ABSTRACT

Women are vulnerable section of the society and several macro indicators related to education, employment, economic participation and participation in domestic decision making etc. point towards an adverse status of women. Empowerment and education of women has been a priority in successive plans and several public expenditure programmes are directed to this objective. However, outcomes of administrative intents are not often realize.

In our social fabric, women are neglected a lot. But it cannot be denied that they have a defined and definite role to play in the society in general and family in particular. After independence, our elected governments have devoted enough attention to the problems of women, resulting into numerous reforming steps and framing of laws. But, the practical output has not been satisfactory, at all (Majumdar Maya, 2004). The casualty has been the veracity of her existence. At one juncture she was put on a very elevated pedestal and at another juncture she was thrown into the pits of filth and guilt. It is only recently that society has started realizing that education is the fundamental requirement for human development and for human betterment, it is essential to understand about the growth of women and girl child.

The first aspect to empower women is to make them literate and educated. Education is the key to progress and unless Indian women are educated, they will not be able to enjoy their freedom and liberties. The education of women has been sadly ignored in the past. Historically, in the Indian situation the rearing of girl child and her education has always been taken with indifference. The only exception may be the Vedic period. Approximately around five hundred B.C. the educational and social status of women began to decline. With the Islamic invasion of Babar and Mughal Empire, women’s freedom and rights were deteriorated. When Christian missionaries entered India, the efforts for girls’ education were initiated. After independence the role of women had been changed. They began to enjoy economic independence and more dignity and equality than before.

The women accepted their subordinate status for centuries. It is only in the later half of the 20th century that the Indian women started revolting against
stipulations that the women are inferior to men. Women are seeking for employment, the old conservative norms and traditions are changing in the enlightened households. In many families, this changing phenomenon is creating conflict, particularly in those families where women's role is confined to being housewives.

At present there are women with different degrees of achievement as highly qualified, professionally well settled dynamic, pushy and independent. In terms of employment as well as promotion in work and profession women often face difficulties. Education as well as awareness change in women’s self-perception makes them able to take their own decisions on various issues regarding health, education and employment.

Women education leads to empowerment. Since woman’s empowerment is a global issue, UNO has also expressed concern in this matter. Illiteracy adversely affects the personality of a woman by making her timid, unconfident, insecure, dependent and helpless identity. Hence, right to education as well as economic independence are some of the keys to women’s emancipation and empowerment, eradication of gender based discrimination and an assurance of all other human rights on equal footing, which is a continuous process for realizing the standards of parity, liberation and freedom. Thus it implies growth of life chances, participation in different spheres of life – economic independence, social, cultural, development process and decision making etc.

In terms of employment as well as promotion in work and profession women often face greater difference than men. Though career and job for women have now to be recognized as an indicator of women empowerment yet there are many families in which women are looked upon as housewives, these families do not expect women as to work and earn wage. Education as well as awareness, change in women’s self-perception make them able to take their own decisions on various issues regarding health, education and employment.

In the present study, an attempt has been made to assess the role of education in empowering women and its relationship with economic independence and decision making by keeping in mind the following objectives:

- To study socio-economic and demographic profile of the selected sample.
- To study educational level of the selected sample.
To assess the economic independence of the respondents.
To assess the decision making and educational empowerment of the selected sample.
To analyze the relationship between economic independence and educational empowerment.
To analyze the relationship between education and educational empowerment.

District Saharanpur of Uttar Pradesh state was selected purposively out of 71 districts in the state. Urban area of Saharanpur was selected. The city was divided into five zones: east, west, north, south and central. Each zone consists of 10-12 mohallas. Two mohallas were selected from each zone, thus 10 mohallas were selected at random. Forty families having married woman aged 30 to 41 were chosen purposively from each selected mohalla. In this study education of the respondents was taken as independent variable, it was studied through questionnaire prepared with the help of expert.

Economic independence, decision making and educational empowerment were taken as dependent variables and studied through questionnaire prepared.

Profile of the sample

• The study consist of population of 400 married women respondents.
• The respondents including in the study were in the age range of 30-41 years. It was found that 112 respondents were of 30-32 years and 68 were of 33-35 years. Respondents of age group 36-38 years were 76 whereas out of total samples 36 belong to age group of 39-41 years.
• The majority of respondents were Hindus 92% whereas Muslims were only 8%.
• The percentage of the respondents who belonged to forward caste was considerably large (49%) in the sample. The respondents belonged to backward caste schedule castes were 33% and 18% respectively.
• The nuclear family was most common type of the family in which the majority of respondents live. The nuclear family is defined as one in which husband and wife live with any number of unmarried children or with no children at all. The study found that 45% samples belonged to joint family and 55% of the respondents belonged to nuclear family.
The study consists that majority of respondents (46.5%) had 2 children and 23% respondents had 3 children whereas 30.5 respondents had more than three children. The above results supported that number of children were large in poorer or struggling section of the community.

Out of 400 respondents (72%) were housewives and 28% were working outside the home.

Majority of the respondents (50%) belong to low income group i.e. 8000 to 15000 and respondents whose salary was below 8000 were (18%) whereas 17.5% respondents belonged to family whose income was between 16000 and 20000. Only (14.5%) belong to high income group i.e. more than 20000.

Major findings related to economic independence, decision making and educational empowerment of the respondents according to their educational status.

This study represents the relationship among education, decision making and economic independence. In this study it was accepted that education is highly beneficial and it is the fact that level or type of education from which maximum strength, skill and confidence can be derived, is important.

In this study mean scores obtained by the graduates (7.65) and post-graduates (7.28) were high as compared to others (5.48). Mean scores of illiterates were found to be 4.25 and the mean score of primary educated respondents was 0.59, who were high school and intermediate educated scored 5.95 and 5.7 respectively.

The mean scores on decision making were obtained by respondents according to their educational status. The researcher found that respondents who were illiterate scored (13.06) minimum. It scored (15.59), (15.41), (15.34) and (15.10) for high school educated respondents, graduates, post-graduates and intermediate educated respondents. The other ranges (13.68) for other category respondents and for primary it scored 13.58.

It was found that education and awareness have greater impact on decision making. Findings related to educational empowerment of respondents according to their educational status were depicted that illiterate respondents scored highest
(8.56) than high school (7.56), graduate (7.82), post graduate (8.24) and other category (8.24) like diploma holders, polytechnic, etc.

It was found that illiterates realized the important and empowering role of education because they were suffering due to low status in the society and family.

**Relationship of educational empowerment with economic independence and decision making respectively.**

Economic status of women is accepted as an indicator of a society's stage of development. In this study correlation was observed and the relationship between economic independence and educational empowerment of illiterate respondents was found positive \( r = 0.052 \). On the other hand the negative \( r = -0.280 \) relationship was found between decision making and educational empowerment of illiterate women. It was found that illiterate respondents do not consider that educational empowerment can enhance their power of decision making.

The findings on the relationship between educational empowerment and economic independence was found positive \( r = 0.077 \) among primary educated respondents and Relationship between decision making and educational empowerment was also found positive \( r = 0.292 \) among primary respondents.

High school educated respondents showed positive \( r = 0.120 \) relationship between economic independence and educational empowerment. There was also a positive correlation between decision making and educational empowerment. There was negative \( r = -0.314 \) relationship between economic independence and educational empowerment among intermediate educated respondents. On the other hand same respondents showed positive \( r = 0.142 \) relationship between decision making and educational empowerment.

Relationship between economic independence and educational empowerment of graduate respondents was found negative \( r = -0.040 \) and positive \( r = 0.536 \) relationship was observed between decision making and educational empowerment.

Relationship between economic independence and educational empowerment of post-graduate respondents was found positive \( r = 0.070 \) and
relationship between decision making and educational empowerment was also observed positive ($r = 0.314$).

There was positive ($r = 0.103$) correlation between economic independence and educational empowerment of other (polytechnic, education training or any diploma) respondents and the relationship between decision making and educational empowerment of respondents was also found positive ($r = 0.401$).

**Findings related to opinion of respondents on different aspects of empowerment.**

Researcher analyzed the responses of women on different issues related to variables of this study. These responses helped to find out the opinion of the respondents on different aspects of empowerment. Researcher examined the attitudes of respondents through various questions related to household expenses, education, employment, changing role of life, etc. Thus, the opinion of women on different aspects of empowerment is summarized here.

Women respondents were 100 % agreed that educated home maker will be an asset to the family. It was seen that educated home-maker is more confident and more likely to send their daughters

Out of 400, 60% women respondents considered that in spite of educational empowerment, women are deprived from opportunity of leadership, while 65 % were agreed that women are becoming a tough competitor to men.

There were 78.5 % women considered that decisions regarding expenses must be taken by both husband and wife.

There were 75% women respondents who were considered that employment of women outside the home is an additional burden for them.

Researcher found that 56 % respondents were in favor of it, that women should not start employment without getting permission from husband and in-laws.

Respondents were asked if a women is not getting handsome salary should leave the job, only 9.5 % agreed with this statement, whereas 44 % respondents have a firm believe that women should never leave the job and 46.5 % were agreed to not to leave the job until the better opportunity is available.
Opinion towards employment was examined and it was found that large number of women (28%) was agreed that economic independence is necessary to face problems, for betterment of future generation, for leisure time activities and to give full dimensions to life. Only 7 (1.75%) out of 400 were said that it is necessary for leisure time activities.

Generally it was considered that women were domesticated merely to bear and rear children and to perform household chores but researcher found amazing results that majority (80%) of respondents viewed that the tasks which are considered women’s duty should be learnt by male members also.

Lastly when respondents were asked about problems related to health and nutrition majority of women (70 percent) accepted that lack of knowledge and ignorance about the available facilities are responsible for this problem. As Senarath Gunnawardena (2009) conducted a study on women’s autonomy in decision making and health care. Findings revealed that mostly decision making about their health increases with education and awareness. Women who were earned and educated were more powerful in taking decisions regarding to their health.

**CONCLUSION**

In the last millennium women have evolved and developed. We can claim strong presence of women in all walks of life, still conditions of female in our land has remained subordinate. It can be concluded that the education of women is a much discussed subject, but sensitization about this issue is grossly neglected at the grassroots level. We can claim strong presence of women in all walks of life, still conditions of the female in our land has remained subordinate. It can be concluded that the education of women is a much discussed subject, but sensitization about this issue is grossly neglected at the grassroots level.

Education is the central to the process of sustainable development of women. Women education and the need to pursue their career and to have their own independent income and involvement in decision making have begun to be accepted and respected by our families and society. Education, employment and
involvement in decisions made, economic independent women conscious about her rights.

This study threw a light on the actual role of education for the empowerment of women with special reference to economic independence and decision making. It can be concluded that education of women creates great opportunities for women. These opportunities are experiences in the new role of women, decision making, bringing about change in family structure. Education further employment of women provides them certain power in family decision making.

Improvement in the status of women basically depends on their education which improves their economic structure and decision making power. The need is for women to realize their inherent strengths.

This study analyzed that economic independence and decision making are the two main prerequisites of empowerment and these two variables (economic independence and decision making) can be improved through education of women.

Suggestions for further research

- Similar study need to be conducted in different areas of Uttar Pradesh and other states of India as well.
- Similar study can be under taken on a large sample for more valid results.
- More elaborated studies could be done considering more aspects of empowerment like cultural empowerment, political empowerment, etc.
- Research work could be done considering different age groups other than in the present study.
- Comparative study could be done on married and unmarried women/educated or uneducated.

For Action

Nobody will liberate women but only women themselves. It is often advised to shun evil, not evil people. Women have followed this dictum for too long. Women have to bring in the change themselves.
The need is for women to realize their inherent strengths. They have to face the reality and the challenge. Women have to free themselves of religious convention and superstitions.

Women have to exhibit their self worth. They have to safeguard their dignity and rights. Nobody has the right to violate any women's pride. Women have to make their own judgments.

Empowerment of women is the prime objective of all development programs and policies in India in order to achieve self sufficiency and self reliance. These programs could be framed properly and executed effectively. According to one of the ILO report, "Women are 50% of world's population, do 2/3rd of world's work hours, receive one tenth of men's income and own 1% of world's property". Therefore there is a lot to be done for women's equity and justice so that their dominant role in the economic development is not underestimated.

However a clear vision of an alternative future may speed that turn around and provide nourishments when the going gets tough. Here are some ideas that view to help make tomorrow as a part of the search for women’s education and empowerment.

- Promotion of education and awareness among men and women.
- Addressing the capacity building need of women, both for skill development and enterprise management to facilitate their economic empowerment.
- Promote involvement of women in decision making through consensus building developing a system for power sharing and active participation in household decision making.
- Women are marginalized in decision making due to lack of experience in prevailing traditions in society which affects their self confidence and skill. This phenomenon needs to be looked into the remedial measures are to be evolved.
- Some women also find that there is no space for them to perform effectively as decision makers because men dominate. Necessary change in attitude of people in the society is to be instilled.
- In general, education needs to be expanded with special emphasis on female population.
- Women in the field of family planning, domestic hygiene, decision making related to child care, nutrition, household expenses, etc would be more effective than men.
- The enlightened men can offer their help in the empowerment of women.
- It is observed that percentage of higher educated women is low. So attempt should be made to encourage female for higher education.

The remedy for empowerment lies in a strong will power and a gender–just reform in the whole system covering the major issues related to women as their welfare, social-economic justice, education, health and power of taking decisions at household as well as societal level.