



## EDUCATION – A KEY TO EMPOWER WOMEN

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*Educate a man and you educate an individual. Educate a woman and you educate a family.*

--- A. Cripps

### **Abstract**

During the Vedic period, woman enjoyed a prominent position in Indian society; she was treated as a deity of the house. In the later periods, however, India got exposed to different social, economic, political and cultural changes, leading to the lowered status of women in India. Later in 18<sup>th</sup> century, different social reformers attempted to augment the condition of women. In spite of their efforts to empower women, gender discrimination still exists in Indian society even after India got independence. To remove gender discrimination, Indian constitution has given equal rights to women in all spheres of life, many strategies and policies are framed by the government in this regard. But all these efforts of government have not yielded expected results in empowering women. According to Census data of 2011, the population of India is more than 121 Crores with 48.5 percent females. Women produced 30 percent of all food commodities consumed, but get only 10 Percent of the income and own only 10 percent of assets. The above statistical evidences highlight the lower economic status of women. Is adequate and proper education the right / proper solution to this problem? To know this, an attempt is made in this paper, focusing on the importance of education for women, the challenges faced by women in accessing education, present strategies and schemes of government to encourage girls' education, the impact of education in empowerment of women, etc. The findings of this paper will contribute in facilitating the existing strategies of Government and NGOs to empower women.

**Keywords: Gender Discrimination, Women Empowerment, Challenges, Strategies, Education.**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Women in India, in the ancient period, enjoyed equal status and privileges with men in all spheres of life. Woman was treated as 'Graha Lakshmi' (Goddess of Home) in those periods. An Indian Rishi (sage), Manuhad mentioned in a Sanskrit verse, that 'god resides where women are respected'. The story of 'Shakuntala and Dushyant' mentioned in the Hindu epic, reveals that woman had freedom to choose her husband. 'Gargi and Maitri' were the sages of that time and participated in scholarly discussions. This indicates that women had freedom of education and enjoyed high status in the ancient period of India.

Around 500 B.C, India was invaded by the foreign rulers and the invasion continued till India got independence in 1947.. In the community of many of these invaders, women did not have dignified status. They treated woman as a property and she was kept under the control. The culture of foreign rulers impacted the Indians. As a result different restrictions were imposed on women to safeguard them and to control them. Those measures to control and protect women turned out into different evil practices against them, such as child marriages, Custom of Sati, Jauhar etc., As a result, the status of women started deteriorating, making them suffer due to such in-human practices.

During 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Century, various social reformers such as Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, M.G. Ranade, Dayanand Saraswati, Jyotiba Pule, Mahatma Gandhi, etc., witnessed the plight of women in Indian society. In order to free women from this embarrassing situation, they strived hard to uplift the status of women in the society. These social reformers stressed on women's education, abolishment of child marriage, widow remarriage and other evil practices against women.

After Independence, Indian constitution has given equal rights to all the citizens of India. With the constitutional support, it was believed that, the problems of inequality and discrimination against women would be solved. This belief was shattered in the year 1974, when a report was presented to the government on the status of women. The report highlighted that the dehumanizing social customs against women folk are existed in Indian society.

UN Commission on the status of women observed that women constitute half of the world population, perform 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the world's work, receive 1/10<sup>th</sup> of its income and own less than 1/100<sup>th</sup> of its property. According to India's Census, 2011, the population of India is more than 121 Crores with 48.5 percent females. Women produce 30 Percent of all food commodities consumed, but get only 10 Percent of the income and own only 10 percent of assets. These global and national statistics highlight the poor economic status of women all over the world.

### **1.2 Women Empowerment**

Women Empowerment is a prerequisite for creating a good nation. Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women to ensure equal-right for women and to make them confident enough to claim their rights.



## Ways to Empower Women

There are different ways to empower women such as the some of the below.

- By giving access to and control over resources
- By making them participate in decision making in domestic, societal and political level
- By providing education
- By creating employment and self employment opportunity
- By changing the mentality of society towards women
- By identifying their skills and giving encouragement to make a good career

Among these, the most important way is to enhance their economic status. A change in economic status changes the social status and political status of a woman. When women gain economic strength they gain visibility and voice. Major problems of women can be controlled if women's economic status is improved. However, to gain economic strength, women must be educated properly. Proper education helps women to understand their rights and responsibility. Education creates more employment opportunities for them and thereby empowers them in all walks of life. So education is a powerful tool to empower women.

### 1.3 Importance of Education in Women Empowerment

New UNESCO study highlighted the need for education in empowerment of women, citing the following some of the factors.

- Education improves job opportunities and increases economic growth
- Education saves mother and child's life, as an educated mother seeks for knowledge related health care, nutrition to maintain good health of herself and her child.
- Education teaches proper communication skills that avoids disputes in the family.
- Educated woman guides her children to proper direction and make them good citizen of India
- Education improves social mobility of women
- Education reduces crimes against women

Proper education makes difference in the status of women. It creates more employment opportunities, creates health consciousness and decreases maternal and infant mortality rates, makes woman confident to face any adverse situation, reduces suicide attempts, increases social and political participation. Education also makes women more courageous to fight against various evil practices imposed on them and so on.

### 1.4 Status of Women Education in India

**Table 1: Literacy Rates in Post Independent period**

Year	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
1951	4.87	19.02	12.1	22.33	45.6	34.59	8.86	27.15	18.32
2001	46.7	71.4	59.4	73.2	86.7	80.3	53.67	75.26	64.83
2011	58.75	78.57	67.8	79.92	89.67	84.1	65.46	82.14	74.04
% Increase in 2011 over 2001	26%	10%	14%	9%	3%	5%	22%	9%	14%

Sources: Census of India (2011)

Table-1 reveals that there is increase in overall literacy rate (74.4%), female literacy rate(65.46%), and male literacy rate(82.14%) in 2011, over the period from 1951. The female literacy rate has increased by 22%, whereas the male literacy rate has increased by 9% in 2011 from 2001. The increase in female literacy rate is more in rural area as compared to urban area.

**Table 2: Number of Females per hundred males enrolled by stages of Education**

Year	Primary I-V	Upper Primary VI-VIII	Secondary IX-X	Senior Secondary XI-XII	Higher
1950-51	39	19	NA	15	13
2011-12	93	90	81	81	80
2012-13	94	95	89	89	85
2013-14	93	95	89	89	85
2014-15	93	95	91	90	85

Source: (i) Figure from 1950-51 to 2011-12: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>); (ii) Figure for 2012-13 & 2014-15: National University of Educational Planning & Administration, New Delhi (website: <http://dise.in/>) (iii) Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)



On observation of Table No.2, one can note that, in 2014-15 there has been a considerable improvement in female enrolments per hundred of male enrolments as compared to the year 1950-51. But enrolment ratios for senior secondary and higher education are still low.

**Table 3: Drop-out Rate at Different Stages of School Education**

Year	I-V Classes		I-VIII Classes		I-X Classes	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
2000-01	41.90	39.70	57.70	50.30	71.50	66.40
2010-11	25.40	29.00	41.20	40.60	47.70	50.20
2012-13	4.66	4.68	4.01	2.30	14.54	14.54

Source: Elementary Education in India 2013-14, Ministry of Human Resource Development. Statistics of School Education 2010-11,Flash Statistics 2013-14

Table No.3, shows dropout rates of female child in primary, secondary and higher secondary classes. And drop-out rates are more in higher secondary stage when compared to primary and lower secondary stages.

**Table 4: Number of Female Teachers per 100 Male Teachers at Different Levels of Education**

Year	Primary School	Middle School	Secondary School
2000-01	55	62	54
2010-11	76	80	61

Source: Statistics of School Education 2010-11, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

It is noted from Table-4, the number of female teachers per 100 male teachers are less in 2000-01 and 2010-11.

The statistical evidences presented in above tables demonstrate that there is still more scope to improve literacy level of women. Even now women face various problems to have access to education and to continue their higher education. Few of such problems are identified after the interaction with some of school and college dropouts and on referring existing literatures. Problems faced by women in accessing education are discussed below.

#### 1.4 Problems Associated With Women's Education

##### Poverty

In India, the vast majority of the population is poor. Due to poverty, parents are not able to afford education to all their children. When the choice comes they prefer to invest in education of son/s, rather than their daughter/s. In India it is believed that a son will take care of his parents in their old age. While on the other hand, after some years girls get married and go out of the house.

##### Domestic Duty

Indian society has a belief that the proper place for a woman is home. Serving husband and his family and taking care of children are her prime duty. This applies to all women whether they are educated or not. Hence, more emphasis was not given on girl education.

##### Early Marriages

Girls are deprived off education due to early marriages. At present early marriages are banned. Still, due to several socio economic reasons, women are not perusing education especially higher education.

##### Conservative Mentality and Low Literacy Level of Parents

The parents who are illiterates and are of conservative attitude, have the belief that the purpose of education is only for getting good jobs. Education has been linked to employment. Therefore, these people who are not interested to send their daughters for jobs are not in favour of sending them for higher education.

##### Lack of Girls' School

Many people hesitate to send their daughters to co-education institutions. The number of women's educational institutions are less in number. And the parents are not prepared to send their daughters to women's educational institution also if it is located in distance place.

##### Lack of Proper Sanitary Facilities

Many parents stop their girls' education after they attain puberty if the school doesn't have a separate, clean sanitary facility for girls.



### **Lack of Women Teachers**

The lack of women teachers in primary and middle schools has been very largely responsible for the low enrolment of girls, especially in the backward regions. It is an accepted fact that the primary schools should be staffed with women teachers. At present the proportion of women teachers to men teachers is very low.

### **Women Trafficking**

Fear of women trafficking is another reason for the parents to send their daughters to the educational institutions located in a distant place.

### **Child Labour**

Due to poverty parents are forced to send their girl child for domestic work, for wage work in household enterprises. Parents from poor family think that it is better to send their daughter for work rather than to school as they can contribute to the family income.

To eradicate the problems associated with women education, to improve literacy rate and literacy level, government has enacted national policy for education. Under this policy various schemes are launched to support girls to access education on par with with boys.

### **1.5 Government Support to Women's Education**

National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 revised in 1992 has various schemes for the development of women's education in India.

#### **School Education**

##### **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**

SSA attempts to reach out to girls belonging to SC, ST and minority community. Various facilities provided to girls under this scheme include,

- Free text books
- Separate Toilet for girls
- Back to school for dropouts
- Bridge course for older girls
- Recruitment of women teacher
- A teachers sensitization program to promote equitable learning opportunities
- Gender sensitive teaching, learning material
- Innovation fund for district for retention of girls' education

##### **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya**

100% girls' school set up for SC, ST, Muslim communities in the area of scattered habitation.

**Construction of Separate Toilets for Girls:** Prime Minister in his speech on August 15, 2014 gave a call to parliamentarians to use MPLAD fund for construction of toilets.

**Udan-Giving wings to Girl Students:** This programme is designed to provide comprehensive platform to deserving girl students who aspire to pursue higher education in Engineering. Under this program aspiring girl students are given coaching to prepare for IIT, JEE exams.

**Reservation of Seats for Girls in Kendriya Vidyalaya:** In Kendriya Vidyalaya, per section 2 seats are reserved for girls of outstanding performance. These seats are available over and above the sanctioned strength

**Construction and Running of Girls Hostel for Students of Secondary and Higher Education:** This scheme was launched with an aim to improve access to and to retain girl child in secondary and higher secondary classes. The Scheme envisages construction of hostel with capacity of 100 girls in each of about 3,500 educationally backward blocks.

**Mahila Samakhya (MS):** This is an ongoing scheme for women's empowerment that has initiated in 1989. The objectives of the MS programme is to create an environment in which education can serve the objectives of women's equality and where women can seek knowledge and information and thereby empower them to play a positive role in their own development and development of society.



**National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education:** The centrally sponsored scheme with an objective of establishing a conducive environment for girls to reduce and to promote enrolment of girl child of ST,SC community to secondary education. During 2014-15, 6621 crores have been sanctioned covering 2,20,684 girls.

**Rasthriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan:** RMSA was launched in March 2009 to improve quality of education to enhance Gross Enrolment Ratio and to remove gender inequality, socio-economic disability barrier.

**Higher Education:** Department of higher education aims to reduce gender gap in higher education..On the eve of independence GER was 10% that has increased to 44.89% in the academic year 2012-13.

**Higher Education of Women through Open and Distance Learning (ODL):** Access to Education through an open and distance learning system helped women to continue education through distance mode

**Women hostel in polytechnic College:** In order to enhance women's participation in polytechnic education a scheme has been launched to provide financial assistance for construction of hostels for girls.

#### University Grant Commission (UGC)

The women's education has been a priority area for UGC. Number of Schemes are launched by UGC to encourage the enrolment and promotion of girls in higher education such schemes are

- a) Day care centers in university and colleges
- b) Post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for single girl child for pursuing higher and technical education

**Post Doctoral Fellowships for Women:** The number slots available under this scheme are 100 per year. The tenure of the award is 5 years. The upper age limit is 55 years for general category and 60 years for SC/ST/OBC/PH/Minority

**Development of Women's studies in Universities and Colleges:** The primary role of those centers is to make knowledge simulation and knowledge transmission through teaching and research.

**Schemes of Capacity Building Women Managers in Higher Education:** This program is focused on women in higher education in the academic and administrative streams to sensitize and motivate them and subsequently equip them for decision making positions in the higher education system.

**Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU):** IGNOU has been making conscious efforts/steps to reach out to the girl/women learners especially remote and rural area.

**All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE):** In order to increase the enrollment of women in technical education, AICTE has special concessions and regulation for setting up of a women's technical institution.

#### 1.6 Education and Empowerment of Women

After the enactment and implementation of National policy on education, the literacy rate of women has increased from 8.86% in 1951 to 65.46 % in 2011. Literacy brings changes in the life of every person, it increases employment or self employment opportunities and thereby increase economic status. Improved economic status enhances the social and political status. On international literacy day, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2011, the then President of India Smt. Pratibha Patil said that increasing female literacy has the potential of becoming a force multiplier in pushing forward the socioeconomic development of the nation. She said, "If we make women literate, they will be self reliant and the beneficial impact on society will be manifold"

So, it is necessary to know the role of education in empowerment of women. Practically it is difficult to measure impact of literacy / education on women empowerment since other factors, along with literacy / education also contribute to the empowerment of women. There is limited statistical evidence available that shows direct relationship between education and empowerment of women. However, an effort is made to correlate the education and empowerment, with education being an independent variable and some observed empowerment factors being dependent variables.

**Table 5: Literacy rate and women employment**

Year	Female literacy Rate	% of employment in public sector	% of employment in Private sector	Overall % of employment
2000-01	53.67 %	13.4%	20.2%	16.8%
2010-11	65.46%	18.1%	24.3%	21.2%

Source: Census data of 2001 and 2011, Men and Women Statistics 2015



**Table 6: Literacy and infant mortality rate**

Year	Female Literacy Rate	Infant mortality rate per thousand live birth
1951	8.86	146
1961	15.35	146
1971	21.97	129
1981	29.76	110
1991	39.29	80
2001	53.67	68
2011	65.46	46

Source: Census 2011, Registrar General Office

**Table 7: Number of MPs based on educational status in 2014**

Educational Qualification	Women MPs	
	Number	%
Under Matriculation	3	5 %
Matric, Inter/Higher Secondary, Diploma Holders	13	21%
Undergraduates and graduates	19	31%
Post Graduate	27	44%
Total	62	

Source: Lok Sabha Secretariat

**Table 8: Suicide victims and their educational levels 2013**

Educational Level	Female	Male	Total
Primary Education	10322	19502	29824
Higher Primary	10095	21679	31774
Matriculate/Secondary	8180	19416	27596
Under graduate/Diploma/Graduate	6027	13858	19885
Post Graduate and above	207	509	716

Source: Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India, National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs.

It is observed from the above tables that literacy / education has a positive co-relation with respect to the empowerment. The statistics given above reveal that due to increased literacy level there is increase in women employment in both public and private sector, decrease in infant mortality rate, improvement in political participation and reduction in suicide victims. Hence, we can certainly say that education is the most powerful tool of empowerment.

### Findings

Observation of the data presented above reveal that there has been increase in literacy rate of women. Improved literacy level enhanced status of women in different aspects of life. The compiled data presented above, from different sources reveal that increase in literacy rate has improved the employability of women. Women participation in politics is more with a higher level of education. The mortality rate of infants is reduced when women are educated. Education has given woman more confidence to face the challenges of life, hence low suicide attempts were observed with highly educated women when compared to poorly educated women.

### Suggestions

Challenges related to education of females can be noticed from three different angles, i.e., issues associated with parents, issues associated with children and issues related to school and its atmosphere. The education level of women can be enhanced if problems are solved from these three different angles.

1. Poverty, negative mindset of parents towards education of their daughters, in-secured feelings of parents to send them to educational institutions which are located at far off places are the main reasons for not encouraging their daughters to continue education. Hence, it is the task of government and NGOs to educate parents, make them understand the importance of education of their daughters, provide more security to girls in schools and colleges by appointing lady police near school and college campus will certainly increase the literacy rate of girls.
2. A girl may have her own reasons to drop out of school that are discouraging study environment, sickness, sickness of family members, household work, poor comprehensions etc. By appointing a lady counsellor in each school and attending the personal problems of the girl child, dropout rates can be reduced and enrolments at each stage of education may increase.



3. Inconvenient School and college atmosphere also discourage parents to allow their daughter/s to continue her/their education. So each school should have basic facilities such as girls toilet, pure drinking water, adequate number of lady teachers, indiscriminate behaviour of teachers towards poor learners, remedial classes for poor learners will reduce school/college dropout of girls at different stages of education

### Conclusion

It is a fact that women need to be empowered for overall growth of nation, society and family as well. Education is a most important tool for empowerment of women as it creates employment opportunities, make the women economically strong. Education increases confidence in women, it helps them to fight against all atrocities associated with them. In India there is positive change in the educational status of women. Still educational facilities are not equally accessed by men and women both. Women still face several problems in getting proper education. The government has framed many schemes, created more encouraging atmosphere to give equal opportunity to women to get proper education. But these schemes go futile unless the problem with low literacy / education level of women is not tackled effectively.

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