

# Role of Education in Empowerment of Rural Women

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## INTRODUCTION

Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individual and social communities. It is a multi-dimensional process and refers to the expansion of freedom of choice and action in all spheres - social, political and economic to shape one's life. The Oxford English Dictionary explains "to empower" as to "invest legally" or formally with power, to enable or to permit". It means, to remove the restrictions artificial or otherwise that people freedom doing the things that is within their ability to achieve. (K.D Rosa 2012) Empowerment is now increasingly seen as a process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. This means control over material assets, in intellectual resources and ideology. Discrimination of women is well known all over the world in communities society and nation across time and space. They are constituted distinctly unequal categories as compared to men. In recent years empowerment of women has recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women.

## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT : AS A CONCEPT

Women empowerment generally means an awareness among the women. It aware women about their abilities their participation in society. Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the third international conference at Nairobi 1985. The conference defined "women empowerment as a redistribution of social power and control resources in favour of women". Control over resources in turn include control both over societal resources like education employment and political power, household resources like income, property, health and decision making. (Kurvilla Molly, May 12-18, 2008, Vol 46). It means the process through which women are currently most discriminated against achieve gender equity. This will support for men to change those

aspects and their behaviour roles and privileges which currently discriminate against women. Thus, empowerment occurs when women achieve increased control and participation in decision making that leads to their better access to resources and therefore improved socio-economic status (B.K Sanjoy & R. Sangeeta, 1-7 2012, August Vol - 49). Stromquist (1995) has identified four clear components of empowerment. They are cognitive, psychological, economic and political.

- The cognitive component refers to women's understanding of their conditions of subordination and the causes of such condition at both micro and macro levels of society.
- The psychological component includes the development of feelings that women can act of personal and societal levels to improve their conditions as well as the formation of the belief that they can succeed in their change efforts.
- The economic component of empowerment requires that women can be able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of financial autonomy, no matter how small and how hard to obtain in the beginning.

The political component would encompass the ability to analyze the surrounding environment in political and social terms; it also means ability to organize and mobilize for social change (Mandal Ajit & Mete Jayanta, 2012).

J.K. Pillai has noted that "Empowerment as an active, multidimensional process which enables women to realize their fully identity and power in all spheres of life" Pillai J.K. 1995).

Parimala Kapur has stated that " Women empowerment could be considered as a process in which women gain greater share of control over resource material, human and intellectual knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money and access to money and control over decision - making in home, community, society and nation" (Kapur Parimala, 1970).

Equality and empowerment of women require action in a number of areas like.

- a. Building women's capabilities, through education and health care.
- b. Improving opportunities for women to earn income or to participate in decision making forums.
- c. Ensuring legal justice to women.
- d. Establishing and strengthening institutional machinery to ensure implementation and monitoring of gender empowerment policies.

Thus, women empowerment is a process of social change. It will enable women to maintain stronger functioning position. It enables autonomy and control over their lives, gain economic opportunities, social equality and personal rights.

#### PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

Women are an integral part of the society. A society can not progress without the equal progress of man and women. As a rural country majority of women population in India lives in rural areas. The problems of rural women can be seen an integral part of the general social economic and political problem of rural India. Women in India have generally enjoyed lower status than male counterpart. Because of lack acceptance from the male dominant society, Indian women suffer immensely. Women are responsible for bearing children, yet they are malnourished and in poor health. Illiteracy is the one of the basic problems for the lower status of rural women in India. Lack of education they cannot hold any prestigious job, they take on the most physically difficult and undesirable jobs. Rural women are generally not perceived to have any meaningful income generation capacity and they are relegated mainly to household duties and cheap labour. Education has always been considered as the most powerful instrument for social change. It is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. Empowerment of women involves economic opportunity, social equality and personal rights etc. Women are deprived of their human rights, often as of their matter of tradition. Because of illiteracy they are not able to understand about their rights. Despite of governmental efforts for improving educational status of its all citizens. India has still lowest female literacy rate. According to 2011 census male literacy rate is 82.14% and female literacy rate is 65.46% out 74.04%

of total literacy rate in India. Rural women literacy is lower than urban literacy rate. According 2011 census rural female literacy rate is 58.75% and urban female literacy rate is 79.92%. This shows the lower educational status of rural women than urban women. For development of any society active women participation is most necessary. Education is the important factor which empower the rural women in social economic, political aspects of the society, which make aware about their rights. In this context there is a need to study about the women empowerment concept, need of education for empowerment of rural women, what are roots causes of women illiteracy and what are the policies taken by Indian government for empowerment of rural women.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the main objectives of this study.

- a. To study about the conceptual meaning of women empowerment and the steps and policies taken by the government for empowerment of women in India.
- b. To study about the role of education for empowerment rural women and find out the root causes of women illiteracy in rural areas and how the causes of illiteracy should be removed.

#### METHODOLOGY

The method followed in this study is descriptive. The method involves collection of data and interpreting casual connect between facts. This method is useful when the problem is capable of being described. The study is based on secondary data i.e. books magazines, newspapers and journals etc.

#### INDIA'S POLICY FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment of women in any society is an important factor to enable women to participate in the social economic and political development of the society. Women as an independent group constitute 48.46 of the country's total population as per 2011 census. In the preamble of Indian constitution, Fundamental rights, fundamental duties, Directive principles enriched the principle of gender equality. The constitution of India not only accorded equality to

women but also empowered to the state to adopt the measures of positive discrimination in the favour of women. A number of Articles of the constitution specially reiterated the commitment of the constitution towards the socio-economic development of women and upholding their political right and participation decision making.

Within the framework of a democratic polity our laws, development policies, plans and programs have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. Some specific laws enacted by the Government of India to safeguard the interest of women and up-gradation of their interest are such as - Hindu Marriage Act 1955, The Hindu Succession Act 1956, The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, Equal Remuneration Act 1976. The suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act 1956, The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971 etc.

From the Fifth Five Year plan (1974-78) onwards has been marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. The national commission for women was set up by an Act of parliament in 1990 to safeguard the right and legal entitlements women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) of the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in panchayats and Municipalities for women.

India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women, convention on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) in 1993. The Mexico plan of Action (1975) the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985) the Beijing Declaration as well as the platform of Action (1995).

The National Policy of Education 1986 and the program of Action 1992 act the guiding force to influencing both the qualitative and quantitative indicators regarding the need of empowerment. The main features of NEP (1986) are as follows –

- a. To gear the entire education system to play a positive international role in the empowerment of women.
- b. To promote women's studies as a part of various courses and encouragement to educational institutions.
- c. To access of women programs of vocational technical and professional education.

- d. To create dynamic managerial structure to cope up the targets envisaged.

The Government of India declared 2001 as the year of women empowerment. The National policy for the empowerment of women was passed in 2001. The policy focus three policy approaches.

Judicial legal system - by making the legal system more responsive gender sensitive for need.

Economic Empowerment - by mainstreaming gender perspective in the enhancing in the development process of enhancing women's capacities and access to economic opportunities.

Social empowerment - Through focused efforts on education, health and nutrition.

#### ROLE OF EDUCATION FOR EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN

As other part of the world there are large disparities in the economic, social and political opportunities available to men and women in India. Gender discrimination began early in life and continues as the female child grows over first in the form of smaller ration of food and nutrition and later in the form of fewer schooling opportunities as compared to the boys. Education constitutes the instrument of social transformation and development. Elementary education empowers women providing basic information and skill and higher education enhance their capabilities an enter any field or profession. But the prevailing education system denies opportunities to vast section of population particularly rural women. In some parts of the country the female literary rate is as low as 18% while in the urban areas it is 48%. The estimated dropout rate for girls is 56% at the middle school stage. (2001 census). Gender disparity of schooling is greatest in Bihar, U.P, Rajasthan, where the gross enrolment rate for females is about two thirds or less than that for males (The world bank report 2005). In rural areas high illiteracy rate, lack of decision-making power over their fertility and early marriage of girls limit their chances of coming out of poverty. Education plays an active role elevating women's positions and promoting their rights in society. It is the first step to empowerment by opening a person to a new world of information and awareness of present state of affairs. Empowerment will occur only if education is used creatively by active participation in the economy and society. It enables

women not only to gain more knowledge about the world but also helps her to get status self-confidence. Amartya Sen emphasises that education empower women within the family and society. Women are not only improving their own welfare but through their “agency” act to improve the wellbeing of their children and help transformation society itself. Education impact in reducing domestic violence. In poor areas where women are isolated within their communities have little education and cannot earn much, girls are often regarded as an economic burden and women and girls sometimes suffering deliberate neglect and outright. Although reducing domestic violence involves complicated social change, some researchers suggest that when women gain education earning capacity, standing in society this neglect gives away. (Sharms S.C. & Sweta Baksi, 2009). Empowerment of women means increasing economic, social, political strength, self-reliant and heaving a positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation. But lack of education basically rural women is not able to active participation in decision making, political process, employment of profitable jobs and deprives from enjoyment of their rights. Education will help women to make themselves aware about the different programs taken for their empowerment of their rights their importance for social development, education of the women will also facilitate knowledge of nutrition, sanitation and equal status of son and daughter.

Caldwell Suggest that education empowers women by leading to (a) Reduced fatalism in the face of children’s ill-health and a more ready acceptance of western medicine (b) Greater capability for manipulating the world resulting from better awareness, greater confidence in seeking out and gaining access to quality care, and enhanced self-esteem (c) A shift in the traditional intra-family balance of power away from the patriarch and the mother-in-law such that children become beneficiaries of a better allocation of domestic resources. Clelend Van Ginneken point out that higher levels of female literacy could lead to favourable change in reproductive behaviour, namely its influence in delaying marriage, leading to early cessation childbearing and better spacing of children, enhance socio-economic status of familiar, better use of health services, and improved domestic care of children, all

of which contribute to lowering infant mortality rates (Dube, M.P.).

Thus, education is the most important factor for empowerment of rural women. Education will enable women to enrich and develop themselves and, in the process, achieve true equality in terms of economic political and social participation.

#### CAUSES OF LOW LITERACY AMONG THE RURAL WOMEN

It is not possible to find out a single factor responsible for low literacy rate of rural women in India. Because education is a multi-dimensional process. Low literacy rate of rural women related with many social, educational, demographic, political and administrative factors. Some of these factors are -

- Lower enrolment of girls in schools is one of the fundamental factors of which hamper in empowerment of rural. According to latest statistics two out of every ten girls is the age group of 6-11 are still not enrolled in schools (Bharadwaj S.K. & Rani, Sangeeta, August - 1-07, 2011)
- Higher drop-out rate of girls from schools is another cause of low literacy rate of rural women in India. According to 2001 census dropout rate of girls at the middle schools stage is 56%.
- Another factor is gender discrimination between boy and girl. In India rural social set up boys are given first preferences for education than girls. In many family’s girl children play the role of mother by performing the responsibilities of household work such as fetching water, collection firewood, cleaning and cooking etc. In such family’s attitude of girl child education becomes secondary.
- Dowery system and other social practices act as main causes of deprivation of the girl Childs from their right of education. In many family poor and downtrodden, think that if their daughters are educated more, they have to accumulate more properties to provide as dowery at the time of marriage.
- Another cause of rural women illiteracy is poverty. Because of poverty many families in rural areas children especially girls are considered as their income source. Instead of giving them

education facilities parents have engaged them in different functions to earn money for their livelihood.

- Early marriage is another cause of low literacy rate of rural women in India. The legislation of India prescribed 18 years age for girls to marriage. It is very much ignored and neglected by the families of with low literacy background. This discourages the girl children to continue their schooling and higher education as they enter into family life at the early age.
- Child labour practice also impact in women illiteracy in rural India. According to the UN sources India is the most child labour populous nation. More than 50 million child labours are engaged in different fields, most industries girl children are preferred for high productivity and low cost, they also engaged in domestic works.
- Through the constitution of India and different legislation providing the opportunities of free compulsory education to all the children of India but the enforcement machinery is not fully success to performing its duties and responsibilities.

#### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Women empowerment is an essential part of human resource development women can play a vital role in the social, economic and political development of the society. Empowerment of women is way of building-up women's intellect, capability and potential for participation in social progress. It is a process to shift the gender balance of power which is biased towards men and make it more favourable to accommodate women's sensitivities. But women in India constitute a great mass of illiterate and powerless humanity. Basically, rural women are more illiterate than urban areas. Despite of legal equality. guaranteed by the constitution and innumerable social legislation enact in favour of women still women in India remain the largest backward class emotionally harassed, socially oppressed and economically exploited. In this condition education is one of the most powerful instruments to deliver power into the hands of women. It helps women to ensure legal justices, to earn income or to participate in decision making. Though the government of India introduce special plans and

schemes for women's education still certain socio-economic and other factors stand as the barrier of women's education basically in rural areas which are discussed in the study. To remove these problems certain measures should be considered to bring change in women's education and empowerment.

Firstly Appropriate steps should be taken by the educational authorities with the participation of communities in order to bring the girl children to the main stream of education.

Secondly to increase the enrolment of girls in schools the enrolment can be made even mandatory for every girls by the government in the realm of compulsory education.

Thirdly, the social evils like dowery child marriage and other practices should be eliminated through well-designed packages of mass awareness programs, social welfare measures will full support of public, political parties, NGO and government agencies.

Fourthly, the poverty-stricken families can be identified through proper investigation and necessary poverty alleviation services should be provided to strengthen the income so that the families should be able to send their children to schools without much financial difficulties.

Fifthly, the mass media can play a significant role to build a good and positive image about girls and women in the society and encouraged them for education. In rural areas radio is a means of communication which broadcasts various programs which help the uneducated women to energize themselves.

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