



## Role of Higher Education in Women Empowerment

Dr. Monika Panchani  
Associate Professor  
Zoology.G.D.C. Bassa.  
[monaharipanchani@gmail.com](mailto:monaharipanchani@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Higher Education refers the education at the degree level and above. It also includes Professional Schools in the field of Medicine, Engineering, Business, Law, Music and Art and other institutions like Teachers Training School, Pure Science and Technological Institutions. **Literacy** alone cannot help women in self dependence but higher education helps women to become more capable. It is only higher education that makes them aware of their rights and duties and use their rights as per need. **Higher Education** is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence. It brings a reduction in **inequalities** and helps in improving their status within the family. Higher educational achievements of women can have **ripple effects** within the family and across generations. But there are many **hindrances** also in the path of women empowerment and in higher education. Some of them are as -lack of education, financial constraints, family responsibility and social status etc. Presently women are participating not only in **traditional courses** but also in various areas of men's territory. In future it is necessary to widen the **scope** and opening up new fields catering women's needs. Universities and colleges have to offer add-on courses together with degree courses. Presently the target of Higher Education is to provide women's access to vocational, technical and professional education. There are many **policies** and programmes for the betterment of women. For this purpose there is **need for identification** of skills and occupations suitable for women. Moreover there should be proper implementations of Govt. policies and different programmes of government of India regarding women empowerment and higher education. In this paper an attempt has been to analyse the relevance of higher education in empowering the women.

**Keywords:** *Higher Education, Empowerment, Rights, Constraints and Implementation*

### Introduction

Education is the right of all the citizens of a Nation. Education primary, secondary or higher must be provided to all categories of citizens by breaking down constraints and barriers. Literacy is the basic building block of education. It is a basic component of social cohesion and National identity. According to the Census report 2011, literacy growth was 9.2% but there was a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India. In 2011, the literacy rate recorded was 82.14%

for men and 65.46% for women. **Literacy** alone cannot help women in self dependence but higher education helps women to become more capable. It is only higher education that makes them aware of their rights and duties and use their rights as per need.

*“The higher education is that which does not merely give us information, but makes life in harmony with all existence”* (Ravindranath Tagore).

Higher education means the education beyond the level of secondary education. Higher Education refers the education at the degree level and above. It also includes Professional Schools in the field of Medicine, Engineering, Business, Law, Music and Art and other institutions like Teachers Training School, Pure Science and Technological Institutions. The UNESCO’s World Conference on Higher Education (1998) and the World Education Forum (2000) made a commitment to the attainment of many goals for women’s education and empowerment. Empowerment of women strongly is associated with level of education i.e. higher the level of education greater the empowerment of women ( Nand kumar ,2014).

Empowerment for woman means she becomes independent and able to take decisions about every aspect of life herself and ensuring equal participation in developmental processes. In this way women develop ability for critical thinking and enhancing self-esteem and self confidence in themselves.

*“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”.* (PT. Jawahar Lal Nehru).

### **Objective**

The main objectives of this research paper are:-

1. To know the relevance of higher education in women’s life.
2. To analyse the need of women empowerment.
3. To identify the obstacles or hindrances in the path of women empowerment.
4. To evaluate the future prospective of higher education and their impact on women empowerment.

### **Methodology**

This research paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. Pub med research was carried on net on various related topics, such as Role of education, Higher education and women, Empowerment of women etc.

### **Discussions**

#### **1. Higher Education in India Present Scenario**

In India Higher Education had its roots in early time as well. In the 5th century BC Taxila was the earliest recorded centre of higher education in India. The Nalanda University was the oldest University system of education in the World. At the time of British Raj in India, the western education was introduced into Indian society. In 1854 the east India Company acknowledged women education and employment. But in the pre-independence era there was very limited access to Higher Education. Traditional view supports women education to be better wives and mother, modern attitude refer to equality and development. Men and women are just like the two wheels of a chariot, therefore it must be necessary to provide equal opportunities to both men and women.

From the year 1883 till, the independence both the number of colleges and the enrollment of students in India were found to be very low. In 1948-49 the University Education Commission commented that colleges should be established that would serve both men and women simultaneously for Higher Education. In 1958, the government of India appointed a national

committee for the women education. Then in 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE), and its Programme of Action (POA) gave high priority to gender equality and to work for women's empowerment. At present there is revolutionary change in higher education system and women participation. The target of Higher Education is to provide women's access to vocational, technical, professional education and emergent technologies. Identification of skills and occupations suitable for women should be based on the employment potential of women.

Education of girls is vital not only on grounds of social justice but also because it brings social transformation. We have to promote gender equality in education for development. By educating a woman you educate the whole family.

In our country in rural areas now women get secondary education but not higher education. Percentage of women higher education is less than men and there are few women at higher position in corporate level.

Now the focus of the Government is more on women education. At present India has **46** consolidated central universities as on 20/05/2015. 331 state universities, **129** deemed universities, **223** Private universities. Other institute **33,000** colleges as government degree colleges and private degree colleges including **1800** exclusive women colleges. Large number of student getting higher education through open universities too.

Government of India has been taken various steps and plans especially for women in every movement. There are many **policies** and programmes for the betterment of women.

There are several projects and Government scheme as-:

- National Literacy Mission, aimed to attaining a literacy rate of 41% by 2035.
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched in 2001 to ensure that all children in the 6-14 year age group attend school.
- Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (R.U.S.A) aimed to providing funds to eligible state higher educational institutions. It provides opportunities of higher education to women. National mission for the empowerment of women (NMEW) launched by the Indian government. It has increased the ratio of female sex and female literacy both.
- UGC has introduced the Swami Vivekananda Scholarship for Single Girl Child for research in Social Sciences.
- PRAGATI - Scholarships for Girl Child for Technical education aims at providing encouragement and support to girl child to pursue technical education.

## **2. Women Empowerment and Need of Higher Education**

Women in the Vedic age got most honored positions in the society. They had the right to education and were free to remain unmarried and devote their whole life to the pursuit of knowledge and self realization (Seth, 2001). But during the course of civilization women lost her prominence and accepted secondary status to men. Though, women constitute about 48% of total population, they lost their status due to socio-cultural discrimination. At present women are playing many role in the society in decision making and developmental processes but still their participation is less. Since women can play a very important role in the development of society and country therefore identification of skills and occupations suitable for women are required. For woman empowerment means able to take decisions, can fight for her rights and become self dependent. An empowered woman has been able to develop ability for critical thinking, decision-making and action through collective processes; Ensuring equal participation in developmental processes; Enhancing self-esteem and self confidence. According to Sen and Batliwala (2000) empowerment leads to a growing intrinsic capability greater self confidence,

and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barrier. Higher Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence. It brings a reduction in inequalities and helps in improving their status within the family. Higher educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. The year 2001 was celebrated as women's empowerment year, which recognized women as agents of socio-economic change and development in the country. Indian Government continues to encourage higher education for women through programmes like, Indira Gandhi scholarship for single girl child for pursuing higher and in order to support higher education through scholarships and by constructing women hostels and by capacity building for women managers in higher education. Women Leader Women appointed as Chairpersons, Board of Governors of apex technical education institutes and in National Institutes of Technology (Nits). For the first time in the history of IITs, two women scientist nominated on the IIT council ( Packianathan et al.,2016).

The Indian National Policy on Education (NPE) is a landmark in empowering the women through education. For better outcomes Higher Education needs to take responsibility for:

- Cultivation of positive self-image and self-confidence, Developing capacity for critical thinking and decision-making.
- Providing Continuing Education and Correspondence Centers for organizing vocational and literary skills, Efficiency in Agricultural and Home Science Colleges.
- Industrial Training Institutes with diverse courses, keeping in view the job potential, facilities for vocational counseling.
- Imparting information about credit, banking, entrepreneurial development and access to women's technical education.
- Providing Women's Studies Research centers and organize seminars and workshops to discuss women-related issues and
- Disseminate information and encourage interaction with students and the general public through the media. Providing classes on legal literacy, programmes for women's socio-economic development via media, adult education and information and training support.
- A more relevant and responsive curriculum catering to the cultural and occupational needs of women.

### 3. Challenges

Over the years, many challenges have been faced by Higher Education such as: How to introduce more disciplines and diversity, satisfy the social demands for new options and remove gender barriers and role stereotyping

There are many **hindrances** also in the path of women empowerment and in higher education. Some of them are as:

Lack of education, financial constraints, family responsibility and social status etc. Inadequate school facilities serve as a deterrent for the girl child's participation in formal schooling reported by the International Programs Centre for the U.S. Department of Commerce (Velkoff, 1998).

Gender discrimination has been a major obstacle in granting equal opportunity for women in Higher Education. Negative cultural and societal attitudes, different standards- roles for boys and girls, competing demands on the girls time. Studies conducted by the National Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974), reveal that women were restricted to a few limited types of occupation because of prevailing social attitudes regarding their aptitude, resistance of

employers, denial of training opportunities in higher skills and their ignorance regarding the opportunities.

Economic reasons like -lack of resources, distance from school, lack of facilities in schools for girls, lack of female teachers, lack of security both in and outside the school, curriculum not relevant and flexible, gender stereotyping in curriculum, gender unfriendly classroom environment, early marriage and child bearing, absence of women role models, fear of deterioration of social structure. A BBC news report by Kaushik Basu (2004) noted that a study of 188 government-run primary schools found that 59% of the schools had no drinking water and 89% had no toilets.

#### 4. Future Prospective

Presently women are participating not only in **traditional courses** but also in various areas of men's territory. But lack of educational and training facilities for studying science and the type of employment available for women holds them back. Thus one of the thrust areas of Higher Education is to include technology studies to help women's development in research and employment.

In future it is necessary to widen the **scope** and opening up new fields catering women's needs. Universities and colleges have to offer add-on courses together with degree courses. The target of Higher Education is to provide women's access to vocational, technical and professional education. There are many **policies** and programmes for the betterment of women. In the emerging global environment, women are required to develop a more skilled approach to cope with the rapid multiple changing environments.

In India, career guidance and counseling courses in women's colleges are needed to social and market demands. Courses such as Computer Science, Electronics, Information Technology, Home Science, Law and Governance, Molecular Medicine should be included in the curriculum. Courses in Fashion Designing, Clinical Nutrients and Dietetics, Nursing and Business Administration, Personality development and spoken English classes, commercial and secretarial practice, Media careers, Public Relations, Advertising, Garment Technology, Hotel and Catering studies can be offered as certified courses.

We have to focus on some unconventional course like event management, puppetry workshops, television script writing, MBA management degree and aviation law for women students. The Life Insurance Corporation of India already conducting crash course to train those women who need financial assistance for healthy survival.

#### Universities are the Empowering Agents of Higher Education

To be effective agents of empowerment through Higher Education, universities need to give attention to:

- Mass motivation, awareness programmes and mobilization must be organized.
- Dissemination of information through newsletters and other social agencies.
- Literacy Promotion campaign, trainings and development of learning materials.
- Preparation maintenance of data based information regarding girls education and use of technology.
- Strong Network Culture, monitor activities related to women's studies and women's movements and recommend better implementation.
- Women and Research: The University Grants Committee has agreed to provide part-time research associate ships to 100 girls every year

## Conclusion

Higher education brings a reduction in **inequalities** and helps in improving their status within the family. Higher educational achievements of women can have **ripple effects** within the family and across generations. Empowerment of women strongly is associated with level of education i.e. higher the level of education greater the empowerment of women. Presently women are participating not only in **traditional courses** but also in various areas of men's territory. But lack of educational and training facilities and the type of employment available for women holds them back. So Higher Education should include technology studies to help women's development in research and employment. In future it is necessary to widen the **scope** and opening up new fields catering women's needs. Universities and colleges have to offer add-on courses together with degree courses. For this purpose there **is need for identification** of skills and occupations suitable for women. Moreover there should be proper implementations of Govt. policies and different programmes of government of India regarding women empowerment and higher education.

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