



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Women Empowerment through Education

Dr. B.R. Prasad Reddy, M.A. M.Phil. Ph.D.

Associate Professor,  
Department of History,  
K.H. Government Degree College,  
DHARMAVARAM,  
Anantapur (Dist)  
Andhra Pradesh  
India

### Introduction

Dependent women are not empowered women. If women think just that being highly educated and employed they are empowered, it is a myth. Women have to awake from deep slumber and understand the true meaning of empowerment. Everyone must understand that empowering women doesn't mean empowering them in technical area only. Women should remember that they are also rational, intelligent and thinking human beings.

For centuries, women were treated as less-than-equal to men in many ways. Women were not allowed to vote, own property, or work in many jobs. This situation is due to strong addiction to culture and tradition. Such patience is exercised not only for the sake of society and children, but also due to lack of confidence to live as a single woman and face the challenges of life. Women have to awake from deep slumber and understand the true meaning of empowerment. Now that we are out of those dark ages, women are more EMPOWERED to do whatever they want. This means that they have the ability to choose their own destiny, job, vote, and do anything a man can do.

The **Oxford American Dictionary** defines "empowerment" as "to make (someone) stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights." When we talk about women's empowerment, we talk about women taking more of a leadership role. Whereas until very recently, women were subordinates.

**Meaning of Women Empowerment:** The absence of a democratic context has contributed to slow progress in empowering women, particularly in South Asia. Women's empowerment movements have not survived in authoritarian regimes based on gender subordination and ideologies of male dominance. Approaches in South Asia have necessarily focused on opportunities and services rather than on political power. Conceptualizations of gender discrimination and male domination have been over simplified and focused on elimination of

obvious oppressive practices such as wife beating or dowry demands. Empowerment of women that will have lasting impacts must involve consciousness raising before the social construction of gender, which subordinates women in the family, class, caste, religion, or society, can be changed. Three experimental approaches to empowerment in South Asia have been tried: integrated development, economic empowerment, and consciousness rising. Consciousness rising has been implemented in awareness groups and education that have led to a new consciousness, self worth, societal and gender analysis, and access to skills and information. The economic empowerment approach has relied on improving women's control over economic resources and strengthening women's economic security. Grameena Bank has provided one example of organizing women around savings and credit, income generation, and skill training activities. Integrated development approaches have encouraged women's collectives that have engaged in development and social problem resolution and formed specialized activity groups as means of mobilization of women. No one design has assured success. Identification of the poorest and most oppressed in a geopolitical area has provided an entry point for action. Women were encouraged to find a separate time and space for themselves. The three aforementioned approaches have different assumptions about the reason for women's powerlessness: greater poverty and lower access to resources, economic vulnerability, and subordination within patriarchal societies and socioeconomic inequalities.

### **Characteristics of Empowered Women**

1. Empowered women define their attitude, values and behaviours in relation to their own real interest. They have autonomy because they claim their freedom from existing male hierarchies, whether they live in traditional societies or modern industrial societies.
2. Empowered women maintain equal mindedness. They act out roles that challenge male dominance. They respond as equals and co-operate to work towards the common good.
3. Empowered women use their talent to live fulfilling lives. They not only survive the harshness of their own subjugation but also transcend their subjugation.
4. Empowered women maintain their strength on the face of pressures from the religion and work and contribute towards the empowerment of all women.
5. Empowered women define their values and formulate their beliefs themselves, they do not derive their sense of being from male authorities nor do they live vicariously through men.

## Need of Women Empowerment

Empowerment is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- Having decision-making power of their own
- Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision
- Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or.)
- Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
- Having positive thinking on the ability to make change
- Ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power.
- Ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means.
- Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated
- Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma

## 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 woman and to women groups, but also to the families and community as a whole through collective action for development.

**Higher Education:** Higher Education is the aggregate of systematized knowledge and practical skills that allow theoretical and practical problems to be solved by a given type of training, utilizing and creatively developing the modern achievements of science, technology, and culture. The term "higher education" is also applied to the training of highly skilled specialists in the fields of economics, science, technology, and culture at various types of higher schools, which accept persons who have successfully completed secondary general-education schools or secondary specialized-education institutions.

## Relationship between Higher Education and Women Empowerment

Higher education definitely raises women's status whether she contribute in the income of the family or not. She can be at par with men. Majority of the women in our country are uneducated that is why they are suppressed. It is the duty of school teachers to tell them that becoming a wife is not their ultimate goal. Their standing up on their feet and being something is important. Education can bring phenomenal change in women's life resulting in social transformation in the long run by inculcating following attributes among them:

1. Enhancing their confidence
2. Raising their status in the family and society
3. Bring awareness about their rights
4. Boosting their self esteem
5. Increasing their self efficacy

6. Reducing their dependency
7. Better upbringing of their children
8. Enhancing their mobility
9. Opening career opportunities

Increased knowledge, self-confidence and awareness of gender equity are indicators of empowerment process. There is evidence that these components are usually developed during and as a result of higher education. Women, who are educated and earning, are in much better position in our society as compared to uneducated women worker.

This is a commonly understood view about the role of education in transforming women.

**Impact of Education on Women:** The situation faced by women in India is one of the bleakest in the world. Of all the discrimination and denial of opportunity that these women suffer, the most damaging is the denial of the right and opportunity to education.

Widespread poverty and discriminatory cultural practices are frequently cited as prime reasons for the persistence of their gender gap in education. If poverty is the chief culprit, how do we explain the achievement of countries like Kenya, Vietnam and Tajekisthan, which have a lower per capita income than India but score much better, with literacy rates of 78 percent, 94 percent and 100 percent compared to 52 percent for India. The corresponding literacy rates for these countries are: Kenya 70 percent, Vietnam 91 percent, Tajekisthan 100 percent and India 38 percent.

Cultural bias surely does exist and poverty does constitute a factor in influencing educational attainments especially for girls. But it would be very dangerous to limit the analysis of causation to these factors. Valid as these constraints are, they all too often serve to camouflage the political indifference, bureaucratic inertia and social apathy that lie at the core of the problem. The status quo thus becomes a way of life. Breaking this circle requires new forms of realization and mobilization, not just of resources but also of communities themselves. In a wide range of low-income countries, the hold of poverty and negative cultural factors have been broken by concerted political action, genuine people movements or because of a sustained public demand of education.

The 1980s and 1990s brought with them yet another daunting challenge. The expansion of the market economy and industrialization and globalization brought increased inequalities, resulting in loose of livelihoods, erosion of natural resources and with it decreased women's access to water, fuel, fodder and traditional survival resources .It also brought new forms of exploitation-displacement, tourism, sex trade and retrenchment to mention a few. Women are being pushed into less productive sectors. Increased pressure on rural resources accelerated migration to urban areas in search of livelihood. People from backward regions, tribal communities, disadvantaged castes and the displaced communities were being pushed against the wall. Women in such countries shouldered the brunt and this phenomenon was labelled "feminization of poverty".

The word empowerment in the context of women in the Indian policy was used in 1986- Educational Policy which is known as the “NPE 1986” and the title of the chapter is “Education for Women’s Equality and Empowerment”. It has actually two aspects, empowerment first means self empowerment that is women being able to help themselves through whatever is imparted to them and use them to get strength for themselves. It may be education, health or so on and the second is that they should be able to help others to become empowered.

Education is important because literacy has become a tool of evaluating a person- whether one can read or write. Illiteracy has become a very pejorative word in our society. Today we find that literacy itself gives you status. If one can read or write is educated he/she may get access to so much of information. Information about what you can access for others and for yourself, whether it is educational facilities, health, employment opportunity, legal literacy and so forth. These are very extrinsic reasons, but intrinsically education is important for individual development and confidence.

But we see today that even where all these conditions exist, women do not come forward to claim their human entitlements. True empowerment is achieved only if women themselves “realize” that it is important for them to be empowered to enjoy a just, fair and happy life.

Then why is it that they hesitate to come forward? A simple answer to this can be that our government is corrupt and the justice system long drawn is expensive. But there is more to this than putting the blame on “systems”. There is an “inherent” reluctance to leave the “comfort zone of self and societal notions” on one hand and the lack of “skill” to handle such situations in real life on the other.

Empowerment of women as a goal of development projects and programs has gained wider acceptance since 1990s. It is not a simple linear process. It has long been argued by various UN agencies that the critical determinant of women’s socio-economic status is education, and that education is the key to achieving social development by improving the well being of the girls and women and thus promoting gender equity. The experience of numerous programs in the government and the NGO sector shows that it is indeed possible. Empowerment of women was one of the nine primary objectives of the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) and every effort was made to create an enabling empowerment where women could freely exercise their rights within and outside their home as equal Partner with men.

Education is one of the most critical factors responsible for the development of a human person. Right to education, therefore, is held as a very important human right. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is the principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. The international community has realized the importance of education for individual and collective well being made explicit provisions in several human rights instruments on the rights to education. The Constitution of

India was recently amended to provide for the right to compulsory elementary education to children falling between the age group of 6-14 years. Among the world's 900 million literacy people, women outnumber men two to one. Girls constitute the majority of 130 million children without access to primary education (Human Development Report 1995). The illiteracy rate of women is 55.16 percent as against 75.85 percent for men (2001). They can be seen as beggars on road crossing and rag pickers. Kabeer (1990) estimates that the deaths of young girls in India exceed those of young boys by over 300,000 each year and every sixth infant death is specifically due to gender discrimination. Of the 15 million baby girls born in India each year, nearly 25 percent will not live to see their 15th birth day. Of late, the girl child's educational needs received special attention in the wake of national and international efforts on empowering women.

Education, in a broad sense, essentially involves penning the mind, enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence, building a sense of positive self-worth, accessing information and tools of knowledge and acquiring the ability to negotiate this unequal and unjust world from a position of strength. No society has ever liberated itself - economically, politically or socially –without a sound base of educated women. Many countries experiences around the world have demonstrated that investment in educating women is the most precious investment a society can ever make.

### **Conclusion**

Empowering women socially, economically, educationally politically and legally is going to be a Herculean task. It is not going to be easy to change the culture of disregard for women which are so deep-rooted in Indian society. But it does not mean that it is implausible. Only revolutions bring changes in a day, but reforms take their time. This one, in particular, will take its time as well. The idea of women empowerment might sound hard by the yard, but by the inch, it is just a cinch. All we need is a concentrated effort focused in the right direction that would rest only with the liberation of women from all forms of evil. The vision behind the Government declaration 2001 as the year of women empowerment is to provide women equal partnership with men and to enable them to exercise their full control over their own actions. The efforts of the Government are still inadequate and the process of empowering women in India has a long way go. We have to keep in mind that the whole sky will never show the 'glitter' till the gloom and darkness of 'half of the sky' is disengaged There is need for complete abolition of social practices such as dowry, sati, female infanticide, permanent widowhood, child marriage and many more. There are many people and organizations working including the Government that are working for improving the social and economic position of women.

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