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Changing trends in women empowerment and education: A sociological study

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Abstract

Educated women can play a very important role in the society for socio-economic development. Education eliminates inequalities and disparities as the means of recovering their status within and out of their families. It is the key factor for women empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Today the empowerment of women has been one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically Women Empowerment is still an illusion of reality. We observe in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social evils. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choice. The empowerment of the women is a highly significant issue of our times. There are so many saints and statesmen who have struggled for the empowerment of women in India. Several international conferences were organized to take stock of the situation and prepare grounds for the empowerment of women in all walks of human life. The empowerment of women is a multi-dimensional aspect which demands active participation of various stakeholders in a developing nation like India. Series of Constitutional protective and promotional measures are designed and implemented in India to achieve the goal of empowerment of women. In the present times women studies has become an important branch of academic mainstream in India. Recently series of innovative approaches are adopted to ensure equality of opportunity and empowerment of women in all respects.

Keywords: Empowerment, opportunity, women, education, development

Introduction

Women empowerment has been an ongoing saga form many years. Historically we have seen that the role of a women have been conflicting. In India once they were worshipped as Sita or Durga and as time passed they are also subjected to social evils like Sati, Child marriage etc., Further women are even deprived of few basic facilities like food, nutrition, elementary freedom, freedom of education etc., Of late there have been a lot of onus given for enhancing the status of the women world over and a lot of schemes and Programmes are launched. Even the Millennium development Goals have included Gender equality and empowerment of women as one of its main goals. However on scrutiny six out of eight goals in a way involve women involvement and empowerment. Empowerment literally means "To invest with Power". In the context of women's empowerment the term has come to denote women's increased control over their own lives, bodies and environment. The UNO (2001: 04) has provided a meaningful conceptual framework of empowerment of women. It reads: "Empowerment is defined as the process by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices. It is the process of acquiring the ability to make strategic life choices in a contest where this ability has previously been denied"

Education in India

Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It is not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside (Suguna, 2011) [8]. The Indian Education system has two important structures, one is formal and another one is nonformal education. Some other educational programmes also formulated to motivate the women education such as online education and distance education. The main objective of the entire educational programme is to make every girl child to educate. This low level of literacy not only shows a negative impact on women's lives but also on their families and country's economic development.

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Hence it is of foremost importance to raise the level of education amongst women. There are an estimated 33.3 million Indians enrolled in higher education courses in India, according to the HRD ministry's All India Survey on Higher education report for 2015. On these, 17.9 million are boys and 15.4 million are girls as of 2014-2015. Fundamental Rights of women are equality, freedom to religion, educational rights, cultural and educational, against exploitation, freedom. Improving girls' educational levels has been demonstrated to have clear impacts on the health and economic future of young women, which in turn improves the prospects of their entire community.

Women education in ancient India

In the Vedic Period women had access to education, but gradually they had lost this right. India Scriptures Rig Veda and Upanishads mention about several women sages and seers. Women enjoyed equivalent position and rights in the early Vedic era. However, after 500 B.C., the position of women started to decline. The position of women in ancient India was vital. In the Vedic period, women education in ancient India was prevalent. Indian women during the ancient times was said to be superior to men. The women in ancient India were given significance and they held an important position in the Indian society during that time. In the Vedic period, educational system was very developed. Historically women have taken part in all spheres of life with courage and gusto. Indian mythology is rich with stories of highly educated and evolved women. One can trace the historical evidence of ancient Indian education to the 3rd century B.C. when education was imparted orally and many women scholars were part in it. When Buddhism spread to India, some world famous educational institutions such as Nalanda, Vikramshila and Takshila were established. Research shows that a number of women were enrolled in these temples of learning. These universities flourished from about 5th century to 13th century. In the 11th century the Muslim rulers established universities in Delhi, Lucknow and Allahabad. Still education has been found to be restricted to a certain strata of the society.

Objectives of The Study

The following are the specific objectives of the study:

1. To find out Women Education in Pre-Colonial, Colonial and Modern India.
2. To analyze Women Rights, Legal Protection of Women in Indian Constitution.
3. To know the Government Schemes and Programmes for Women Empowerment.

Methodology of The Study

The present study is a qualitative study. The researchers here collected data from different secondary sources like books, magazines, journals, various government organizations, website etc.

Position of women in current scenario

In the contemporary world, women need to gain the same amount of power that men have. Now, it is time to forget that men are the only holders of power. In India, women are still facing different obstacles in male-dominated cultures. Now a day's women are coming the main stream of development. The government of India established a special commission for the women development.

The Position and status of today's Women in India is considered high in modern Indian society. The population of women is almost half of the total population of India. A country or a community cannot be considered civilized where women are not honored. Indian laws have been made without discrimination against women. As a result Indian women enjoy high position in our society. Women today occupy high ranking posts like, I.A.S. I.F.S. Indian women are also in our Defense Service. The modern Indian women participate in various sports and games. The Contemporary Indian Women serve as M.P., M.L.A. governors and ministers. Women have also achieved high fame in the areas of literature, music and acting. More and more women are joining the field of science and technology. In fact there is no sphere of activity in which women are unsuitable or incompetent

Lets now have a look at the darker side. Though the Indian law does not discriminate between men and women, the status of women of our country today is practically far below the status of men. Though the status of today's Women on India is high, the overall picture of women's position in India is not satisfactory

Problems faced by Indian Women

There are various issues and problems which women generally face in the society in India. Some of the problems are mentioned and described below

- **Selective abortion and female infanticide:** It is the most common practice for years in India in which abortion of female fetus is performed in the womb of mother after the fetal sex determination and sex selective abortion by the medical professionals.
- **Sexual harassment:** It is the form of sexual exploitation of a girl child at home, streets, public places, tran sports, offices etc, by the family members, neighbors, friends or relatives.
- **Dowry and Bride burning:** It is another problem generally faced by women of low or middle class family during of after the marriage. Parents of boys demands a lot of money from the bride's family to be rich in one time.
- **Disparity in education:** The level of women education is less than men still in the modern age. Female illiteracy is higher in the rural areas, Where over 63% or more women remain unlettered.
- **Domestic violence:** it is like endemic and widespread disease affects almost 70% of Indian women according to the women and child development official. It is performed by the husband, relative or other family member, Girls have no property fights like boys forever
- **Status of Windows:** Windows are considered as worthless in the Indian society. They are treated poorly and forced to wear white clothes.

Types of Empowerment of Women

Social Empowerment: The tenth five year plan (2002-07) called for a 3 prolonged strategy of social empowerment, Economic empowerment and providing gender justice to create an enabling environment free of discrimination. Social empowerment of women refers to Education for women, health of women, mobility of women, participation of women in various fields and also protection of women against Gender based violence.

Political Empowerment

It was only in 1929 that all the provincial legislatures gave women the right to vote on the same term as men. The Government of India Act, 1935 enabled all women over 21 years to exercise their franchise provided they fulfilled the conditions to play a significant role in less conventional political activities. However the founding father of Indian constitution were aware of the women requirement and Articles 14, 15, 325, 326 provided specific safeguards and promotional measures for the empowerment of women in Indian Society. The most significant landmark in the journey of empowerment is the historic 73rd and 74th Constitution amendment acts, 1992 by the centre and its ratification by the state. The Constitution Amendment acts reserved 1/3rd seats for women in the Panchayat raj and Municipal bodies. In places like Mumbai though these reservations did help women contest elections initially of late women are so active in politics that they did not require the reservations policies to win elections. However even though they have proved their ability to win elections and execute their positions effectively there are many hindrances for a women in achieving complete empowerment. One of the main hindrance at the village level is the lack of education and secondly the intervention and interference of male. In a survey conducted in India it was found that some of the barriers for the women in carrying out their duties are lack of education (80%) Inadequate finances

Economical Empowerment

An International Centre for Research on Women publication made the case that 'economically empowering women is essential both to realise women's rights and to achieve broader development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, education and. According to its authors, 'a woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions' (Golla *et al.*, 2011) ^[9].

Social empowerment

Social empowerment it is a process to change the distribution of power in interpersonal relations among different people, cultures, activities of the society. Social empowerment refers to the enabling force that strengthens women's social relations and their position in social structures. Social empowerment addresses the social discriminations existing in the society based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion or gender.

Health empowerment

Women's health and safety is another important area. The empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety. The health concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country, and are important factors in gauging the empowerment of women in a country.

Constitutional Rights to Women

The rights and safeguards enshrined in the constitution for women in India are listed below

1. Article 15(1) The state shall not discriminate against any citizen of Indian on the ground of sex.
2. Article 15(3) The state is empowered to make any special provision for women. In other words, this

provision enables the state to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women.

3. Article 16(2) No citizen shall be discrimination against or be ineligible for any employment or office under the state on the ground of sex.
4. Article 23(1) Traffic in human beings and forced labour are prohibited.
5. Article 39(a) The state to secure for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
6. Article 39(d) The state to secure equal pay for equal work for both Indian men and women.
7. Article 39(e) The state is required to ensure that the health and strength of women workers are not abused and that they are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their strength.
8. Article 42 The state shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.
9. Article 51-A(e) It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
10. Article 243-D(3) One third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women.
11. Article 243-D(4) One third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women.
12. Article 243-T(3) One third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every municipality shall be reserved for women.
13. Article 243-T(4) The offices of chairperson in the municipalities shall be reserved for women in such manner as the state Legislature may provide.

Major Findings

The following are major findings of the study

1. This study explores the history of women education in India. The previous background of women education of Indian society reveals that in Vedic era women education was good. Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country.
2. The present study reveals that there are various forms of Empowerment of Women. This study shows that the empowerment of women occurs when they are involved in decision making in social, economic and political spheres and they are also able to play an equal role as per with men in society. Sustainable development of the country should be possible if to promote the role of women in every social, political and economic activities of the development.
3. The present study reveals that there are many violence against women. Violence against women is a grave violation of human rights. The Government of India has provided to eliminating violence against women and girls through various policies, laws and programs.
4. This study shows that there are several legislatures and laws made by the Government both in central and state level for women empowerment in our country. The constitution of India conveys a powerful mandate for equality and rights of women in its preamble, fundamental rights and duties and also provides for specific provisions for affirmative action.

5. This study also shows that the Government has launched various scheme which aims at making girls independent both socially and economically. Recently the Government has launched Beti Bachao, Beti padhao scheme which aims at making girls independent both socially and economically.
6. This study reveals that education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. This study shows that educated women have greater chance to achieve high empowerment level.

Conclusion

It is crucial to note that the attitude of people towards women's education will go a long way in explaining the extent to which the people want their nation to develop. Like the saying goes that to educate a woman is to educate the society as whole. Education is considered as a key instrument for the women empowerment. It changes their lifestyle, improves their chances of employment, facilitates their participation in public life and also increased their status in the society. Even though considerable progress has been made with regard to literacy and education, the overall structure still remains unfavourable to women. Empowerment involves gaining a sense of knowledge, skill, and competence. To achieve this women and girls should be given opportunities to build and expand skills and resources by involving them in social and economic decision making process at all levels and imparting education. This developmental aspect brings in a social inclusion among women, as well contributes to the development of the Society by utilising the immense hidden and suppressed potential of the women. In simple terms, it is apparent that in countries and companies that promote gender equality, progress is much more rapid and far-reaching.

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