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Conclusion and Suggestions
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Women account for more than half of the world’s illiterate population and achieving literacy for them could be one of the first steps towards empowering women to participate more equally in society and free them for economic opportunity which can be seen as highly important end in itself. The education enhances their decision making capacity in vital areas, especially in the areas of reproduction. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women and giving knowledge, skills and self confidence which is necessary to make them to be full partners in the development process.

Women’s education and empowerment plays an important role in the development. Empowerment is a very broad term encompassing all types of empowerment such as education, economic, social, political, legal and cultural empowerment of women. The world declaration in world conference in 1990 laid emphasis on “education of all” and stress on universalizing access and promoting equity, the two issues which are vital to the empowerment of women.

The history of women’s education began with heated controversies about women’s right to education and this battle has been won. Women today, enjoy a formally and explicitly recognized right to education, but few specific and effective guarantees have been put in place to ensure that women’s access to education is secure.

Education is the most important instrument for human resource development and the most important mediums through which knowledge and information is acquired. Hence, access to education has been recognized as a fundamental right of both men and women. The empowering role of woman’s education is multipronged, affecting not only every aspect of women’s lives, but also the lives of their children and others who are likely to depend on them. Education has the potential of empowering women in several different ways by equipping them with the awareness
and knowledge required to make beneficial life choices by increasing their ability to access to resources and services, by enabling them to become informed consumers and citizens, by inculcating a feeling of self-worth, and by increasing their ability to challenge and make accountable those who hold power and authority among other things. Education is also likely to enhance women’s economic independence by equipping them with skills necessary to avail of paid employment opportunities thereby also making their economic contributions more visible. At the national level the education of women has resulted in the improvement of the productivity, income and economic development of women as well as better quality of life notably a healthier and better nourished population.

Empowerment of women is one of the main reasons as to why female education is necessary in India. If a woman is educated, she will build self-confidence and this will result in empowerment.

Women’s empowerment is a new phrase in the vocabulary of gender literature. The phrase is used in two broad senses that are general and specific. In a general sense, it refers to empowering women to be self-dependent by providing them access to all freedoms and opportunities which they were denied in the past only because of their being women. In a specific sense, women empowerment refers to enhancing their position in the power structure of the society. The word women empowerment essentially means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic terms—a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and directive principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures, a position, indiscrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of democratic polity, our laws, developmental policies, plans and programmes are aimed at women’s advancement in different spheres. India has also ratified various international conventions to secure rights of women.

Empowerment would become more relevant, if women are educated, better informed and can take rational decisions. Education is the foundation of woman
empowerment. The greatest single factor that can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. It enables her not only to gain knowledge about the world outside her hearth and home, but also helps her to get status, positive self esteem and self confidence, necessary courage and strength to face the challenges in life. It also facilitates her to procure a job to supplement the income of the family and achieve social status. Educated women can play an equally important role as men in nation building.

Education is the nourishment of the mind with knowledge which practices purposefully and productively. Education disciplines the mind, sharpens the intellect and refines the spirit. It shapes and polishes a rough unknown diamond into a multi-faceted Kohinoor sparking with scintillating brilliance. It's the development of integrated personality that unfolds itself to the highest wisdom. It's a continuous process.

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar the prominent person of the nineteenth century (1820-1891) helped the British Government to establish the first girl’s school in Calcutta in 1849. He was further responsible for the establishment of forty girl’s schools in Bengal between 1855-1858.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale a brilliant national leader (1866-1915) worked relentlessly towards raising the status of women in Indian society. He founded the “Servants of Indian Society” in 1905 as its main objective the education of women. Two religious leaders who helped in bringing about the renaissance in the Hindu religion were Rama Krishna Paramahansa (1866) and Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902).

In the 19th and early 20th centuries there was also an improvement in the status of women in India. Two major movements which affected women’s position during this period were the Social Reform Movement of the 19th century and the Nationalist Movement of the 20th century. Spread of education was an important instrument for social change and in improving status of the women.

The lack of education is the main cause for which women suffer more than men do. The lack of education means the lack of self-reliance, self-confidence
because of which women are not able to come out of their problems. So, educating a woman means educating a family. As per one estimate about 850 million people in the world are illiterate. Out of these about 50% are in India alone. But if we take illiteracy rate among women, the situation becomes more alarming. Four out of five women in this country are illiterate which means they are denied the benefits of modern knowledge, improvements of functional skills and behavioural changes towards modernization. No doubt that there has been a tendency towards literacy in post-independence era, but women to a large extent have been ignored. Consequently, a considerable majority of the women particularly from rural areas continue to be either illiterate or semi-literate. It means women are not given the opportunities in order to enable themselves to take the benefit of the modern technology.

The National Policy of Education (NPE) sees education as an instrument to bring about basic changes in the status of women and envisages a well conceived edge in their favour.

- Mahila Samakhya is one of the most successful efforts to link women’s empowerment project with education to create an environment for women, to acquire knowledge and information with a view to bring about change in their perception about themselves and that of the society.

- The Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) has been successful in raising the demand for education, especially among women. In most of the 428 districts women make up over 60% of the adults enrolled in the programme.

- The Non-formal Education (NFE) is being extended particularly to meet the needs of girls who are unable to attend formal school. NFE centres run exclusively for girls to get 90% assistance from the Central Government.

The University Grant Commission (UGC) has been encouraging institutions to take up research projects in the area of women’s studies by providing necessary funds.
National Policy on Education (NPE) – Initiatives for women 1986 is a landmark approach towards women education. It has attempted for the first time to address the basic issues of women’s equality.

In January 1991, the government constituted a statutory body called National Commission for Women (NCW). In accordance with the directives of the National Policy on Education and the implementation strategies envisaged in the programme of action, the government formulated a comprehensive programme known as National Literacy Mission (NLM) of adult education. The NLM was launched by Rajiv Gandhi (at that time he was Prime Minister of India) in May 1983 to achieve the goal i.e.; imparting “Functional literacy” to 80 million illiterate persons in the 15-35 age-group, 30 million by the 1990 and an additional 50 million by 1995. The mission was, thus, aimed at achieving 80% literacy in 1995 in comparison to 36.0% in 1981. The NLM aimed at involving youth and voluntary agencies in the programme. In 1990 there were 3113 projects in operation in various states and union territories. Likewise presently there are 500 voluntary agencies working in the field. In addition to this Shramik Vidhyapuths and 16 state resource centers are functioning in different states to cater to the worker’s education and to improve technical resources support to the programme. In January 1991, the government constituted a statutory body called National Commission for Women (NCW).

The Government of India has launched various programmes like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), The National Programme for Education of Girls at an Elementary level 2003 (NPEGEL), The National Policy on Education (1986) which recognized the need to redress traditional gender imbalances in educational access and achievement. The National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education was launched in 2008 by the Government of India which provides incentive to the girl child who passes VIII Std examination and enrolls in a Secondary School. The National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001 highlights the creation of a gender sensitive educational system.

Women’s education has assumed special significance in the context of India’s planned development, as it is incorporated in every Five-year Plans as the major programme for the development of women. Universalization of elementary education,
enrolement and retention of girls in the schools, promotion of Balwadies and Crèches, raising number of schools and colleges of arts, science, and professions for girls, polytechnics, girls hostels, multipurpose institutions and adult education programs are some of the steps being taken by both Central and State Governments in India to boost up women’s education

The Mahila Samakhya experience over the past twelve years offers a unique case of trying to explore and understand the issues of women’s education and empowerment and the interlinkage thereof in different regional and rural contexts within India. It offers an example of the importance of empowerment of women as a critical precondition to facilitate greater inclusion of women and their daughters into education. Further, it provides an alternative paradigm to women’s mobilisation and empowerment to the current and dominant focus on economic interventions as the principal strategy for women’s empowerment.

Mahila Samakhya started as a pilot project in 10 districts in the states of UP, Gujarat and Karnataka during 1988-89 and has grown into a programme of scale and is currently being implemented in 60 backward districts in the country covering over 9000 villages in 10 states. It is estimated that over two lakh women are actively mobilised and organised by the programme with a much larger number being impacted indirectly.

Education is important for all, but it is especially significant for women and the girl child. This is true not only because it is an entry point to other opportunities but also because the educational achievements of women can have far reaching impact on the family, the society and across generations.

The present study has focused on the concepts of marriage, family planning, domestic violence and political participation of women in India. Its main objectives were to establish a relationship between education and empowerment of women in Indian context. This study sought to delineate the impact of education in furthering or declining the state of empowerment of women.

Modern education has played a significant role in changing women’s outlook. There is a remarkable change in the values which the women cherished under the
influence of traditions. The modern education has brought about a new concept of womanhood in India which is at odds with the traditional concept of womanhood. Today the woman is not only the manager of household but she also actively participates in public life. Education removes the inequalities between the sexes. In changing societies like ours the education has especial significance in the changing notion of women in politics. Education is the means that enables the women to utilize their rights and get emancipation.

The gender equality can be attained by virtue of empowerment. The constitution of India stands for equality between men and women and provides that there should be no discrimination on the ground of sexes. Nonetheless, the women lag behind men in various areas and the poverty among women is on the rise. Their status is that of subordination in almost every sphere of life. The efforts of the government are focused on economic development more and less in the field of social empowerment.

Ever since the dawn of independence in 1947 the equality between men and women with their liberation from traditional constraints has been the part and parcel of Indian policy towards women. Education leads to equalization of the status between individuals and help intellectual, social and emotional development of human being.

Marriage and remarriage rates among women have also changed with the arrival of education among them meaning thereby that the college educated women in comparison with the women with fewer years of education marry latter, have fewer children and are less likely to view marriage as “financial security” and are happier in their married life and with their family life and are least likely to divorce.

Female education has also great impact on marriage age of females and is responsible for the delay in their marriage. Among the urban middle and upper classes there is a strong pressure to educate girls so that they can find a better employed bridegroom. Even the top sections in rural areas, which were averse to educate their girls are now sending them to schools and colleges because they now comprehend that they will find it difficult to get a suitable match for their girls in case they are not educated.
Education and fertility are closely related with each other. Female education has played a significant role in the decline of fertility in India. The National Sample Survey has indicated that where the education level is higher the fertility is lower.

The National Family Health Survey in India has indicated that the education of women can play a pivotal role in shaping their attitudes and behaviour. Educational attainments have shown a substantial association with important variable considerations including age at marriage, fertility, the use of and demand for family planning, number of children desired, antenatal care, delivery in a health facility, vaccination and multi-nutritional status of children, use of oral dehydration solution and infant and child mortality. Education among married women has also led to the weakening of son preference.

Female education makes women aware that there is a noticeable difference in the reproductive and child health seeking behaviour of educated women than illiterate women. The educated women stand empowered mainly in decision making, autonomy and control over household resources. They have knowledge and awareness of the modern world and their inter-spousal communication has greatly improved.

Education among women is responsible for later age of marriage and smaller family size and because of the education they take decisions to control their fertility. It is by virtue of education that the educated women have the knowledge about contraception which gives them the choice to have desired number of children. The infant mortality is lesser among the children of educated women and their children are healthier and get better education.

This study also depicts the impact of education on domestic violence. With the increase of the level of education there is a decrease in the incidence of domestic violence. Because of education there is greater awareness among both women and men about family planning, marriage, domestic violence, political participation etc.

There is close and positive relationship between political participation of women and education. Education enables women to assert their rights and get emancipation and helps them to think and take decisions at their own.
In the last few decades the social, economic and cultural life of women has greatly improved with the rise of women’s educational standard both in rural and urban areas. Education has given rise to an interest among women to participate in political, social, cultural and other activities. Education of women is the powerful instrument to free them from the yoke of slavery, oppression and ameliorate their social and economic condition in the male dominated society.

Only through education we can prepare a woman with ability and potential to meet society’s challenges, effect positive change and make them become thoughtful ethical leaders. Ensuring access to education is a precondition for full realization of the right to education. Without proper access to education it is not possible to guarantee the right to education.

Parents are not generally opposed to female education but they are reluctant to pay for it. When there is an economic constraint in the family, the girl child is first in the family to be taken out of school. Boys are usually retained as they are looked upon as a sort of investment for the future. Therefore, the state intervention in the form of free textbooks, uniforms, food, etc can be an important factor in the initial enrolment of the girl child in school.

From the above discussions we arrive at the conclusion that the true and real empowerment of the women is possible by education. Only the educated women are empowered in true sense. The empowerment of women is not possible without educating them. The education is, therefore, the remedy of all problems that come to surround them in their lives and a powerful means of their all round development.

SUGGESTIONS

Educational planners in India have tried a wide range of strategies to bridge the gap between men and women. Education is a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities, to challenge their traditional roles and to change their lives. Educating women is a high return investment in socio-economic development of the nation. There are some useful suggestions for
empowerment of Indian women which can be brought about through education. Present study offers the following suggestions:

1. Elimination of illiteracy, universalisation of elementary education and minimization of the drop out rate.

2. Improving women’s and girls’ health by ensuring them access to adequate maternal health care, family planning and nutrition and reducing maternal mortality and increasing the life expectancy.

3. Acquiring knowledge and skills for social, cultural and political advancement and inculcating positive and egalitarian attitudes for women.

4. Promoting qualified women to positions of power at every level within political, legislative and judicial bodies with the goal of achieving parity with men.

5. Securing women’s right to vote, stand for election and hold public or political office.

6. Greater female inheritance rights may improve female education through a substitution of dowry payments in the marriage market.

7. The parents of children belonging to poor, underprivileged families must be specially educated with proper social formula to help them to understand the significance of educating the girl child as foundation for empowerment.