

## Women Education: A Developmental Journey from Society to Nation

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### Abstract

Many of us would hear from our elderly people that certain higher level jobs are just not meant for women. Even I have heard it since childhood – “Teaching profession is the best and safest profession for women”. If we look behind the history, literacy of women at that time was looked upon as a disgrace. Women were treated badly and very often the importance of women in the society was underestimated. They were considered inferior to men. Even now this concept has not changed as expected. However, the role and status of women in society have significantly changed during the last few decades. Twenty first century has brought in its trail a new hope for women. There came drastic changes in the role, ambitions and attitudes of women. From a non-entity, they have been able to establish themselves as an identity of their own in the modern society in different areas such as- politics, business, medicine, law etc. And these impacts are simply due to the fact that women are now educating themselves.

Late Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru stated-“The most reliable indicator of a country’s character is the status and social position of women more than anything else.” Enrolment of women in higher education has grown, but the figures are not satisfactory as compared to that of the boys. The main barriers of women in higher education include early marriage, poor financial condition of parents, lack of suitable curriculum for girls’ etc. The scenario cannot be changed overnight, but women education should positively stand up for the triple-folded actions- as the founder and fashioner of a happy family, to be able to earn her livelihood independently and honorably if circumstances demand her to do so and to discharge her duties as a responsible and enlightened citizen.

**Keywords:** Women education, Barriers, Society, National development.

### Introduction

Women education refers to any form of education that aims at improving the knowledge and skill of a women and girls. It includes general education at schools and colleges, vocational and technical education, professional education, health education etc.

Women education in India is a very important topic in modern context. Women education is very much important for the full development of a country. It is like an effective medicine to cure a patient completely. Educated women are weapons who yield positive impact on the Indian society through their contribution at home and professional fields. The social and

economical development of a country largely depends upon the education of women.

Both men and women cover the population of the country. They are like the two sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other because women give birth to the next generations. Therefore they need equal opportunity to participate in the development of the country, hence get the scope of education.

### History of Women Education In India

According to the 2011 census, the female literacy rate in India is 65.46%. This figure is still below the world average rate of 79.7%.

Women education in India plays a very important role not only for the development of human resources, but also for the improvement in quality of life. If we look into the Vedic age, we will find that women had access to education in India but they gradually lost the right. During British period, there was revival of interest in women education. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar emphasized on women education in India.

A report of National Committee on Women Education (1959) states –“It cannot be denied that the general picture of the education of girls was the most unsatisfactory and girls received practically no formal instruction whatever, except for the little domestic instruction that was available to the daughter of the upper class families.”

Jyotirao Phule is remembered as the champion of women education in India. He along with his wife Savitribai Phule, opened the first school for girls in 1848. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Baba Saheb Ambedkar were leaders of the lower caste who took great initiatives to make education available to women in India. Women education got its best after the country got independence in 1947. Different municipal committees and other local bodies were encouraged to open primary schools. In the year 1970, training colleges for women were established for the first time and women were trainee to become teachers in girl's school (Mondal,2015).

The literacy rate of women in India has grown over the three decades. In 1971, only 22% of the Indian women were literate and by the end of 2001, 54.16% female were literate. According to the 2011 census, the female literacy rate in India is 65.46%. This figure is still below the world average rate of 79.7%.

#### **Methodology of Study**

The present study has been done from reviewing different articles, research papers, journals and books. It is a qualitative study.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

The present study is carried out with the following objectives-

To study the previous status of women in ancient India.

To find out the present situation of women education in our country.

To carry out a study that will explore the barriers and problems faced by the female students seeking education.

To find the probable measures to reduce the problems of women education.

To study the recommendations of different commissions and committees on women education.

#### **Recommendations of different Commissions on Women Education in India**

Different commissions and committees laid great emphasis on women education and recommended according to the requirements of the society. Among them some important ones are-

##### **Bhaktavatsalam Committee(1963)**

A separate women inspectorate will help to bring in more girls to school.

It is only by providing women teachers with quarters near the schools that many educated women can be attracted to the teaching profession.

##### **Hansa Meheta Committee (1961-62)**

- No differentiation should be made in the curricula for boys and girls at the primary stage.
- Women should be appointed as the staff of all primary schools.
- Co-education should be adopted as the general pattern at the elementary stage.
- The curricula of general education should be common to boys and girls and no differentiation should be made therein on the basis of sex.

##### **Kothari Commission (1964-66)**

- The special programmes recommended by the National Committee on Women Education
- The general programmes that is to give attention to the education of girls at all stages and in all sectors and for the expansion and improvement of education.

### **Durgabai Deshmukh Committee**

Women's education should be treated as a major programme in the field of education. Gaps between boys' and girls' education must be bridged in no time.

### **University Education Commission (1948-49)**

Women are human beings and have as much right to full development as men have. Same facilities should be provided to the women colleges and universities as provided to men's colleges and universities.

### **Mudaliar Commission (1952-53)**

It recommended for the study of Home science in all girls' schools.

State government should take effort to open girl schools wherever there is demand for them.

### **Importance of Women Education**

**Better standard of living:** Women education will help them to earn their livelihood, thereby raising their economic condition and their status in the society.

**Decreased mortality rate:** Women education will help to increase the age of marriage of women, thereby improving the chances of survival of the mother and the baby.

**Improved health and hygiene:** Women, on getting education, will be able to nurture their children in a better way. This will result in the improved health and hygiene of the new born.

**Increase women empowerment:** Women education will help to increase women empowerment to seek gender equality in the society which eventually will lead to narrow down the social inequities.

**Achievement of self-honour:** Through proper education, women may raise their voice for their own honour and dignity.

**Self-reliance:** Education makes a woman self-reliant and therefore can stand against injustice and exploitation.

**Elimination of crime against women:** Many of the social evils and crimes of the society, such as- dowry, flesh trade, female infanticide can be eradicated by educating women. An educated woman greatly influences the thoughts and beliefs of the society members.

**Prevents social exclusion of women:** Uneducated women spare most of the time

in household works and other undignified profession and get isolated from the society, leading to depression and other physical ailments. An educated women unlikely to go all through this and will ultimately brew a balanced society.

**Integral development:** The goals of integral and sustainable development can be carried out through proper women education. Women education provides an equal opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder with men which leads to better integral development of the country.

**Exploration of hidden potentials:** Women education helps to develop 'brain drain' and thereby explores the hidden potentials of a female/girl child who was most likely to indulge herself in household works. It will positively benefit the nation, as women are less likely to leave her roots and migrate to other nation.

**Women in politics/Bureaucracy:** Women education can lead to raise political leaders who can fight for the rights and justice of other woman, ultimately leading to a better society.

**Protection against HIV/AIDS infection:** Educated women will have learned about the ways to protect themselves from getting the threatening diseases like HIV or AIDS.

### **Problems of Women Education in India**

Women face varieties of problems during their journey of education. Women have to face obstacles and hindrances at every stage of their life- from the very beginning of their school life to higher education, and sometimes even after that. The problems include-

**Poor financial conditions of the parents:** As more than 70% of the population earn their livelihood through agriculture, there are cases where the mother and father work in the farm. And as a result the girl child is not permitted to attend the school and is forced to engage in household works.

**Negative parental attitude:** One of the most important challenges to promote girls' education in India. Negative attitude of parents toward girls creates hindrances for girls' education.

**Early marriage:** Many girls become victim of early marriage every year especially in the rural areas. They are often pulled out of

school at a very critical age in their development. This clearly restricts the percentage of women education .

**Lack of proper curriculum for education of girls:** In majority of the institutions no variations exist between the curriculum of the boys and girls. But both have their own needs and requirements. Hartog committee(1929) stated-‘the curriculum for girls should be consistent with and suitable to their requirements.

**Scarcity of female teachers to serve in rural areas:** Shortage of lady teachers hampers the development of women education to some extent. There are many lady teachers who often become reluctant to serve in the rural areas. This clearly diminishes the number of female teachers in the rural schools thereby having a negative effect on the development of women education indirectly.

**Lack of proper physical facilities:** In our society, co-education is still a controversial issue, particularly in rural areas. Girl students sometimes face different types of problems in those schools. One of the big inconveniences is the problem of sanitation.

**Transport problems:** In several places, female students have to move out to a distant place to continue the education. In those cases, transport becomes one of the problems toward girls’ education and that eventually leads to lesser percentage of educated women.

**Wastage /Dropout and Stagnation:** Wastage and stagnation are the two terms first introduced by Hartog Committee (1929) which are the two burning problems of the day. Lack of women education increases the chance of wastage and stagnation in our society.

**Lack of social consciousness among women:** There is still lack of enthusiasm and social consciousness among women toward women education.

**Lack of proper security:** One of the problems of women education is surely lack of security of female students in the school and on their way towards school. Instances of abduction, rape and molestation of female child arises a big question mark towards their journey to women education.

## **Suggestions for Overcoming the barriers to Women Education In India**

**Making the classroom gender sensitive:** Female students face different problems in the classroom. Therefore the classroom environment should be made gender sensitive.

**Recruitment of teachers sensitive to gender:** Both male and female teachers need to receive training in gender awareness.

**Rescheduling the curriculum for women:** The curriculum may be rescheduled according to the need and requirements of female child. At the same time thoughtful revision of text books, classroom materials may be done.

**Making sure girls are safe:** Parents become unwilling to send their daughters to school because of sexual or gender violence. Therefore in order to promote women education, women must be kept secured.

**Encouraging girls’ participation in education:** Female students should be encouraged to participate in education process.

**Decreasing the domestic work load:** Many girls are kept in the home for household works. Therefore decreasing the domestic work load may increase their chances of attending the schools.

## **Conclusion**

The importance of women in matters of building the character of the citizens, economic reconstruction of the country and social reforms is being realised today. The awakening among Indian women has been really considerable during the recent years. Inside the country, there is a demand for equal rights. Apart from being a daughter, wife and mother, a women must play a positive role in the country’s planning, progress and development. The problems faced by the women cannot be totally abolished in one day. Government policies work only as long as the people are being supportive. We, all the citizens of the country have to participate fully and honestly in those programmes to lower down the barriers of women education in India. It’s time to change the mentality of ours to bring the overall development of the nation. However the change in the attitude

of the citizens toward the improvement of women education is still a long way to go.

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