



IN 21ST CENTURY WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said that for the all-round development of the society “education and economic resources are most essential”. Education, as an instrument of social and economic mobility calls for the expansion of access to education and employment opportunity to the weaker sections and women. Such opportunities expand mainly through the expansion of the state sector. The Directive Principles of the constitution that “free and compulsory education should be provided for all children up to the age of 14 within 10 years of the commencement of the constitution” reflex the view point of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee. For him the goal of education is human welfare and hence demanded political safeguards to weaker sections and minorities. He said that “we may forego material benefits of civilization but we can’t forego material benefits of civilization but we can’t forego our right and opportunity to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent as education is the greatest material benefit”. This underscores the need for legislation to ensure quality education for women that provides for the up gradation of their skills in all trades and activities. A healthy development of recent year is the reduction in the literacy gap between males and females in rural and urban areas.

Empowerment of women is to be recognized as a process through which the socio-economic development of women can be achieved over a period of time. In fact, it is a multi-dimensional endeavor that underscores the need of simultaneously promoting the educational status of women and involving larger promotion of women in entrepreneurial activities. Further, equally important is the need of legislation that ensures women to take effective advantage of the opportunities in the economic and social realms along with men.

Key words: Women empowerment, Gender Disparity, Female Literacy Rate, Female Employment, Censuses of India.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world women not only constitute one half of the human population of the globe but also sway the growth of the remaining half. Women produce half of the world’s food supply, account for 60.00 per cent of the work force and contribute up to 30.00 per cent of the official labour force, but surprisingly, own less than 1.00 per cent of the world’s real estate.

Globalization facilitated rapid improvement in the areas like education, transport, communication, mass media etc, and further bought many changes in the living standards of the people. In terms of development goals on poverty, health, education and gender equality, the effects of globalization are many are varied, and they differ between countries in their magnitude. Unfortunately, these benefits were not distributed evenly among all the regions of the country and these changes failed to improve the living conditions of rural folk, more specifically, the women in rural areas. Women living in urban areas are enjoying the advantages of harnessing the benefits of developmental programmes quickly and easily then the women striving and working hard in rural areas.

Women have no are very little financial independence what so ever. They are hardly in a position to spend any thing on them self or pay much attention to their own needs. This is mainly due to the fact that much of the labour and services of rural women is non-monetized or unaccounted in terms of economic resources. In spite of her labour and hard work for nearly 18 hours a day on the farm and within the house, rural woman gets very little in



terms of monetary resources. For a long time the economic potential and utility of the service of women are not adequately recognized and very little attention has been paid to involve them on a large scale, actively in the directly indirectly productive activities and enable them to make them more effective and economically productive.

Increasing participation of women in productive activities depends upon the level of education of women which indicates the growth of development of women entrepreneurship all over the globe. "Education is the key for all round development" (Dr. B.R. Ambedkar) and it is a process through which the faculty of reasoning is developed among the human beings.

Apart from the fact that education system has an intimate bearing on the development of a Nation, it largely determines the quality of man power and the social climate of the country. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said that for the all round development of the society "education and economic resources are most essential". Education, as an instrument of social and economic mobility calls for the expansion of access to education and employment opportunity to the weaker section and women. Such opportunities expend mainly through the expansion of the state sector.

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In this contest, an attempt is made in this paper to estimate the status of women education, and the need, scope and limits of women empowerment.

Women Educational Status

Realizing the importance of education to girls, with provides the basic knowledge and skills especially in the areas of childcare, health nutrition and environment, several committees were appointed to study the need, importance and urgency of women education. National Committee on women's education, 1959 (Durgabhai Deshmukh) emphasized the need for the allotment of special funds for women's education. National committee of women's education 1962 (Hansa Mehta) pleaded for common curriculum for boys and girls and induction of women teachers not boys' schools. The Committee on the status of women in India, 1974 recommended free education for girls up to secondary stage.

The views of these committees were considered in the formulation of policies on education in our country. The National Policy of Education 1968 provided for equality of educational opportunities. The National Policy of Education, 1986 emphasized that education should become an instrument for fostering equality between men and women. The Revised National Policy on education and programme of Action 1992 stressed the fact that education for women's equality is too important. The Human Development Report on South Asian Nations Education 1994 reported that in urban India, when mothers were uneducated, the child mortality rate was as high as 82 per 1000,



but it dropped to 34 per 1000 when mothers were educated. However, female education in India was neglected for a long time resulting in enormous economic and social cost.

Table 1 show the status of literacy among women in India since 1901. Female literacy rate was under 8.0 per cent up to 1951 and gained momentum afterward as a result of planned economic development. Though female literacy rate recorded an increase of 10.00 per cent each during the census years 1981 and 1991 in increased by more than 15.00 per cent by 2001. However, it was significantly between the literacy rate in rural and urban areas.

Table 1: Literacy Rates in India (in Per cent)

Year	Persons	Males	Females	Rural	Urban
1901	5.39	9.83	0.60	N.A	N.A
1911	5.92	10.50	1.05	N.A	N.A
1921	7.16	12.21	1.81	N.A	N.A
1931	9.50	15.59	2.93	N.A	N.A
1941	16.10	24.90	7.30	N.A	N.A
1951	16.67	24.95	7.93	12.10	34.50
1961	24.02	34.44	12.95	18.82	46.97
1971	25.46	30.45	18.72	23.69	52.37
1981	43.56	56.37	29.75	36.00	67.20
1991	52.11	63.86	39.42	44.20	76.00
2001	64.84	75.30	53.70	59.20	80.10
2011	74.00	82.10	65.50	68.90	85.10

Source: Registrar General of India, Census Series, Government of India, New-Delhi.

Table 2: Male – Female Literacy Gap (in Per cent)

Year	Total	Rural	Urban
2001	21.6	24.6	13.4
2011	16.6	19.8	9.8

Source: Registrar General of India, Census Series, Government of India, New-Delhi.

Prior to 1981, the female literacy rate has been deplorable in our country. While the male and female ratio of population has nearly been the same, the female literacy rate has been less than half of the literacy rate males. Even in 1981 except in Kerala, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, less than one third of the females were literates in all the states. In other words, only one quarter of the females in India become literates by the end of 1981.

An inter-state analysis of female literacy rates during 1981-1991 census years indicates that Haryana recorded the highest rate of increase of 13.54 per cent, while Bihar registered that lowest rate of increase of 6.37 per cent female literacy. Through Tamil Nadu recorded 10.90 per cent increase against Kerala's 10.52 per cent increase in the female literacy rate during 1981-1991, the female literacy rate in Kerala was 86.17 per cent as against Tamil Nadu's 51.33 per cent.

The data given in table 1 and 2 for 2001 and 2011 show increasing trend in the literacy levels of females, in 2011, it is 65.5 per cent compared to male literacy of 82.1 per cent. In rural areas, literacy rate among females was 58.8 per cent as contrasted from 79.9 per cent in urban areas. Male-female literacy gap in 2011 was 16.6 per cent for all India, as against 19.8 per cent in rural areas and 9.8 per cent in urban areas. Comparison of 2001 and 2011 data reveals that the literacy gap has come down substantially, which is an encouraging sign.



Scheduled Caste (SC) female literacy was more vulnerable in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa States. The literacy rate of SC women was 10.93 against 30 for the women population of the country in 1981. Nearly one half of the SC women in Kerala and one fifth of them in Gujarat, Manipur, Maharashtra, and Himachal Pradesh are literatures.

The percentage of Scheduled Tribe (ST) literates increased from 11.30 in 1971 to 16.35 in 1981 (5.0%). However, the female literacy of ST in 1981 was only 8.0 per cent, which is far below the literacy rate of women (30.0%) in India. In all the states with larger ST population, except in Arunachal Pradesh, the female literacy ranged from 29 to 55 per cent. From this analysis, it is clear that the status of women in terms of education has been on the rise during the last three decades.

Advancement of Women through Five Year Plans

There has been a progressive increase in the plan outlays around six decades of planned development to meet the needs of women and children. The outlay of Rs. 4 crores in the First Plan (1951-56) has increased to Rs. 7,810.42 crores in the Ninth Five Year Plan, and Rs. 13,780 crores in the Tenth Five Year Plan. There has been a shift from “welfare” oriented approach in the First Five Year Plan to “development” and “empowerment” of women in the consecutive Five Year Plans.

Perspectives on Advancement of Women through Five Year Plans

First Five Year (1951-56)	It was mainly welfare oriented as far as women’s issues were Concerned. The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) undertook a number of welfare measures through the voluntary sector. The programmes for women were implemented through the National Extension Service Programmes through Community Development Blocks.
Second Five Year plan (1956-61)	Efforts were geared to organize “Mahila Mandals” (women’s groups) at grass roots levels to ensure better implementation of welfare schemes.
Third, fourth, fifth and other interim plans (1961-74)	They accorded high priority to women’s education. Measures to improve maternal and child health services, and supplementary feeding for children, nursing and expectant mothers were also introduced.
Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85)	This is regarded as landmark in women’s development. The plan adopted a multidisciplinary approach with a three-pronged thrust on health, education and employment of women.
Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90)	Development programmes for women were continued, with the objective of raise their economic and social status and bring them into the mainstream of national development. A very significant step therein was to identify and promote “beneficiary-oriented programmes” which extended direct benefits to women.
Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97)	It attempted to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors did not bypass women. Special programmes were implemented to complement the general development programmes. The flow of benefits to women in the three core sectors of education, health and employment were monitored vigilantly. Women were enabled to function as equal partners and participants in the developmental process with reservation in the membership of local bodies. This approach of the eighth plan marks a definite shift from ‘development’ to empowerment of women.
Ninth five Year Plan (1997-02)	The ninth Five Year Plan envisaged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Empowerment of women and socially disadvantaged groups such as SC, ST, Backward Classes (BC), and Minorities as agents of socio-economic change and development. b) Promoting and developing people’s participatory institutions like panchayati Raj institutions, cooperatives and self help groups. c) Strengthening efforts to build self-reliance.



	d) The convergence of services from different sectors. e) A women's component plan at the central and state levels.
Tenth five year plan (2002-07)	The Tenth Five Year Plan was formulated to ensure requisite access of women to information, resources and services, and advance gender equality goals.
Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12)	The Eleventh Five Year Plan proposes to undertake special measures for gender empowerment and equity. The Ministry of women and Child Development would make synergistic use of gender budget and gender mainstreaming process

Source: Indian Planning Commission, Five Year Plans, New Delhi.

A look into the employment position of women in India reveals the fact that among the total women employed, only 4.0 per cent of the women comprise the workforce in organized sector, and the remaining are employed in the unorganized, informal and low wage sector. National Commission on Self-employed Women in the Informal Sector suggested the syllabic need to be more relevant for children in rural areas.

The expansion of public services led to a large-scale increase in the employment of women as ANMs, gramasevika, anganwadis, teachers etc. the New Economic policy and the reforms aimed at reduction in the social sector spending hampered the expansion of employment opportunities for women. The Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government, London, 1990 stated that the share of employed women in science and technology is a low percentage of the total.

Conclusion

However, women are not effectively organized into a group to achieve their legitimate rights in the society on all fronts like socio-economic, political, cultural and other areas. Literate women are not contributing significantly for their empowerment, and hence many feel that legislation is necessary for the empowerment of women apart from their improved level of education in the country.

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