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## Role of education in women empowerment

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### Abstract

Empowerment is considered to be a means for creating social environment in which vital decisions may be taken and choice could be taken to bring social transformation. It strengthens the innate ability through acquiring knowledge, power and experience. The empowerment of women has become one of important issues of current period. It is considered that women should stand equal to men in terms of education, livelihood, health and all other parameters. The education of women plays an important role in the advancement of society. In the words of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, "If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered" (Bhat, 2015; Tamilselvi, 2018). Education is a milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. It assists in bringing equality and works as a means to improve their status within family, society and politico-economic system. This Paper seeks to highlight various dimensions of empowerment of women through education.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, education, social transformation, equality, knowledge

### Introduction

Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individual to think, take action and control work in an autonomous way (Bhat, 2015; Kaur, 2018) <sup>[36]</sup>. It refers to liberation from oppression or bondage of any kind. It also ensures escape from year-long bondage. It demands reconfiguration of full range of social and economic relations. It is a story of liberation and identities gained where different actors clash for achievement of prestige. It involves liberating the individual from understandings of the 'self' that are imposed by external forces. A meaningful commitment to empowerment, it seems, presupposes structures that institutionalize respect and recognition for difference, that guard a negative space of freedom for the individual and that provide basic resources for individuals to realize their 'self' (Witte, 2019) <sup>[69]</sup>. The free movement provisions (and the corollary right of non-discrimination based on nationality) serve to amplify available realizations of self for subjects to include those available in other member states (Witte, 2019) <sup>[69]</sup>. The empowerment appears less grand event of liberation than a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjection. It is also referred to be autonomy in decision making. It in other words, is understood as the emancipation of the individual into a wider cultural space and 'imagined community' that transcend the boundaries. Empowerment, on the other hand, concerns a critical analysis of power that might bring about resistance through which existing systems of power can be subverted. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's lives (Bhat, 2015<sup>[10]</sup>; Kaur, 2018 <sup>[36]</sup>). It not only assists in development of human resources but in improvement of quality of life. Here Education is a very vital element for bringing empowerment. It provides a new dimension of looking at things. According to Mahatama Jyotiba Phule, "Education is that which demonstrates the difference between what is good and what is evil" (Bhat, 2015) <sup>[10]</sup>. It can bring lots of attitudinal changes which is very crucial for socio-economic and political progress of the country. Education facilitates the process of conscientization through which human beings may introspect in themselves. Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training or research (Ojha, 2016) <sup>[51]</sup>.

According to Shakuntala (2005), in her book “Empowering women: An alternative strategy from rural India”, the more vital inhibiting factors leading to the disadvantaged position of women are their ignorance, powerlessness and vulnerability (Ojha, 2016) <sup>[51]</sup>. Education provides women an understanding about their rights and power to fight the economic and social discrimination. This is a key for prosperity development and welfare (Jha, 2014) <sup>[34]</sup>. An educated woman provides an infrastructure for a family to grow up in a competitive world. Studies reveal that she brings better, educated and healthier children and thus carries social and economic productiveness in the micro economy i.e. household. An educated woman has better bargaining powers through the channels of increased information and thus provides autonomy (Jha, 2014) <sup>[34]</sup>. Education enables women build their views, understanding and help families, societies and nation as a whole to gain competitiveness. It plays an important role in enhancing the livelihood conditions for women (Yousuf, 2019) <sup>[70]</sup>.

### Objectives of the Study

- To understand the basic tenets of women’s empowerment.
- To explain the role of education in strengthening socio-economic and political status of women.
- To bring a light on kinds of empowerment of women through educational initiatives.

### Methodology:

The study is based on descriptive research design. The data has been collected through secondary sources like journals, books, government reports, newspapers and various working papers. The secondary data has been analyzed through content analysis method. Meta analyses, systematic reviews, literature reviews, books and documents that were not based on authenticated data, were excluded from the study.

### Evolution of Women’s Education in India:

Women in ancient India were entitled to the very important rite of Upanayana, which would give them the right to study the Vedas just like men. In later ages, they were unfortunately barred from it and thereby from Vedic education (Korishetti, 1994) <sup>[40]</sup>. The education of women in India can be traced back to 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. when education was imparted orally. During that period, women worked as researchers in universities like Nalanda, Vikramshila, Takshila (Jenefa, 2012) <sup>[33]</sup>.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, muslim rulers established some universities in Delhi, Lucknow and Allahabad where women participated in various educational activities. Mughal emperors provided liberal education to the princesses. Gul-Badan Begum, the daughter of Babar and author of the Humayun Namah, Nur Jahan, the celebrated wife of Jahangir, Mumtaz Mahal, the wife of Shah Jahan, Jahanara Begum, the eldest daughter of Shah Jahan, Zibunnisa Begum, the eldest daughter of Aurangzeb were learned ladies of the royal household (Korishetti, 1994) <sup>[40]</sup>. Daughters of Rajput chiefs and some Bengali zamindars were able to read and write during this period. The British period opens a new chapter in Indian educational history. The British made a ritualistic attempt in women's education. During the British period, missionaries and their educational institutions started promoting education for girls in the early part of 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1819, Female Juvenile Society, a

non-religious organization started schools for girls (Phadke, 1958 in Korishetti, 1994) <sup>[40]</sup>. The Ladies Society for Native Female Education was formed in 1824 under the patronage of Lady Amherst, which managed more than thirty women's schools. The establishment of municipalities and the levy of the local fund cess gave a great fillip to the progress of women's education. In 1857, three universities were established in three presidencies –Bombay (now renamed Mumbai), Calcutta (Kolkata) and Madras (Chennai). Acquiring higher education presented a personal challenge to middle class girls, but the participation of Christian and Parsi women was much higher than that of Hindu women (Jenefa, 2012) <sup>[33]</sup>. The Indian National Congress played a major role in emancipating women. Within a year of its formation in 1885, a Ladies’ Association was formed. By the 1890s more and more highly educated women were visible in the public sphere (Jenefa, 2012) <sup>[33]</sup>. Later, prominent Indian women like Ramabai Ranade, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Rameshwari Nehru, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Aruna Asif Ali, Sucheta Kriplani, Usha Mehta and Vilasini Devi Shenai played an important political and social role. In 1913, the British government of India was forced to prepare a new educational policy for women, which recommended special curriculum of practical utility for women, like needle-work, music etc (Korishetti, 1994) <sup>[40]</sup>. Banaras Hindu University in 1916, Aligarh Muslim University in 1920, and Delhi University in 1922 became new hubs of women’s liberation. After the Independence, women’s education, especially higher education took off.

### Role of Education in Women Empowerment

The education strives to awaken people from their darkness so that they may realize their empowered status. The importance of education in promoting and sustaining both individual and national development is well known. If education has an empowering effect on women in terms of socio-cultural, economic, interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological domains, investing in education is worthwhile not only from an individual but also from a national perspective (Aslam, 2013) <sup>[6]</sup>. Education, as thought by Freire, is engraved in the dialogical concept of an education rooted in a problematizing comprehension of the act of knowing and the intentionality of changing the world. It is an education that evokes transformation, emancipation, and human liberation (Siqueira, 2015) <sup>[62]</sup>. Access to education by the people equips them with the ability to think about reality, to refuse political and scientific neutrality and to affirm concepts and practices of humanity. Freire, in many of his works, expresses his comprehension of popular education linked to actions with the oppressed (Siqueira, 2015) <sup>[62]</sup>. Extensive education programme aims at transforming patriarchal attitudes. The ideological apparatuses which bolster patriarchal domination need to be transformed into the ideological apparatuses bolstering the rights of women. Education clearly reduces gender gaps in earnings and can play a vital role in attenuating inequalities in earnings in the labor market. Girls’ education is a human right, provides economic and social benefits and is an international objective. Men continue to play strong roles in Indian women’s lives in certain decisions and at least in our sampled areas. The traditional mode of education makes women to be equipped with capacity to exercise the role of wife and mother and the significance of latter kind is very relevant in this globalized era to be strong enough in their

lives. Henceforth, the necessity of education is not only for male rather women too (Nagaraja, 2018) <sup>[49]</sup>. The education system should find the way for inclusive development of women.

**Dimensions of Empowerment of Women through Education:** Education facilitates emancipation of women in a multifarious way. It equips women in such a way that they may get directions to grow their personality. Let's see its various dimensions.

#### **Participation in Public Affairs**

Education gives women an opportunity to participate in public affairs actively. It gives them space where not only civil and political but economic, cultural participation of women is ensured. The power of knowledge will strengthen self-confidence among them to resist any kind of exploitation. The political empowerment of women depends upon their self-conscientization. It may help them in taking crucial decisions in their personal and political life. Their empowerment consists of right to vote, right to contest, their role as campaigners in public affairs. It may also bring their participation in local self-governance. Education was to equip women with the know-how to make sure that women would be part of structures and participate in making influential decisions and policies that affect women and ensure that their interests would be advanced (Akawa, 2014) <sup>[2]</sup>.

#### **Social Upliftment**

Education has potential to help in social upliftment of women also. It plays a catalytic role in a country's socio-economic development and is one of the principal means available for a deeper and harmonious form of human development reducing poverty, ignorance and exclusion. Education, which is a training ground for a professional, research-based, career-oriented future must be respected as a potential instrument for bringing about social transformation and ensuring the success of democracy (Singh & Singh, 2017). It is argued that it may facilitate an environment free from all forms of violence against women and also ensure the participation and adequate representation of women at highest policy levels. Women's increased participation at the decision making level can only be said to lead to their increased development and empowerment if such participation enables them to achieve greater control over factors of production, access to resources and the distribution of benefits (Varghese, 2012) <sup>[67]</sup>. The education-empowerment discourse, therefore, could benefit significantly from investigations into the process by which education can transform values, attitudes and outcomes for women (Aslam, 2013) <sup>[6]</sup>.

#### **Financial Independence:**

Education not only empowers women in their social standing but in their financial capacity also. It builds their credit worthiness through ensuring their financial literacy. Women with sound educational status have very robust financial planning (Varghese, 2012) <sup>[67]</sup>. The financial independence is a necessary condition for enabling women to seek justice and equality, because without economic strength, women cannot be able to exercise their rights and entitlements. Without reasonable income security, people lack real freedom to make rational choices and to become

socially responsible (Varghese, 2012) <sup>[67]</sup>. The financial literacy equips women with expertise in doing financial planning not only for the household but even society and state. The economic capacity of women may be determined through their command over resources, agency and achievements. The access of women to micro-finance services is also determinant to their financial independence. It may also help in terms of developing their purchasing power. Female education has historically been seen as deeply subversive and threatening. In societies throughout the world, education is seen as not only offering a path to formal employment in the cash economy, but is popularly associated with ideas about 'modern' i.e. westernised life (Sweetman, 2004) <sup>[64]</sup>.

#### **Psychological Empowerment**

Education has capability to empower people psychologically to deal with their personal problems. The psychological empowerment depends upon self-esteem and self-efficacy. Through psychological empowerment women not only transgress the traditional and patriarchal taboos and social obligations, they also transform their selves and subjectivities (Mandal, 2013) <sup>[45]</sup>. It enables women to collectivize and reduce their isolation, fragmentation and atomization. When women join educational institutions, political parties or decision-making bodies; hold white color jobs, take decisions and travel different places; occupy land and wealth, they feel psychologically powered and build their self-confidence, recognize their self-worth and take control of their own income and body (Mandal, 2013) <sup>[45]</sup>. This personal growth and exploration has given them self-respect, pride, maturity and resilience as they have exerted their independence away from home. They also learn the art of living and how to adjust with the changed circumstances. The education of women also brings less desire for increasing number of children so that it may be limited upto certain numbers.

#### **Political Growth**

Education assists in political empowerment of women. The participation of women at all levels of governance structures is the highest need of this hour for women's actual empowerment. Alida Brill (2000) holds, "Without our own voices being heard inside the government areas and halls of public policy and debate, we are without the right to accountability— a basic establishment of those who are governed" (Mandal, 2013) <sup>[45]</sup>. Women throughout the world have been struggling to break away the shackle of bondage, subjugation, oppression and all kinds of ill treatment both within and outside of their families. Without bringing them in the corridor of power where they can formulate policies and programs and implement them, the survival of women is very difficult (Mandal, 2013) <sup>[45]</sup>. Education helps women in their fight against their own fears and enhances their self-dignity. Promilla Kapur (2001) has rightly viewed that, "Woman's empowerment in reality is to empower herself and not overpower men" (Mandal, 2013) <sup>[45]</sup>. In this sense, the political growth of women make them free from shackles of unfreedom. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important (Mandal, 2013) <sup>[45]</sup>. It is a multi-pronged process through which power and strength may be gained. Without universal participation of

women, a strong democratic society may not be imagined. The participation is an important means to ensure improved living conditions.

### Conclusion

Empowerment of women is a very vital component of development discourse. It is very much explicit that empowerment of women is very much required for positive change and transformation of unequal society. Despite independence of our country, women are still not free from their boundaries. The sufferings of our women are far worse than that of developed nations. It must be kept in mind that gender equity is the realization of complete equality in all aspects of the social order regardless of gender (Mandal, 2013) <sup>[45]</sup>. For achieving complete equality in the society between two genders, it is necessary to eliminate all kinds of domination, oppression and discrimination against the fair sex by their male counterpart (Mandal, 2013) <sup>[45]</sup>. Empowering women is seen as one of the central issues in the process of sustainable development for many nations worldwide. Around the globe, government and different organizations strive to increase women's empowerment by implementing different interventions such as offering access ranging from microfinance services to promoting sustainable development and human rights (Huis, *et al.* 2017) <sup>[30]</sup>. In order for development to occur, for gender equity to be achieved, and for men and women to develop their full potential as individuals, education provided in the schools must contribute to the eradication of gender stereotypes. Any development activity may be achieved only through mutual cooperation and active participation of both men and women. Women's empowerment is a belief-mediated process in which the impact of social conditions of a purely objective nature, such as the strength of the knowledge economy, is mediated by their tendency to nurture emancipative beliefs. For the development of the economy, women and men both should work together and women should utilize their skills. Empowerment of women leads to benefit not only individual woman and women groups, but also to the families and community as a whole through collective action for development (Dominic & Jothi, 2012) <sup>[21]</sup>. Therefore, the education of women is a very strong tool for their empowerment.

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