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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION – A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Women have generally been looked down upon with disdainful contempt. All sorts of strictures have been inflicted upon them, reducing their status to a mere play thing or a slave of man’s whims, a mere chattel to be dumb driven. They have been confined to the hearth and home. The orthodox male-oriented society in India has still not been able to adjust itself to the fresh wave of women’s liberation. But today the time have changed, the Indian woman has cast off her age-old shackles of serfdom and male domination. She has come to her own and started scaling the ladders of social advance with proud dignity. But the status of women suffered a setback in the Brahmanic age. In the muslim rule, women completely lost their glory, they were relegated into the background, cutoff from the mainstreams of life. This research articles to be discussed Woman Empowerment through Education on a Sociological Perspective.

Keywords: Women Consciousness, Women Education, Male Oriented Society, Women Status, Educational Empowerment, Life Skills, Women Liberation.

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

“We shall see better days soon and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with female education”.

–Dr.B.R.Ambedkar

“Our women have a very great part to play in the progress of our country, as the mental and physical contact of women with life is much more lasting and comprehensive than that of men. Now for nothing was it said that ‘the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world’.” In the apron strings of woman is hidden the revolutionary energy which can establish paradise on this earth.” Women have generally been looked down upon with disdainful contempt. All sorts of strictures have been inflicted upon them, reducing their status to a mere play thing or a slave of man’s whims, a mere chattel to be dumb driven. They have been confined to the hearth and home. The orthodox male-oriented society in India has still not been able to adjust itself to the fresh wave of women’s liberation. But today the time have changed, the Indian woman has cast off her age-old shackles of serfdom and male domination. She has come to her own and started scaling the ladders of social advance with proud dignity.

In Vedic India, woman enjoyed an enviable status. She was considered to be a goddess, something like the Greek, Athena, the supreme source of man’s inspiration. She was called ‘Arhangini’. We hear of women sages and scholars in the vedic age. But the status of women suffered a setback in the Brahmanic age. In the muslim rule, women completely lost their glory, they were relegated into the background, cutoff from the mainstreams of life. They were devitalized and made dependent of men folk. Evil and inhuman ill-practices fostered in the society to deharmonise them; chief among them being the Puradah’ system. ‘Sati’ system, child marriage denial of education and permanent ban on widow re-marriages. The Britishers knew well the supreme value of mother in nation buildings. So, they cleverly engaged selfish ‘Pandits’ and ‘Mullahas’ for preaching feminine inferiority. Women were reduced to mere household drudges, in a way, they lived a semi-dead life.

The National Policy of Education emphasized the promotion of women’s education in all areas of learning to eliminate any sex based stereo typing with the guarantee of equality before the law and the emphasize on girl’s education. Since employment plays a vital role in improving women’s status in the society. Education of women is of prime importance in any women empowerment programmes. Gender discrimination still persist in India and lot more needs to be done in the field of women’s education in India. The gap in the male-female literacy rate is just a simple indicator. While the male-literacy rate is more than 75% according to the 2011 Census, the female literacy rate is just 54.16%

Globalization has presented new challenges in the realization of the goal of empowering women and now women empowerment has become the slogan and motto of many social reformers, governmental agencies and voluntary organizations. There is a long cherish wish among all the women to have better avenues in life in order to lead the life in a more fruitful way. However, the



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concept women empowerment is a matter of controversy even now. Empowerment is a process of acquiring knowledge and awareness which enable them to move towards life with greater dignity and self-assurance.

Concept of Empowerment

The word empowerment is one, which is widely used but seldom defined. It is an active, multidimensional process which encompasses several multi reinforcing components that begin with and supported by economic independence. Power is the key word of the term empowerment. According to the International Encyclopaedia. Power means having the capacity and the means to direct one's life towards desired, social, political and economic goals or status. Power means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. Webster's New World Dictionary, (1982) says the prefix "3m" which attached to the noun "Power" is generally used to form verbs meaning to make, make in to etc. So, the word "empower" means to make or cause power.

In fact, an empowered woman is a nation's strength. The United Nation's Organization had declared the year 1975 as women's year and the decade 1975-1985 as women's decade on an international level. Various studies were conducted and made a consensus that so long as women remain depressed and exploited, no nation can enjoy freedom and justice. It is found that when half of the population is denied the opportunities for utilizing their full potential, the economic parameter like growth, development and welfare remains undefined. So various steps were taken to define the concept of women empowerment and to find out ways through which women can be empowered.

Empowerment literally means becoming powerful. In that perspective the empowerment of women and the improvement of their status, particularly in respect of education, health and economic opportunities is highly important. Women need to be empowered in order to become strong and ready to take up new challenges for the building up of the family, society and the nation. Infact women empowerment is human empowerment itself. According to Sushama Shay. Women empowerment is a process which helps women to change other women's consciousness through creating awareness.

Women empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the International Women Conference at Nairobi in 1985. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. So that we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment India is poised to becoming superpower, a developed country by 2022.

Women empowerment is an essential element in national development. Since women constitute half of the population there can be no development unless the needs and interests of women are fully taken into account. In fact, empowered women are a nation's strength. Since development means improvement in the living conditions of the society, as a whole, it is logical to expect that this also mean improved status for women. The effective management and development of women's resources, their capabilities, interests, skills and potentialities are of paramount importance for the mobilization of human resources. In the Indian social, cultural and economic context, no one can achieve the whole purpose of women's empowerment and emancipation within a short span of time. However, the women have utilized the chances given to them and made considerable progress. As formal agency, the government of India wanted to improve the living conditions of women at different times. Here education played an important role for women empowerment.

Importance of Women Empowerment

Human development encompasses elements that contribute critical issues of gender and development. The dignity and culture of a society can be detected from the status of women in that society. According to Rameshwari Pandya (2008). Empowerment has become the key solution to many social problems. Empowerment of women is empowerment of family household and in turn development of a nation of a country. Empowerment of women leads to benefit not only to the individual women groups, but also to the families and community as a whole through collective action for development. Women must define their own needs and goals as well as strategies. A prerequisite for women's participation in development process is their empowerment. Women must exercise full participation in decision making process in all walks of life and fully participate with men in finding equitable and practical solution to issues both in the family and society.

With the dawn of freedom our national leaders, Gandhiji, Nehruji and Dr. Rajendra Prasad in particular, began to think seriously about the urgent need of feminine emancipation. They realized the fact that so long as women of India were not uplifted and emancipated and granted equal status with mew in all walks of life- political, economic, domestic, educational—India could neither progress nor make any advance. So, they provided, for full equality to women in the Constitution. The Parliament enacted the Hindu



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Code Bill and the Hindu Succession Act, conferring on women the right to personal property and an absolute right to divorce. Now, the Indian women have re-captured their dignity, individuality and respect. They have a franchise; they are free to join any service or follow any profession. Free India has, besides her woman Prime Minister (the late Smt. Indira Gandhi) woman ambassadors women Cabinet Ministers, women legislators, women Governors, women scientists-engineers-doctors, women-generals, women public officers and magistrates. Smt. Vijayalakshmi Pandit created a singular record by becoming President of the United Nations General Assembly.

With the encouragement of co-education, women have cast off the age-old inferiority complex and today they are marching side by side with men-folk in every walk of life. Women are actually proving to be academically better, and socially more active. We come across the results of competitive Examinations. In All India Services, Civil and Police and Indian Universities and we are happily surprised to note that women capture most of the merit seats. They are aware of the fast-changing social milieu and they are making sustained efforts to scale the ladders of social progress by dint of zeal and dynamism. They are contributing significantly towards the building of modern India. Notwithstanding the remarkable change in the position of women, in free India, there is still a great divergence between the constitutional position and the stark reality of deprivation and degradation. Whatever whiff of emancipation has blown in Indian society, has been inhaled and enjoyed by the women belonging to the rich and upper middle-class society in cities. Women belonging to the lower Income group and those belonging to the rural areas are still totally untouched by the winds of change. They have still been living in selfish conditions steeped in poverty, ignorance, superstition and slavery. Despite the passing of stringent laws and Art against Dowry, the monster of dowry is still flagging the lives of thousands of hopeless women every year. Mere legislation cannot emancipate the lot of our women. This needs a radical change in our mental make-up and our social structure. For this, we shall have to foster a social emancipating spirit in our everyday life. The conservative male-chauvinistic attitude shall have to give way to liberalism.

Empowering of Women through Education

“Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effect within the family and across generations. Investing in girls’ education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investments in secondary school education for girls yield especially high dividends. Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Educated women, can recognize the importance of healthcare and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. However, women’s literacy rates are significantly lower than men’s in most developing countries.

The education of parents is linked to their children’s educational attainment, and the mother’s education is usually more influential than the father’s. An educated mother’s greater influence in household negotiations may allow her to secure more resources for her children. Educated mothers are more likely to be in the labour force, allowing them to pay some of the costs of schooling, and may be more aware of returns to schooling. And educated mothers, averaging fewer children, can concentrate more attention on each child. Besides having fewer children, mothers, with schooling are less likely to have mistimed or unintended births. This has implications for schooling, because poor parents often must choose which of their children to educate. Closing the gender gap in education is a development priority. The 1994 Cairo Consensus recognized education, especially for women, as a force for social and economic development. Universal completion of primary education was set as a 20-year goal, as was wider access to secondary and higher education among girls and women. Closing the gender gap in education by 2015 is also one of the benchmarks for the Millennium Development Goal. Empowerment of women is the key-device to enable them resurrect their status multifariously in the society and reconcile them to share virilities of the fast-developing world. It had come out of the consensus arrived at the 40th Session of the UN Commission on Status of Women in New York on March 11, 1996 This device is significant in view of the role that the women can more effectively play in all vital areas the male factor alone is not capable of any effective and reliable performance in socio-economic spheres and a partnership is a must throughout the world in these spheres between men and women to ensure the progress in the right direction. Noteworthy is the fact that there exists care in between the present miserable plight of the women due to the socio-economic inequalities that have been persistent throughout the world and the new mandates that require a decisive role of women side by side with the men folk.

Women Conferences

The Commission has warned all the member states of the UNO that the women concerns are mainstreamed to with the impact of the economic and social changes on families. Eradication of poverty, elimination of gender prejudices discriminations and



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providing equal opportunities to women to exp their views are essential to check further drift in the socio-economic situations in their respective countries. The commission has stressed this is not just a formality to oblige the women folk with a view of their morale or pacify them. But it is an integral part of empowerment women that they participate in decision making at all levels in all are the critical concerns that were identified in the World Women Conference held in China in 1995. By empowerment of Women is meant that the conferment of power by means of law in all matters affecting gender interests, related to family well-being and socio-economic national affairs, providing for participation in decision making in all such matters. As a matter of all such matters that were categorically termed as ‘critical concerns the women in the World Women Conference in China in 1995 were required to be mainstreamed to deal with the impact of economic and social changes on families. In eradication of poverty, counter sexism and viol in the global media. It is not India alone where the plight of women is pitiable and status has been depleting and losing day by day, but it is an international phenomenon, because exploitation of women in the forms of domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse in one form or other is equally found throughout the world including the advanced and developed countries of the west.

Social Status of Women

And this is the main reason that the status of women their plight has grown into an international problem and a concern the Economic and Social Council of the UN, Experts of the economy have arrived at the consensus that so eradication of poverty is concerned, it requires full and equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels for which their empowerment and autonomy are essential prerequisites. It implies legislative administrative measures to give right to women no inheritance ownership, to credit and to natural resources and technology. It is necessitating to promote women’s participation in employment and employment and ensure economic and social protection, unemployment, ill-health, maternity, child bearing, widowhood, disability and old-age. Meanwhile in India, reservation of seats in parliament and legislatures for women is being actively pursued at the Government to offer a political toast to entertain women. Many important court rulings regarding relating to harassment of women at work, maintenance of even if not legally married etc., have made the womenfolk stronger. Many savings and insurance schemes, announced from time to time by the central government and various state governments, have helped women to become economically stronger, resulting in their better social status. The constitutional amendment regarding reservation of one-third seats for women at the level of Panchayat has enabled one million women to participate in the decision-making process, right from the grassroots up district level. At the international level, however, the initiatives to improve editions for the women have resulted in the creation of an international legal framework to achieve legal equality by UN bodies are also continually striving to bring about equality by raising public awareness and by a commitment to change long ingrained traditions and attitudes, rich prolong discriminations.

Empowerment is a construct shared by many disciplines and arenas: community development, psychology, education, economics and studies of social movements and organisations, among others. How empowerment is understood varies among these perspectives. In recent empowerment literature, the meaning of the term empowerment is often assumed rather than explained or defined. Rappoport (1984) has noted that it is easy to define empowerment by its absence but difficult to define in action as it takes on different forms in different people and contexts. Even defining the concept is subject to debate. As a general definition however, we suggest that empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. We suggest that three components of our definition are basic to any understanding of empowerment. Empowerment is multi-dimensional social, and a process. It is multi-dimensional in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, economic and other dimensions. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group, and community. Empowerment, by definition, is a social process, since it occurs in relationship to others. Empowerment is a process that is similar to a path or journey, one that develops as we work through it. Other aspects of empowerment may vary according to the specific context and people involved, but these remain constant. In addition, one important implication of this definition of empowerment is that the individual and community are fundamentally connected.

What need to be done?

The People Empowerment People (PEP) program uses the definition of empowerment to connect research, theory, and practice. The Connecticut PEP programme builds on theory of critical adult education developed by Friere, Horton, and others. PEP focuses on the strengths of people, providing opportunities and resources for people to gain experiences and skills while they also gain control over their lives. Underlying this process is mutual respect between participants, facilitators, advisory committee members, and others involved in the program. PEP opens to participants the recognition of their own values and beliefs and encourages expression of their own issues as they define them. The focus is on the connection between individual action and community action, encouraging individual change through training sessions and discussions, and supporting community action through participants’ efforts to change their communities. While we cannot give people power and we cannot make them “empowered,” we can provide the opportunities, resources and support that they need to become involved themselves. In conclusion, we see empowerment as a multidimensional



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social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It's a process that fosters powers in people for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society by acting on issues that they define as important. In PEP as in Extension we strive to teach people skills and knowledge that will motivate them to take steps to improve their own lives – to be empowered.

Summing up

India, the subcontinent, is indubitably a great country of miscellaneous cultures, traditions, religions, castes and geographical characteristics. However, India is even known for its sobriquet 'male-chavuinistic nation'. It's 'Bharath Maatha' who is in turn a woman that serves as the mother of every Indian. While such a woman looks after every Indian child, women in general are simply being disregarded at the dominant men's best. Men ought not to forget the fact that 'men' are in 'Women'. Women are no less than men in India in any sector. Women are not what they really were. Some decades ago, women were limited to the kitchen. Today, Indian women have made their presence felt virtually in every field. Women have ultimately come out of their 'sari' image and entrap the nation by dint of their hard work and power. Women Empowerment is in fact the ability of women to exercise full control over one's actions. Empowerment of women in India is conspicuous by many live examples. But is that all? Are only those women empowered? If not, how about rest of the Indian-Women world? Are the common women vested with powers to drive the nation? These above questions, if posed to our so-called leaders would simply be parried. Women have become marionettes in the hands of them.

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Related Web Sites

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- <https://womensglobal.org>
- <https://www.care.org.girleducation.org>
- www.righttoeducation.org