's empowerment.

Well-educated women are the key stone that contribute positively to society both at home and in the workplace. It is similar to an extremely potent drug that has the ability to fully heal and restore a patient's health. A well-educated lady can handle both her profession and home. Women make up about half of the population of the nation, so if they lack access to education, the nation as a whole will suffer from poor socio-economic conditions. Women's education will hasten society's social and economic advancement. Women's education is a significant possibility for the social and economic development of a country. If women's education is neglected, it would be a sign that the country is unaware of its bright future. The aim of this paper is to discuss about need of women empowerment.

### Women Education Status:

The constitutional directive to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years has remained unfulfilled till now. Educational experts admit that this failure is mainly due to the slow progress of education among girls. Literacy and educational levels are increasing for Indian women still there is gap between male and female literacy rate which can be seen in the following table.

**Literacy Rate in India**

S. No	Year	Persons	Male	Female
1	1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
2	1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
3	1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
4	1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
5	1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
6	1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
7	1961	24.0	34.4	13.0
8	1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
9	1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
10	1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
11	2001	65.38	76.0	54.0
12	2011	74.04	82.14	54.0
13	2021	77.70	84.70	70.30

Source: *Census of India (2021)*

The realities of a great nation must be known by us, the inhabitants of India. The world's largest democracy is found in India. This honourable title respects us and reassures us of our fundamental obligations. India, the second-largest nation in the world by population, has an issue with the literacy rate. Every person needs to think about societal changes to deal with the same. We will learn in-depth information today on the Indian Literacy Rate and how to address it. India's average literacy rate as of the year 2021 is 77.70%, according to data from the National Statistical Office (NSO). In India, male literacy is at 84.70% in 2021, and female literacy is at 70.30%. According to the National Family Health Survey 2019–21 (NFHS-5), adult men and women (15–49 years old) have literacy rates of 87.4% and 71.5%, respectively. 763,498,517 (76.34 billion) people in the nation are literate, according to the 2011 Census. There are 328,814,738 people in total, with 434,683,779 (43.46 crore) men and them. The general literacy rate is 72.9%, although the rates for men and women are 16.25 percentage points apart at the national level, with men's rates at 80.89% and women's at 64.64%.

**Indian states having highest literacy rate**

S. No	State	Male	Female	Average
1	Kerala	97.4	95.2	96.2
2	Mizoram	93.72	89.4	91.58
3	Delhi	93.7	82.4	88.7
4	Tripura	92.18	83.15	87.75
5	Uttarakhand	94.3	80.7	87.6
6	Goa	92.81	81.84	87.4
7	Himachal Pradesh	92.9	80.5	86.6
8	Assam	90.1	81.2	85.9
9	Maharashtra	90.7	78.4	84.8
10	Punjab	88.5	78.5	83.7

Source: survey by National Statistical Office (NSO). \*UTs & NE States based on 2011 Census

**Indian states having lowest literacy rate**

S. No	State	Male	Female	Average
1	Andhra Pradesh	73.4	59.5	66.4
2	Rajasthan	80.8	57.6	69.7
3	Bihar	79.7	60.5	70.9
4	Telangana	80.5	65.1	72.8
5	Uttar Pradesh	81.8	24.9	7.3
6	Madhya Pradesh	16.7	24.9	7.3
7	Jharkhand	24.0	34.4	13.0
8	Karnataka	29.5	39.5	18.7
9	Chhattisgarh	36.2	46.9	24.8
10	Jammu & Kashmir	52.1	63.9	39.2

Source: survey by National Statistical Office (NSO). \*UTs & NE States based on 2011 Census

**Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:**

The term gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. In most societies, being a man or a woman is not simply a matter of different biological and physical characteristics. Men and women face different expectations about how they should dress, behave or work. Relations between men and women, whether in the family, the workplace or the public sphere, also reflect understandings of the talents, characteristics and behaviour appropriate to women and to men. Gender thus differs from sex in that it is social and cultural in nature rather than biological. Gender attributes and characteristics, encompassing, inter alia, the roles that men and women play and the expectations placed upon them, vary widely among societies and change over time. But the fact that gender attributes are socially constructed means that they are also amenable to change in ways that can make a society more just and equitable.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same; only that access to opportunities and life changes is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex. Achieving gender equality requires women's empowerment to ensure that decision-making at private

and public levels and access to resources are no longer weighted in men's favour, so that both women and men can fully participate as equal partners in productive and reproductive life.

### **Women Empowerment and Education:**

Women's empowerment is the process of giving women access to opportunities so they can actively engage in politics, work for financial independence, and improve society. Empowered individuals may be aware of their identities and skills in every aspect of life. It includes having easier access to information and resources, having more freedom to choose how to spend their time, and not being constrained by social norms, beliefs, or customs. According to India's most recent Census, women make up almost 90% of the unorganized sector and 48.49% of the nation's total population. For the most part, women are valued and respected. But they are often invisible in the context of progress.

The tale of women's development in education is said to lay between the rhetoric of women's empowerment and the reality of programs that are losing financing for women's health, education, and other factors. Education is considered as a basic requirement for empowerment, prosperity, and welfare of society. Education is regarded as a critical turning point in the empowerment of women since it gives them the tools to overcome obstacles and transform their lives. Women who are empowered have a way to learn and acquire skills that will help them better their quality of life. When women are empowered and educated, they can contribute to the best of their potential and abilities. Additionally, governments need to act decisively to support empowerment. Interventions necessitate meticulously thought out plans of action that give women defined responsibilities. The growth of women and their empowerment are related both conceptually and methodologically. In order to enable women to achieve their goals on par with men in various areas of life and to nurture and maintain a culture centered on equity, unity, and dignity, it is crucial to support their education. Financially secure women lay the basis for all other types of women's empowerment, such as social, psychological, technological, and political empowerment. Below are certain points which will enable us to understand how education is essential for women empowerment:

- Aware about that women's education is important. It is said, "Educated mothers educate family which results in educated population of a nation which builds strong nation".
- Provides women the self-assurance that, with enough women working together, change is achievable.
- Promotes and guarantees women's socioeconomic involvement in national and international forums.
  - Promotes women's involvement in jobs that strengthens economy.
  - Modifies the way in which women are treated due to gender prejudice.
  - Encourages women to experience a sense of independence.
  - Gets rid of gender disparity.
  - Promotes the idea that women's education is vital for combating their oppression.
- Recognizes the need to raise awareness about the importance of educating females in order to equip them to make meaningful contributions to the socioeconomic development of the country.
- Eliminates wage disparities between men and women, as well as all types of discrimination in the workplace.
- Raises national awareness of social issues and modifies attitudes toward female education.
- Women's analytical skills can be enhanced through education, leading to broader reforms that promote gender equality.

### **Process of Empowerment and its Dimensions**

Dimensions	Explanation	Parameters
Cognitive	Women having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the micro and macro levels. It involves making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms	Raising self-esteem and self-confidence of women. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child.</li> <li>• Building and strengthening partnership with civil society particularly women's organisations.</li> </ul>
Psychological	Belief that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforcement of constitutional and legal provisions and safeguarding rights of women.</li> </ul>

	realities and the society in which they live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building a positive image of women in the society and recognising their contributions in social, economic and political sphere.</li> <li>• Developing ability among women to think critically.</li> <li>• Fostering decision-making and collective action.</li> <li>• Enabling women to make informed choices.</li> <li>• Ensuring women's participation in all walks of life.</li> <li>• Providing information, knowledge, skills for self-employment.</li> </ul>
Economic	Women have access to, and control over, productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy. However she notes that changes in the economic balance of power do not necessarily alter traditional gender roles or norms	
Political	Women have the capability to analyse, organise and mobilise for social change;	
Physical	Element of gaining control over one's body and sexuality and the ability to protect oneself against sexual violence to the empowerment process	

(Source: Mokta, 2014)

Wieringa, 1993 and Mokta 2014 have also discussed various dimension of Women empowerment. The model proposed herein discusses women empowerment on three facets and they are economic empowerment, social empowerment and political empowerment. These facets of women empowerment depends on legislative protections, affirmative policies for training, control over resources and various protective and promotional programmes of the government, NGOs and the corporate sector. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards there 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 in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. Several initiatives have been taken by the Government of India to achieve women empowerment. In course of discussing women empowerment, Tomar and Singh (2018) have given detailed list of constitutional safe guards.

#### NGO's Initiative for Women Empowerment:

Women empowerments especially in rural areas have been primary focus for Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) beside the Government. The Ministry of Women and Child Development collaborates with many NGOs for the implementation of its various schemes and for conducting research studies. The Government of India implements many of its schemes with the active participation and support of the NGOs as they play an important role in accelerating the pace of implementation at the ground level. Table 4 lists out presence of performing NGOs in states (with 77.55% of NGOs working for women empowerment) and it states the highest presence in Delhi and the least in Goa, Mizoram and Tripura and one of the reasons could be based on the statistics of crime rate in these states.

#### State-Wise List of NGO's:

S. No.	State	Performing NGOs	% age of NGOs working for Women Empowerment
1	Andhra Pradesh	35	68.6
2	Arunachal Pradesh	4	100
3	Assam	38	81.6
4	Bihar	18	100
5	Chandigarh	7	57.1
6	Chattisgarh	7	100
7	Delhi	146	54.8
8	Goa	1	-
9	Gujarat	16	93.8
10	Haryana	17	58.8

11	Himachal Pradesh	8	100
12	Jammu and Kashmir	2	50
13	Jharkhand	11	90.9
14	Karnataka	63	74.7
15	Kerala	12	75
16	Madhya Pradesh	12	75
17	Maharashtra	82	90.2
18	Manipur	37	89.1
19	Meghalaya	2	-
20	Mizoram	1	100
21	Nagaland	2	100
22	Orissa	72	87.5
23	Punjab	5	60
24	Rajasthan	25	92
25	Tamil Nadu	53	87.7
26	Telangana	20	75
27	Tripura	1	-
28	Uttar Pradesh	61	86.9
29	Uttarakhand	15	73.3
30	West Bengal	37	73
	<b>Total</b>	811	77.5

**Some works conducted by NGOs in this area are as follows:**

1. Apna Ghar Ashram support destitute and disabled women get a safe and caring home. More than 50% of their residents have been rehabilitated. 458 men and 1,004 women currently live in the Ashrams spread across 17 major cities across India. The Ashram was also awarded the State Award by the State Government as the Best Services Organization.
2. Started in 1973, Alpanalaya works for women empowerment in India by helping them to overcome the social, political, and economic barriers. They provide sewing classes and train women who otherwise have not been given the choice or opportunity to become financially independent. 209 women have economically benefited from Self Help groups organized by Apnalaya. In 2017, this NGO for women was awarded the Champion Level- Guide Star India Platinum for the highest levels of transparency and public accountability.
3. Since its inception in 2005, Maitri has worked with over 45,000 individuals on the issues of social and health problems and public health concerns through education, community outreach, networking and legal advocacy. The organization has been addressing the issue of violence against women, running a victim support program and providing support to abandoned elderly widows in Vrindavan.
4. Action Aid India since 1972 shelters the poor and the excluded. Gauravi is the first crisis center set up in India with the help of the Department of Health in 2014 to fight for Indian women's rights and saving them from domestic violence. Currently, there are 22 Gauravi centers across the country and over 40,000 cases have been registered in the centers.
5. Ashadeep Mission was initiated to develop a better quality of life (medical treatment and therapy) for people with mental disabilities. The Navachetana home run by Ashadeep rescues women with mental health issues and provides them with shelter, food, and medical care. They also help these women reunite with their families if possible after treatment. So far, 355 women have been rescued and rehabilitated under Ashadeep mission.
6. Seven Sisters Development Assistance works to create a just and equitable society in Northeast India devoid of poverty. The organization has two programs, leadership programs for the educated youth of North East India and empowering poor rural women through livelihood activities via Self Help Groups (SHGs). Since it was established in 2011, SeSTA has mobilized nearly 8,000 women to form 700 Self Help Groups (SHGs).
7. Foundation for Mother and Child Health works to bring good health and nutritional provisions to vulnerable mothers and children in poor communities. Their programs encourage preventive health, balanced nutrition, and

child development practices in underprivileged communities. So far, the programs initiated by FMCH impact close to 927 pregnant and lactating mothers annually. Their services include regular growth monitoring, availability of accurate information and support from the detection of pregnancy till the child completes two years.

8. Majlis Manch's legal center through its program 'Rahat', provides socio-legal support to victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. The all-women team of lawyers and social workers meet with victims and explain the process and procedures involved in a court case. They are also told about all the legal, public, and private schemes that they have access to.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for Women Empowerment:**

As per the new Companies Bill passed by the lower house of Indian parliament in December 2012, Public Sector Units (PSUs) and private companies having a turnover of over 10 billion or a net worth of 5 billion or recorded net profit of 50 million and above are required to spend 2 per cent of their average net profits in the preceding three financial years towards CSR. Big corporate houses consider women empowerment as a vital aspect of CSR and it has been observed that they usually carry these interventions in the surrounding areas of the main operational regions either by the in-house team or outsourced professional CSR team and it is sometimes carried out in collaboration with NGOs.

The 55<sup>th</sup> Round of the National Sample Survey (July 1999-June 2000), which was the first-ever nationwide survey on informal sector non-agricultural enterprises, showed that the total number of informal workers in non-agricultural enterprises was 79.7 million. Out of these, 30 million were home based (Sudarshan et al, 2001) and a vast majority of these workers are women. Organisations like Dastkar has provided a platform to artisans (especially in rural areas) engaged in hand embroidery and other crafts to receive fair price (eliminating the middle men) for their products. It provides fair wage and fair rate for the products of the local artisans.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

All of the elements required for a woman's empowerment are partially interwoven within India. Women are not equally empowered with men in India. Empowering men is required to make them aware of women's duties, rights, and responsibilities, as well as to empower women through good education facilities to take advantage of opportunities bestowed upon them. Women Empowerment is not merely a slogan but a prerequisite for an optimal capacity for overall development of a family, society, nation and a sustainable world. It has been reflected by improvement in achieving gender parity in the category of educational attainment, showing improvement in political participation but showing a declining trend in economic participation and opportunity as well as in health and survival segment. There is urgent need of reassessing India's affirmative action's, giving fresh impetus on empowering girls and women not only through conventional education but also hand holding for skill acquisition and providing them with equitable economic opportunity with providing them with fitting medical and healthcare. The findings open up several avenues for policy discussion and intervention towards women empowerment.

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