

WOMEN'S EDUCATION: KEY TO EMPOWERMENT



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Abstract

Education is a basic imperative for any country aspiring to become a great nation. Women's Education is the foundation stone, since upon her rests, mainly the growth of a child into a man/woman who will become an asset for his/her community and nation. In today's milieu, education is the stepping stone to power. Whether man or woman, education is the primary pathway to empowerment, through upward economic mobility to higher social status.

Education is a prerequisite for empowering women. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals who are politically active economically independent and is able to make informed choices and intelligent decisions in matters that affect them and their nation. Education inspires people to advance on all fronts. It helps individuals to be more aware of their constitutional and legal rights and of the opportunities available for them to make their lives better. Education also helps people evolve as workers, citizens and human beings

It is important in this respect to bring women into the mainstream of education and empower them, so that society benefits from their education. Women have been long neglected in their role as beneficiaries of the process of development. Though they constitute a huge chunk of the population, their contribution to development in society is often undermined. However in recent times gender has been increasingly viewed as a principle underlying the distribution of resources in the households as well as in society. Women's education is all the more important because of the special problem that women face today. Gender bias in social, educational and political fields is still manifests in many civilized societies of the world.

The empowerment of women is not a reaction to hit back at the system and reversing the gender discrimination but is a systematic approach to increase meaningful participation in the process of development. For this endeavour, education is the most effective tool. Education will bring women's empowerment by bringing self esteem, self confidence, building a positive image of women by recognizing their contribution to the society, polity and the economy, developing ability to think critically, speeding up decision making and action through collective process, enhancing access to legal literacy, regarding rights, opportunities, encouraging economic independence and most importantly is ensuring equal participation in development process.

This paper highlights the importance of education which is the key to empower women.

Keywords: *women education, University's Role, empowerment*



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Introduction:

Education is a basic imperative for any country aspiring to become a great nation. Women's Education is the foundation stone, since upon her rests, mainly the growth of a child into a man/woman who will become an asset for his/her community and nation.

In today's milieu, education is the stepping stone to power. Whether man or woman, education is the primary pathway to empowerment, through upward economic mobility to higher social status. The former President of India Mr. K.R. Narayanan in his speech once said "the deprivation of education continues to be the worst and most insidious aspect of backwardness and underdevelopment... I believe education is the only panacea for all evils in our society... Education is the only enduring means of empowerment, of instilling self-confidence and pride in oneself of control over one's own destiny".

The university education commission in the year 1948-49, was announced by the Government as its first effort towards educational development of the country. The university education commission opined "there cannot be educated people without educated women. If general education has to be limited to men or women, that opportunity should be given to women, for then it would most surely be passed on to the next generation". (Nisha Singh 2000)

"The family is the last frontier of change in gender relations --- You know (empowerment) has occurred when it crosses the threshold of the home". (Kannabiran 1993)

"Education is one of the most important means of empowering women and of giving them knowledge, skills, and self confidence necessary, to be full partners in the development process". (Lucky 1995).

Swami Vivekananda said educate your women first and leave them to themselves, then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them. "Whatever you think, that you will be, if you think yourselves weak, weak you will be, if you think your selves strong, strong you will be".

Knowledge is the weapon to safeguard and uplift a person. He underlined the idea that "knowledge is power". Once this weapon is used, dark days of women will be over. (Dictum of Thiruvalluvar)

As Plato the great Greek philosopher said "you have to raise yourself by your own efforts". No one will empower you but yourself.

“If you educate a man, you educate one person; if you educate women, you educate an entire family”. -Jawaharlal Nehru

Meaning of Empowerment:

Empowerment of women is a critical issue that is being discussed all over the world. The year 2001 has been declared as the year of women’s empowerment for enhancing the status and sustainable achievement in women’s empowerment.

The term empowerment has the most conspicuous feature containing the word ‘power’ which means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power may be termed as empowerment. (Batlwala, 1995)

Pillai (1995) quoted empowerment as an active, multidimensional process which enables women to release their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.

Power is not a commodity to be trans-located, nor can it be given as alms. Power has to be acquired and once acquired; it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved. Bhasin (1992) explained the women’s empowerment comprehensively and elaborated its meaning in different dimensions as shown as in the following diagram.

Conceptual Framework of Women’s Empowerment:

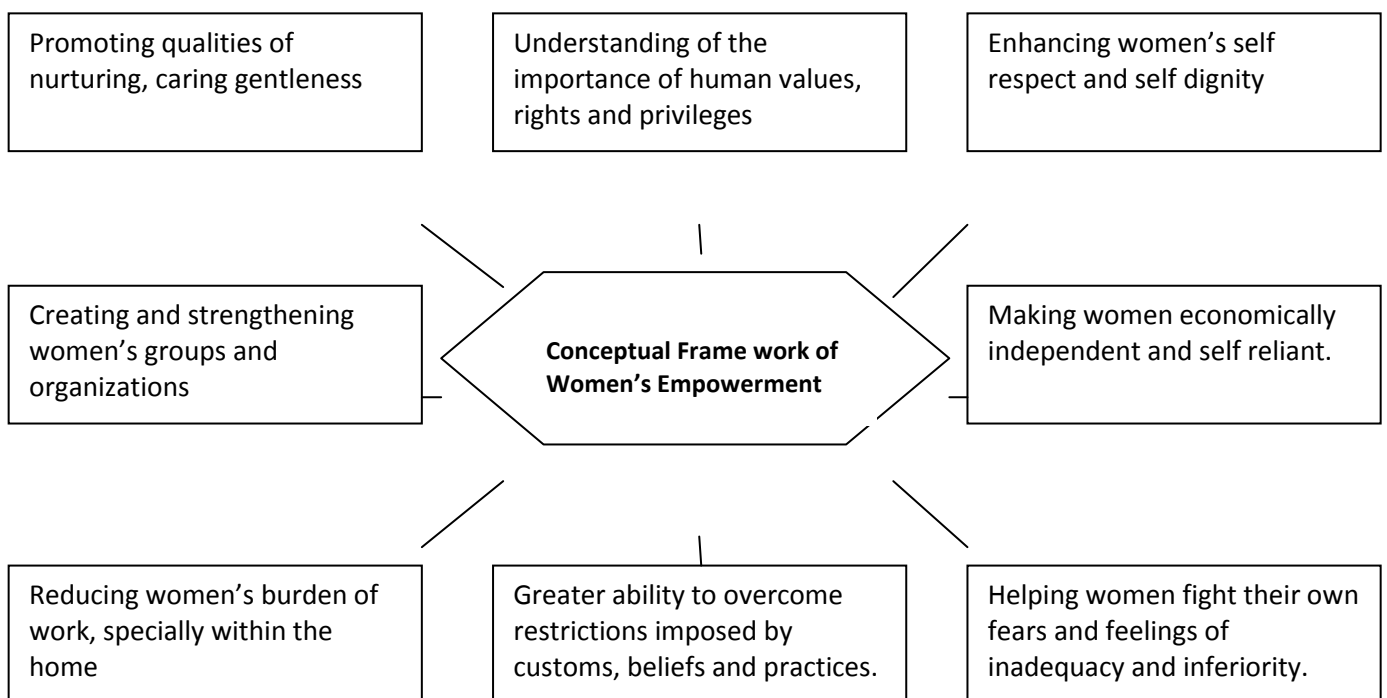


Fig: conceptual frame work of women's empowerment.

Education and empowerment:

Education is a prerequisite for empowering women. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals who are politically active economically independent and is able to make inform choices and intelligent decisions in matters that affect them and their nation. Education inspires people to advance on all fronts. It helps individuals to be more aware of their constitutional and legal rights and of the opportunities available for them to make their lives better. Education also helps people evolve as workers, citizens and human beings. (Gurumurthy I.R)

It is important in this respect to bring women into the mainstream of education and empower them, so that society benefits from their education. Women have been long neglected in their role as beneficiaries of the process of development. Though they constitute a huge chunk of the population, their contribution to development in society is often undermined. However in recent times gender has been increasingly viewed as a principle underlying the distribution of resources in the households as well as in society. Women's education is all the more important because of the special problem that women face today. Gender bias in social, educational and political fields is still manifests in many civilized societies of the world. (Nilima, B.N. 2000). Empowering women contributes to social development.

Significance of women's education:

- Women is the home maker and the child, the father of man, depends upon her to get a sound start in life
- Until women and girls have easy access to basic education, the aim of 'education for all' cannot be met
- Education is a pre-requisite for social upliftment of women
- Educating a women is not merely educating an individual, but producing the means of spreading the results of education through a whole family
- Education empowers women, it enhances women's status in the community and leads to greater input into family and community decision making
- Education provides girls with a basic knowledge of their rights as individuals and citizens

- Women are majority of the world. They lack economic and political power, and are the primary victims of conflict and violence. Education helps them in their upliftment
- Education not only emancipates women from ignorance, ill-treatment and dependence etc., but also empowers them to claim their right to quality of life. Education is the only weapon which can emancipates and empower them

Enforcing women's empowerment through education:

Education is the most significant factor of development and the only tool for realizing empowerment. The program of action 1992 has given the parameters of empowerment of women. The UGC has introduced extension approach in the University system

1. To extend educational opportunities to those who have not been able to attend institutions of higher learning and
2. To render services to different sections of society

Technology education and the empowerment of women:

A core curriculum to develop a positive image of women should be developed. Technical, vocational and professional education should be easily available to girls. A national programme to introduce and strengthen science and mathematics teaching in girl's schools should start. The technical education should be quantitatively as well as qualitatively improved for women, especially in rural areas by establishing ITI's, polytechnics etc. Also, opportunities in non-traditional and emergent technologies should be open to women.

The Role of University in Empowering Women:

The following major activities/role can be taken by the University for empowering women.

1. Mass Motivation and Mobilization:

- Creating Mass Awareness
- Spreading messages through students
- Involvement of peoples participation
- Giving visibility through mass media
- Dissemination through news letters

2. Literacy Learning:

- Preparation of training package for adolescent girls for personality development, development of critical thinking, developing self confidence, developing vocational training etc.
- Preparation of learning materials like folders, posters, booklets and reading material relating to women's empowerment, literacy and population etc.

3. Techno-Pedagogic inputs:

- By linking technology transfer with female literacy
- By developing technology for motivation, mobilization for female literacy
- By preparing data base information

4. Training for staff development:

- Long term and short term training for female literacy personnel, covering anganwadi workers, youth, supervisors and others.
- Preparation of various training manual relating to women's empowerment

5. Curriculum development:

- Developing short term course for district level workers
- Monitoring and evaluation programmes of Master degree and Diploma Degree relating to adult education, population education and women's studies

6. Network Culture:

- Coordinating Committee for Area approved strategy for female literacy
- Networking with other Universities

Approaches to Women's Empowerment:

The major approaches to women's empowerment are envisaged as integrated development, economic and consciousness raising and organizing. Its strategies focus more on organizing women to recognize and challenge both gender and class-based discrimination in all aspects of their lives in both the public and private lives. Some organizations to name are ASTHA, Deccan development Society, Mahila Samakhya Yojana etc.

Process of Women's Empowerment:

Different people express their views regarding empowerment. In my opinion women's

development can be achieved by eradication of illiteracy, poverty, providing educational opportunities for women, providing awareness regarding gender equity, providing employment opportunities for women, providing access to economic resources, providing opportunities for participation in decision making in all matters of life, providing vocational and technical training, removing gender based disparity, providing access to communication, imparting value education, promoting social and economic progress, providing awareness of women rights and laws, developing positive thinking and self confidence.

These are very important concepts and need to be thought of by the society very carefully to empower women. In fact the progress of our nation depends on how best we can achieve in the above areas and empower women.

Conclusion:

Literacy opens the doors of education. Governments approach kept on being modified; beginning with the 'welfare approach' in the 1950's there was a shift to 'Development approach' in the 1970's and an 'Empowerment approach' in the 1990's.

However, whatever the approach, women's education has not reached those heights, which were considered essential, not only for their own development, but also as contributors towards National development as a whole.

Education has become the key solution to empowerment of women. Today we can happily say that every father wants to educate his daughter to empower her.

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