

IMPACT OF EDUCATION IN THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA**Dr. N. Raja Gopal Reddy**

Lecturer, Department of English, Government College for Men (A), Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh

Dr. C. Satish Reddy

Lecturer, Department of English, Government College for Men (A), Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh

Dr. K. Hanumanth Reddy

Lecturer, Department of English, Govt Degree College, Pathikonda, Andhra Pradesh

Dr. D. Veera Nagendra Kumar

Lecturer, Department of Zoology, Government College for Men (A) Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh

Abstract

India has emerged as a leading nation in women's education. This has been a major concern for both the government and civil society, as educated women can contribute significantly to the country's development. Enhancing women's education is crucial to improving their status in society. Educated women have the potential to play a vital role in socio-economic development. Education also serves as a tool to eradicate inequalities and disparities, allowing women to regain their rightful place within and outside their families. It is the key to empowering women and promoting their prosperity, development, and welfare. Through education, women gain strength, which stems from the process of empowerment. Education holds a significant role in addressing gender inequality and vulnerabilities faced by women in Indian society. This paper aims to provide an overview of the current state of women's education in India.

Keywords: Women education, policies, opportunities.

Introduction

Women play a crucial role in the progress of families, societies, and countries. In order to ensure the success of democracy, it is necessary to provide education to both men and women. Educated women are the true source of happiness within families. Education is a milestone for women empowerment as it enables them to face challenges, break traditional roles, and change their lifestyles (Bhat, 2015). However, the female literacy rate in India is lower than that of males. Fewer girls are enrolled in schools, and many drop out. "Educate a girl, empower a nation." Women are vital for the development of a nation, and in this century, economic prosperity is not solely dependent on men but also on women. The government has focused on improving women's education and increasing employment opportunities to enhance their role in society. Equality, gender literacy, and women empowerment need further improvement across India. The Indian government has launched several programs and schemes aimed at women's development. These initiatives have made observable changes in the socio-economic conditions of women. Since India gained independence, the participation of women nationalists has been widely recognized. The Indian constitution grants women equal rights, considering them legal citizens with the same freedom and opportunities as men. Under the 86th amendment, free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 to 14 is a fundamental right of Indian citizens. Despite these efforts, obstacles to women's education still exist. Therefore, this study focuses on analysing women's education in India. Education plays a crucial role in the overall development of the country by improving the quality of life at home and beyond (Suguna, 2011). The Indian education system

comprises formal and non-formal structures. Various educational programs, including online and distance education, have been implemented to promote women's education. The main objective is to ensure education for every girl child. The low level of literacy among women not only negatively impacts their lives but also affects their families and the country's economic development. Thus, it is essential to elevate the level of education among women. In 2014-2015, there were an estimated 33.3 million Indian students enrolled in higher education courses, with 17.9 million boys and 15.4 million girls, according to the Ministry of Human Resource Development's All India Survey on Higher Education Report for 2015.

Factors that hinder women Education.

Even after 71 years of independence, women empowerment continues to be a major challenge in India. Several factors hinder women empowerment, including lack of education among parents, gender inequality, negative parental attitudes towards educating daughters, lack of awareness about government schemes and programs, early marriages, and financial issues.

One of the main factors is the lack of parent education, which results in a lack of concern for girls' education. This forces women to depend on men or others for support. Gender inequality, deeply rooted in India's patriarchal system, also contributes to the hindrance of women empowerment. The education of girls is often viewed as a bad investment because they are expected to get married and leave their paternal homes.

Negative parental attitudes towards educating daughters also pose a significant challenge in promoting girl's education in India. Lack of awareness about government initiatives aimed at empowering women further prevents women from taking advantage of these schemes, policies, and programs. This lack of awareness also affects the effective implementation of government schemes.

Early marriage is another hindrance to women empowerment in India. When girls are forced into early marriages, they are often pulled out of school at a critical age in their development. This transition from primary to secondary education is crucial for girls to acquire the necessary life skills to break the cycle of poverty. However, many girls leave school precisely at this time due to early marriages.

Financial problems also contribute to the challenge of women empowerment in India. With more than half of the population living below the poverty line, families struggle to equally allocate funds for their children's education. As a result, they often prioritize sending boys to school over girls.

Overall, these various factors continue to hinder women empowerment in India, even after 71 years of independence. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from both the government and society to promote gender equality, educate parents, raise awareness, discourage early marriages, and ensure equal access to education for girls.

Role of education in enhancing empowerment

Lack of education prevents women from raising their voices against injustice such as domestic violence, dowry system, and molestation. According to NFHS 4, 31.1% of ever-married women have experienced spousal violence, and 3.9% have experienced violence during pregnancy. Uneducated women often remain silent due to fear and lack of awareness about laws and policies designed to protect women. However, educated women are aware of their rights and know how to handle such situations. Education empowers women to fight for their rights.

Financial independence is crucial for women, as it allows them to earn for themselves, support their families, and contribute to the nation's GDP. Educated women do not have to depend on others for their financial needs, which enables them to make decisions for themselves and their families.

Education also plays a significant role in promoting health and hygiene. Educated women are knowledgeable about health and hygiene practices, allowing them to take better care of themselves, their

families, and their children. Children born to mothers with no schooling have a 32% higher chance of dying in the neonatal period and a 52% higher chance in the post-neonatal period compared to children born to literate mothers. The infant mortality rate is also lower among children born to literate mothers (less than the national average of 57) and higher (68.5) among illiterate mothers (Chowdary, 2015).

Suggestion for Improving Status of Women Education

1. To address awareness problems regarding women's education, it is essential for the government, schools, NGOs, and other organizations to actively organize campaigns and programs highlighting the importance of girls' education. They should also promote government schemes, policies, and programs that focus on empowering women through education.
2. Financial support should be provided to ensure that girls have equal access to education. This can be achieved through offering scholarships, providing free textbooks and uniforms, and reducing admission fees for girls, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
3. In order to make education more accessible for women in remote and underprivileged areas, the government should establish Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems. This will enable women to easily pursue education from their own communities.
4. Making vocational education available at a lower cost is crucial for women to acquire practical skills that align with their interests. By offering affordable vocational training programs, women will be able to become self-sufficient and contribute to their families and communities.
5. Changing the attitudes of parents is paramount. Parents need to recognize that investing in girls' education is equally beneficial as investing in boys' education. Gender sensitization programs and media can play a significant role in shifting societal perceptions and emphasizing the importance of educating girls.

Government Schemes, Policies and Constitutional Law for women Education

India has made significant strides in improving the status and education of women both before and after its independence. A groundbreaking step towards promoting education, particularly for females, was taken with the implementation of the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act in **2002**. This act recognized elementary education as a fundamental right for children aged 6 to **14**. The government pledged to provide free and compulsory education for this age group, which is now popularly known as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Since its inception, the SSA has introduced numerous schemes aimed at fostering inclusive and exclusive growth in the Indian education system, with a particular emphasis on promoting female education (Sahoo, 2016).

The major schemes are the following:

The Mahila Samakhya Programme, launched in 1988, aimed to empower women from rural areas, particularly those from socially and economically marginalized groups. It was established as a response to the New Education Policy of **1968**. When the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was formed, it established a committee to assess the effectiveness of the programme and suggest improvements.

The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) Scheme was initiated in July 2004 to provide primary education to girls. It mainly targeted underprivileged rural areas where female literacy rates were extremely low. These schools introduced a 100% reservation system, with 75% of seats allocated to backward classes and 25% to Below-Poverty-Line females.

The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) was launched in July 2003 as an incentive to reach out to girls who were not being covered by other schemes under the SSA. It specifically targeted the "hardest to reach" girls. NPEGEL has been implemented in 24 states across India and has established "model schools" to offer improved opportunities for girls. A significant achievement of this program was witnessed in 2013 when two girls, Sibbala Leena Madhuri and Aditi

Laddha, secured top-10 ranks in the entrance examination for the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). Sibbala Leena Madhuri ranked eighth, and Aditi Laddha ranked sixth.

Policies:

1. The National Council for Women's Education was established in 1958 with the aim of improving and expanding women's access to education.
2. In 1962, the Hansa Mehta Committee was set up by the government to address the issues and challenges faced by women in education. Subsequently, in 1963, the Bhaktavalsam Committee was also formed to further examine and resolve these problems.
3. In 1956, a committee on education released a report recommending actions to reduce the gap in literacy rates between men and women.
4. The 7th Five-Year Plan implemented an integrated approach that encompassed education, employment, and nutrition for women, as well as the development of children.

In terms of constitutional laws:

Article 14 of the Constitution ensures equality before the law for women. –

Article 15 prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth.

Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity for women.

At the conclusion, it can be strongly affirmed that women's education is equally crucial as men's for the development of a nation. However, despite progress in India, women's education still faces significant challenges. Although the literacy rate among women has increased since gaining independence, approximately half of the female population remains illiterate. This unfortunate reality greatly hampers the progress of the nation as a whole. Despite the government's numerous initiatives, they have often failed due to the ignorance of parents and society at large. In order to improve the status of women's education, a widespread dissemination of positive attitudes and awareness is desperately needed. Only then can we hope to witness a transformation in the status of women within society.

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