

**Ms. Subhashree Panda**

Research Scholar,
P. G. Dept of Education
Rama Devi Women's
University
Bhubaneswar, Odisha
subhashree1188@gmail.com
7537919389

Education as a Catalyst for Women Empowerment- A Pathway to Change

Subhashree Panda

Abstract:

Education is a powerful tool for empowering women. It develops knowledge, skills, attitudes among women to participate more actively in the social, economic and political sphere. Women empowerment represents social, political and economic rights of women. The present study deals with education as a catalyst for women empowerment: a pathway to change. The objectives of the study are to highlight how Education helps in Women Empowerment and the role of various Government Schemes and Programmes for Women Empowerment. An attempt has been made to analyze the empowerment of women in Indian context. The paper explores the significance of education in empowering women.

Keywords: Education, Women Empowerment, Catalyst, Rights etc.

1. Introduction:

Education is regarded as an important tool for women empowerment. It provides a platform to express their thoughts, share their feelings, to face the challenges of everyday life, to confront their issues and change their lifestyle. It also reduces inequalities and functions as a powerful weapon to develop the family as well as nation. Education helps women become more empowered because it gives them the tools to take on new challenges, question the established norms and transform their own life (Mutyalu, 2019). As per Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, if you educate women, you educate a whole family". He further remarked, "To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she moves, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves. Empowering women through education means using education as a tool for promoting their self-worth, dignity, empowering her with knowledge and skills to take advantage of opportunities".

(i) Women Empowerment:

The concept of women empowerment was introduced in the international women conference at NAIROBI in 1985. Women empowerment is the process of providing rights, powers, opportunities



and responsibilities to women so that they are able to develop their potential, think and act freely at par with men equally in society (Bera, 2016). It is the expansion of women's ability and freedom to exercise full control over their action. The burning example of women empowerment is Maa Rama Devi, a legendary women freedom fighter and Social Reformer of Odisha. She was a true inspiration for today's women who took active part on India's freedom struggle, civil disobedience movement, Salt Satyagraha in Baleswar and many more. Rama Devi was a renowned social worker. In recognition of her services to the nation, she was awarded the "Jamunalal Bajaj Award" on 4th Nov 1981 for her brilliant work in social service. In the year 1984, she was awarded the D.Litt. degree by the Utkal University.

(II) Status of Women Education:

Tabel-1: Literacy rate: India 1971 to 2011

Year	Persons (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Census of India (2011)

As per Census 2011, there was a noticeable gender gap in literacy rates. Males were having higher literacy rate compared to female. Male literacy rate was 82.14% whereas female literacy rate was 65.46% respectively.

2. Literature Review:

Chowdhary (2022) found in his study that rural women are less empowered because of a number of factors, including a male-dominated society, a lack of education, a lack of awareness, and personal issues including domestic abuse and family decision-making.

Yousuf (2019) conducted a study on role of education in women empowerment. The results revealed education is the remedial tool to eradicate all the barriers and enhance the status of women by empowering them in all spheres of life. Education brings positive change in the life of women by changing the attitude and the ideology of the society. Giving education to women is the best medicine for their development. Education helps women become more empowered because it gives them the tools to take on new challenges, question established norms, and transform their own life (Mutyalu, 2019).



Channawar (2016) conducted a study on empower the women via education. It shows that empowerment of women in 21st century plays an important role in the development of the country. Through Education Women enhance their knowledge and put every steps further to achieve her goals and aware the society by showing the power of women's empowerment.

Bera (2016) reported in her study that women empowerment' is the process of enabling and developing ability or potential in women so that they can think and act freely, exercises their choice and control their lives and thereby reducing discrimination and exploitation towards them. The widespread discrimination and exploitation of women evoke the need for empowerment of women.

Shettar (2015) revealed that despite the government's numerous efforts, women in India still have comparatively less power and a lower status than men. Singh et al. (2013) observed that women can only be fully empowered if their social and economic standing is raised.

Aslam (2013) reported in his study that education strives to awaken people from their darkness so that they may realize their empowered status. The importance of education in promoting and sustaining both individual and national development. If education has an empowering effect on women in terms of socio-cultural, economic, interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological domains, investing in education is worthwhile not only from an individual but also from a national perspective.

3. Research gaps:

The issue of women empowerment promotes gender equality and which is a common target of developing countries. The current issue which appears in the frontline of the agenda is the realization and promotion of gender equality. In our countries women are generally silent and their voice has been stifled by socio-economic and cultural factors. The basic factors are division of labor, rights, responsibilities, opportunities and access to and control over resources. Many studies have conducted on the provisions, facilities regarding the progress of women. Still women are facing problems in each and every field like in home, office, society and so on. More effective policies and interventions are required for their upliftment. There is an urgent need for reform to empower the women and it is possible only through the practical implementation of education.

4. Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the study are stated as follows:

- 1) To examine the need of education for empowering the women.
- 2) To assess the role of education for women empowerment.



- 3) To figure out the constitutional provisions and Government efforts on education for women empowerment.
- 4) To identify the major challenges for empowering the women.
- 5) To offer remedial suggestions for women empowerment through education.

5. Methodology

A detailed analysis of the literature was carried out to look how education helps in women empowerment and makes them more powerful in all spheres. For the present study, data is collected only through the secondary sources i.e., from the official website of government of India, Ministry of women and child welfare, books, journal, magazines, research articles, and Internet sources etc.

6. Need Of Education for Empowering Women:

The need for empowering women arises due to the following factors.

- i) **Gender Equality:** Women often face discrimination and unequal treatment in comparison to men. Discrimination exists in the field of education, employment, healthcare and decision making.
- ii) **Economic empowerment:** Empowering women economically can contribute significantly to overall economic growth and development. It will close gender gaps in employment and develop productivity capacity among women.
- iii) **Social Justice:** Achieving gender equality is a fundamental human right. Women should have equal opportunities to participate fully in society without any discrimination and violence.
- iv) **Health and wellbeing:** Empowered women are more likely to have better health outcomes for themselves and their families. They should be provided with proper healthcare facilities, education about reproductive health and the ability to make informed decisions about themselves and others.
- v) **Political participation:** Women's voices and perspectives are essential in decision making process at all levels, from grassroot to national governments. It ensures that policies and laws address the needs and interests of all citizens.

7. Role of education for women empowerment:

Empowerment strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experiences (Schuler & Riley, 1996). Education empowers women by expanding their opportunities, raise voice against discrimination and injustice and gender inequality. It plays a vital role for empowering the women in many ways like:



- i) **Reduction in Gender Inequality:** Education reduces gender inequality by breaking down the barriers. It increases women's opportunities and choices. It challenges the outdated and stereotyped traditions and norms against women.
- ii) **Increased economic opportunities:** Education develops knowledge, skills, positive attitude among the women. It enables them to participate in every activity, access jobs and become economically efficient.
- iii) **Social and Political participation:** Education enables women to participate in social and political spheres. It increases their knowledge, skills, leadership qualities, confidence, decision making power etc.
- iv) **Reduced gender-based violence:** Education develops awareness about women rights and empowerment. It reduces and challenges gender-based violence and discrimination against women.
- v) **Enhance Decision making skills:** Education empowers women to participate freely in activities and they can take their own decision without any suppression.

8. Constitutional Provisions and Government Efforts on Education for Women Empowerment:

8.1 Fundamental Rights:

Fundamental Rights guarantee that everyone is treated equally under the law. It includes:

- i) **Article 14**– Men and women have equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic and social spheres.
- ii) **Article 15(1)** — Prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc.
- iii) **Article 15(3)**– Special provisions allow the government to take actions that benefit women and promote gender equality.
- iv) **Article 16**– Equal opportunities for all citizens in public appointments

8.2 Directive Principles of State Policy:

- i) **Article 39(a)**– State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens men and women, equally, the right to means of livelihood.
- ii) **Article 39(d)**– Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- iii) **Article 42**– The State to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

8.3 Fundamental Duties:

Article 51 (A)(e)– To renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.



9. Government schemes for Empowering girls:

- i) **Sarva Shiksha Avijan (SSA):** It is a flagship programme of the government of India which was started in 2001. Its main aim is to achieve the Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) within the age group of 6-14 years. It was made a fundamental right in the Indian Constitution under Article 21A. The main objective of this programme is to bridge the gender and social category gaps at primary schooling stage.
- ii) **Rastriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA):** It was launched in 2009 which aims to improve the quality of education in secondary schools in India. Under the scheme, financial assistance is provided to schools to improve infrastructure, provide teacher training, and implement girl-friendly policies.
- iii) **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):** This scheme was launched in 2015 which aims to address the declining child sex ratio and promote the education of the girl child. Its primary goal is to raise public awareness of the importance of girls' education.
- iv) **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV):** This scheme was launched in 2004 to provide education to girls up to standard 8th from disadvantaged sections of society. Under the scheme, residential schools are to be set up for girls in areas with low female literacy rates. It aims at providing educational facilities to girls belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, minority communities and families below the poverty line in remote areas.
- v) **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY):** It was launched in 2015, to give financial aid to the girls. It is a small deposit scheme, allows parents to open a savings account in the name of the girl child and provides a high interest rate of 7.6%. The money can be withdrawn when the girl child turns 18 to be used for her education or marriage. The scheme is available for girl children below the age of 10 years.
- vi) **Balika Samridhi Yojana:** This scheme was launched on 2nd October, 1997. The girl child who comes from below poverty line can participate in this scheme. It provides financial assistance for a maximum of 2 girls in the family.
- vii) **National Girl Child Day:** National Girl Child Day is celebrated on 24th January every year in India. Its aim is to raise awareness about the importance of girl child education and the challenges faced by girls in India. On this day, various activities and programs are organized to promote girl child education and empowerment.



viii) **National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship (NMMS)** : This scheme provides financial assistance to students from economically weaker sections to pursue higher education. Under the scheme, scholarships are provided to students who achieve good score in the 8th standard examination. The scholarship is provided to the students for studying in classes 9th and 10th. The scholarship amount is Rs.12000/- per annum.

ix) **Udaan Scheme**: This was a scholarship scheme for girls which was initiated by Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). This scheme is for class XI and XII students from CBSE affiliated schools. Its aim is to provide scholarship to the meritorious female students who belong to economically weaker families.

x) **National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001**: The main aim of this Policy is to promote the progress, growth, and empowerment of women. It creates a supportive environment by implementing positive **economic** and **social policies** that facilitate the complete **growth of women**, allowing them to achieve their maximum potential.

10. Major challenges for empowering the women:

There are many challenges which hinder the progress of women. Some of these are:

- i) Illiteracy
- ii) Uneven opportunities
- iii) Domestic violence
- iv) Discrimination against girl
- v) Gender disparity
- vi) Lack of decision-making power
- vii) Lack of recognition of women's work
- viii) Sexual Harassment
- ix) Tradition & Beliefs

11. Remedial Suggestions for Women Empowerment through Education:

As per Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which we can use to change the world." Women empowerment is only possible by providing them education. Some of the doable suggestions are as follows:

- i) Provide equal access to education to girls and women especially SCs, STs, marginalized and rural communities.
- ii) Providing training to teachers by using gender-sensitization methods.
- iii) The curriculum should be designed as per the needs and requirements of the women.



- iv) Promoting Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education to women.
- v) Providing life skills education and vocational education to the women.
- vi) Various programmes to be organized for women including skill training, literacy classes, health education especially for women.
- vii) Timely monitor and evaluate the progress towards gender parity in education.

12. Conclusion:

According to R. N Tagore, 'Women are the builder and molder of the Nation's destiny. An educated women is a guiding light for the children, family members, society and nation, she knows how to have a happy family and balanced and healthy relations with others. It would need the efforts of the Government, corporates and the civil society to work in a coordinated manner to promote the cause of women and move towards a more inclusive society.

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