

## EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES AND INITIATIVES

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### **Abstract**

*Women are an inseparable part of our social system. So it becomes very important to empower them. Education is a tool that can help to break the gender discrimination and can bring drastic change for women in developing countries. Women's empowerment and economical involvement are necessary for strengthening their influence in society. Sustainable development is not possible without the full involvement of women. Women empowerment is a battle that cannot progress without the cooperation of the society as a whole as they represent almost half of the world population. A woman today expects herself to be treated as an individual, a living human being who has some dignity and status as her male counterparts. Thus empowering women through education and skill development becomes the most important role of women's education to foster gender parity and to uplift the status of women in the society.*

### **Keywords**

*Education, Skill Development, Empowerment, Human Rights, Intellectual Property Rights, Constitution, Initiatives*

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## **Introduction**

Nari Shakti, an epitome of Shakti, is able to accomplish that which man cannot. She has the power to create, nurture and transform. Today, the facet of women's life is transforming as she has realized her worth in each and every field and demands gender equality and justice. A healthy, educated and skilled woman can be an empowered woman. Empowerment of women refers to economic independence through information, knowledge and necessary skills. Empowerment actually is a process by which spiritual, political, social, educational, gender and economic strengths of women communities can be attained. Education should help women to develop an analytical and skilled mind with a scientific approach to understand the micro and macro realities around them and the macro policies between local and global levels. The role of education in enhancing women's empowerment can only be realized with strong efforts of equality of opportunities.

Holistic and critical empowerment is the need of the hour. The world today needs more feminine leadership because women face one of the most challenging tasks of the transformation.

## **Women Education**

Women's education is an essential need to change their status in the society and to empower them intellectually. Educated women can play a very important role in the society for their socio-economic, political and legal development which can help them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their lifestyle. Education helps in removing inequalities and biased approaches. As compared to girl enrolment in school education women's literacy is low to that of the literacy rate of men. In higher education enrolment of women is 38.5 million. India's Gross Enrolment Ratio till 2021-22 is 29%. U.P. has shown the highest student enrolment followed by Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

Women's education virtually engages caging the mind, enhancing the self-esteem and self-confidence building, a sense of positive self-worth accessing information and tools of knowledge. Education for women is the best way to improve the health, nutrition and economic status of the household that constitute a micro-unit of the nation's economy. Educated women positively contribute towards the development and prosperity of the nation as she is now aware of their rights and know-how to fight social evils like domestic violence, dowry, low wages, acid-attack, etc.

## **Skill Development of Women**

In order to promote skilling of women, it is necessary to deal with three factors that inhibit their skilling – the lack of publicly provided child care that prevents

women from remaining in the labor force during childbearing years; the extra expense that particular employers incur when they employ women; and lack of safety measures for women traveling in public spaces, especially during the night.

The issue of skill development for women is necessary to pay attention to the factors that inhibit the skill development of women. For an increase in the number of skilled women in the economic life of the country itself. In order to justify the cost of acquiring training, it is necessary to be able to secure a job that pays a premium over an unskilled job. In the IT sector or the other sectors like legal and medical professions, women work as professionals and their earnings are sufficient to be able to take care of the expenses of child care. In manufacturing, on the other hand, the earnings of women workers are low to afford child care as very few factories provide crèches. The lack of factory-provided child care is then a supply-side factor that inhibits women from seeking careers as skilled workers in manufacturing. On the other hand, the employer prefers to employ a man, where such maternity and child care benefits do not have to be paid. The third factor that inhibits the employment of women as skilled workers are the difficulty in traveling in public places during night shifts. To overcome this constraint there should be a fleet of cars and minibusses to transport their women employees to and from work.

### **Challenges**

There are several challenges like issues of Women's Rights in India, Health and Safety, Professional Inequality, Mortality Inequality, Household Inequality, Empowerment of Women in India's Poverty, etc. The Government programs for women's development began in 1954 in India but the actual participation began only in 1974.

The most important challenge for a woman is unawareness of her rights. It is a historical fact that women have been denied of equal rights for centuries. Human Rights represent the rights of all human beings of the men and women. The philosophy of human rights came into existence during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the issues of gender equality and equal rights for women assumed importance after the 1970s. These rights are their birthrights conferred upon them by God or nature. These rights are equally accessible by all the genders. There should be no discrimination in the exercise of these rights.

The second most important challenge for empowering women is health. Today girls and women's health is in transition phase. Population, aging and transformation in the social determinants of health have increased the coexistence of disease burdens related to reproductive health, nutrition and infections and the emerging epidemic of chronic and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in women.

Simultaneously worldwide priorities in women's health have themselves been changing from a narrow focus on the maternal and child health to the broader framework of sexual and reproductive health and to the encompassing concept of women's health which is founded on a life-course approach. Efforts to undertake to screen for under-nutrition, over-nutrition, anemia and non-communicable diseases in women are very important to prevent them from disease and to make them healthy and well-nourished. Only then they will be able to contribute to the economic growth of the country as an agent of national development.

The next important challenge for women's empowerment is safety. Women need a safe and enabling environment that encourages their empowerment. They have the right to live a fearless life so that they can explore and perform their best without any unwanted restraints. Along with this women need to push for affirmative policies which help to realize their potential through the right opportunities.

To empower women another challenge is her security through intellectual property rights. Intellectual Property Rights are a set of exclusive rights protected by law that are accorded to creators or persons over their creations for a certain time period e.g. trademarks, copyright, patents, industrial design rights, etc. Women still use intellectual property rights at a much lower rate than men. The percentage of women who patent is even lower than the percentage of women in science. There is number of factors that play a very important role in this imbalance between men and women in intellectual property rights.

As the United Nations celebrated International Women's Day on 8 March, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), a UN entity specializing in the field of IP, had an ongoing initiative to encourage women's participation in the WIPO, social media platform on technology and innovation. It is promoting gender equality and women empowerment within its mandate through its Women & IP initiative.

Indian Government has started Project KIRAN – Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement Through Nurturing along with the women scientist scheme (WOS-C), the Government of India, Department of Science & Technology (DST) for providing opportunities to women scientists who desire to return to mainstream science and work in the area of intellectual property rights, etc.

It is a verified fact that the competence of women is not given due recognition. Seniors tend to overindulge without valuing their views. Their involvement in any major decision-making is minimal. They have to work twice as hard as men to prove their worth. Additionally, a woman is always under scrutiny for even minor slip-ups. Either they get routine desk work or are asked to perform duties related to social minutiae.

Control over their decisions affecting the women directly is a must for their empowerment. Through empowerment, they can control their resources such as knowledge, information and finances. This can lead them to become stakeholders among the human capital and their presence in the society will be accepted.

Women are under-represented in science, mathematics and engineering fields and are under-utilized pool of talent and resources as they comprise nearly half of the population of any society and could contribute towards the social and economic development of the nation through participation in science and technology programs. The study done in INSA revealed dissatisfaction of most respondents regarding professional growth and career advancement due to lack of time, household responsibilities and lack of encouragement from the organizations. The study suggested that some remedial means should be opted to increase the participation of females in policymaking.

Some barriers which prevent women's participation in decision making are limited access to higher education, discriminatory appointment and promotion practices, dual stress of family and professional roles, family attitudes, career interruptions, alienation from the male culture and continued resistance to management / higher positions, inadequate policies and legislation to ensure the participation of women.

To empower the women they should be given equal representation, their unique perceptions and strength should be properly utilized, they should be allowed to participate in policy-making and decision-making, women-friendly policies should be formulated, selection committees should be sensitized for non-sexist interviewing and there should be a state level and national level directory of qualified women. According to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, gender discrimination can be minimized if due importance is given to the physiological, social safety, self-esteem and self-actualization of women.

Women can empower themselves by developing effective networks of information and influence, acquiring personal skills needed to be effective, finding ways to make a difference, being prepared to challenge the accepted wisdom, maintaining a healthy balance between work and personal life, having a desire to excel, appreciating without being critical, and enjoying the job in which they are in and keep on learning.

### **Constitution**

The constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures to empower women. Various legislations have been enacted and enshrined Acts and Articles favoring women empowerment and protection are:

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- ✓ Right to Equality
- ✓ Right against Exploitation
- ✓ Cultural and Educational Rights
- ✓ The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- ✓ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- ✓ Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (28 of 1961) – (Amended in 1986)
- ✓ Sati Prevention Act, 1987 (3 of 1988)
- ✓ The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013
- ✓ The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013
- ✓ The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1993 ensure the reservation of 1/3 of seats for women in all elected offices of local bodies in rural and urban areas.

#### **Government Initiatives**

To achieve the Health-related goal various policies and schemes proposed by the Indian Government are:

- ❖ Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) for early childhood care
- ❖ Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK)
- ❖ Janani Suraksha Yojna
- ❖ Mother and Child Protection Card – To monitor service delivery for mothers and children
- ❖ Mother and Child Tracking System
- ❖ Maternal Death Reviews (MDR) to improve the quality of obstetric care
- ❖ National Health Policy 2015 to meet the specific needs of reproductive and child health
- ❖ The Ayushman Bharat Programme
- ❖ National Nutrition Mission
- ❖ Ujjwala Yojna

To achieve the Education related goal various policies and schemes proposed by the Indian Government are:

- Right To Education (RTE) Act 2009, enacted in April 2010 to make free and compulsory elementary education a right for all children
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to universalize access to education at primary and upper primary levels
- Padhe Bharat, Badhe Bharat (Subprogram of SSA) to ensure learning levels of class 1&2 students
- Vidyanjali (Sub-program of SSA) to bring together people willing to volunteer their services at schools that really need them

➤ Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) was implemented in 2009 onwards to enhance access to secondary education for all children in the age group of 14-18 years. It increased the female literacy rate from 65.38 to 74.04 % during 2001

➤ Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 2013 to provide strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.

➤ UDAAN is a project launched by CBSE under the guidance of MHRD to address the low enrolment of girl students in prestigious engineering institutions and the teaching gap between school education & engineering entrance examination

➤ Pradhan Mantri Vidya Lakshmi Karyakram provides loans for the students seeking higher education

➤ Vidya Lakshmi is the first portal providing a single window for students to access information and to make an application for educational loans prided by banks and also government scholarships

To achieve the Safety and Security related goal various legislative measures by the Indian Government are:

✓ Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013 to make punishment more stringent for offenses like rape, sexual assault and harassment

✓ The Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 to provide a safe and secure environment for women

✓ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 to protect the rights of women who are victims of violence of any kind within the family

✓ The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2009 to prohibit child marriages

✓ The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 to protects children from offenses of sexual assault

✓ The Juvenile Justice (care and protection of children) Act, 2015

✓ The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill 2016 has increased the maternity leave for working women from 12 to 26 weeks to promote female workforce participation in India

✓ Women Helpline to provide 24 hours emergency and non-emergency response, investigative units for crime against women (IUCAW)

✓ Beti Bachao Beti Padhao is an initiative to secure a bright future and welfare of the girl child in India due to the declining girl-child sex ratio and issues of disempowerment of women

To achieve the Financial Security related goal various policies and schemes proposed by the Indian Government are:

- ❖ Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) are providing livelihood security to thousands of rural women i.e. empowering them with economic security
- ❖ Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) works exclusively for poor women by providing funds and facilitating market linkages.
- ❖ Mahila E-Haat was launched as a start-up initiative by RMK for meeting the aspirations and needs of women entrepreneurs
- ❖ Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna for opening the first bank account and overcoming poverty and debt. According to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Survey of the Gates Foundation, 47% of women have Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna Bank Account
- ❖ Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna (PMKVY) was launched to promote the skills and employability of women
- ❖ Sukanya Samriddhi Yojna – small saving scheme to secure the financial future of the girl child
- ❖ Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojna
- ❖ Stand Up India
- ❖ Start Up India
- ❖ Self Help Groups (SHGs) under the National Rural Livelihood Mission help women to become financially secure and independent.

No doubt now Government is taking great initiatives to various issues related to women like making cyber cafes safe places for women, ensuring the rights of women adopting artificial reproductive techniques, recognizing the need of single women, reviewing personal and customary laws in accordance with constitutional procedures, creating a positive environment for women to participate in various spheres of life. The strategy to empower women has been proposed in the new National Policy for Women. Today the challenge is to empower women in the construction of new India and it can be achieved only when the innate strength, knowledge and experience of 48% of the Indian population is engaged in gender empowerment goal. The majority of women are now in a position to fight for their rightful place in the society. This newly earned confidence will build up a new era for women's multi-faceted development. When men will understand the importance of women's empowerment only then it will bring a great change in their families and nation.

### **Conclusion**

Today woman is a worker, a provider, a caretaker, an educator, a networker, a creator, a preserver and a forger of bonds in herself. More resources, motivation and consciousness-raising for education and employment of women is the need of the hour along with up-skilling, re-skilling and multi-skilling in schools, colleges and training institutes to rejuvenate them for their better future.



Our economy is gradually being diverted from agricultural to manufacturing and service-based economy which is largely dependent on a skilled workforce. Therefore a lot needs to be done by Government and NGOs for providing training for skill upgradation for women. Survival for the fittest is going to be the only rule of the future. When women will accept the change dynamically and will continuously keep on updating their skills, only then they will remain in the game. Undoubtedly women's emancipation should adopt a strategy of "Think globally, act locally". No civil society can tolerate any kind of injustice towards women's power in the country. The economic growth of the country will be incomplete without a social transformation.

The missions – "Skill India" and "Make in India" can be a grand success and can serve their main purpose only when all the stakeholders are concerned to cooperate and coordinate with each other in a planned way and of course women are an integral part of this process.

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