



NEP 2020: Women Empowerment

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Abstract: *Women Empowerment essentially means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. For a nation to grow, for democracy to be truly established and for wider participation of the population in growth and development of the economy, the empowerment of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status are of vital importance. In National Education Policy 2020, even greater emphasis has been laid on women's education. Several steps have been outlined to make women's education even more progressive. Among them are setting up non-formal education programs enabling out-of-school girls to enter the mainstream of education and providing education to remote rural women through open schools or distance education systems. Appointing of more female teachers to fructify these means of expanding women's education have also been suggested in the NEP 2020.*

Key Words: *Women Empowerment, NEP 2020, Education*

Introduction:

Education, call it vidya, cognition or science is the mainstay of development of a nation and society. The main goals of women's education are to make women aware and sharpen their vision in favor of equal rights, to enable women's participation in running the country at all levels, to ensure women's participation in socio-economic development and poverty alleviation, to help achieve economic progress through self-employment to create attitudes and self-confidence among women so that they can take active steps in the process of prevention of dowry and violence against women as also to encourage the formation of beautiful and comfortable families.

Empowerment is the path to achieving full quality of life for both men and women. Empowerment helps to take control of one's life. Additionally, it helps build confidence in the person, by which he learns to solve problems and acquire the necessary skills to move up professionally.

Forms of Empowerment of Women:

Women Empowerment essentially means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. For a nation to grow, for democracy to be truly established and for wider participation of the population in growth and development of the economy, the empowerment of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status are of vital importance. Discussed hereunder are the forms of empowerment of women:

Educational empowerment: Education is considered as one of the most important means to empower women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Education is the key to the prosperity, development and welfare of women as well as the overall development of the country.

Economic Empowerment: Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets.

Social Empowerment: Social empowerment comes with economic empowerment as the latter lends a long handle for *social position* bargaining and garnering respect. Social empowerment refers to a process that affects the distribution of power in interpersonal relations among different persons and activities of the society. Social empowerment also refers to the enabling force that strengthens women's social relations and their position in social structures.

Political Empowerment: Political empowerment means equal participation and equitable representation of women at all levels of the political process and public life in each community and society. It enables women to articulate their concerns and needs. It also leads to the full and equal participation of women in decision-making process in all spheres of life.

Health empowerment: Women's health and safety is another important area. The empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety, from womb to grave and all in between.

Women's education in pre-Independence period:

The unprecedented awakening of women in the country as a result of the National Movement wove women's progress in all aspects of the social fabric of the country. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohan Roy and others built a strong movement to bring women into the prevalent education system. Sister Nivedita played an important role in the spread of Indian women's education. As a result of the efforts and hard work of liberal social reformers, the Indian society became increasingly aware of the need for women's education.

The first of the concrete steps towards bringing women of India under the umbrella of a formal educational system can be traced to the establishment of the Calcutta Female School in Bengal in 1849 through the efforts of John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar became the first secretary of this school. Later this school was called Bethune Women's School. In 1887 the school was transformed into Bethune College, being the first college for women in Asia.

Other memorable institutions are Banaras Central Hindu Girls' College founded by Mrs. Annie Besant, Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi established by Lady Harlingen 1916 to teach medicine to women and Professor D. K. Karve's Indian Women's University which had a specially designed curriculum for women. Many more schools and colleges for women followed all over the country. Vocational education was arranged for in these institutions. Scholarships were also introduced for the education of poor women. In 1946-47 it was seen that 32,14,860 women were getting education in various educational institutions in India.

Progress in women's education after Independence:

Independence and the Constitution of Independent India gave special shape to women's education. The biggest issue of this period was the change in the social status of women. Article 45 of the Indian Constitution thus calls for the education of all children up to the age of 14, irrespective of gender. Article 14, on the other hand, speaks of equal rights for all citizens of India. Everyone's right to education has been recognized irrespective of religion, caste and gender. Article 15 emphasizes that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, caste, gender or place of birth, individually or

severally. Women are specially mentioned here. In terms of education, women have equal rights with men today. The government is encouraging women's education. The guidelines of the constitution, thus, have had a profound effect on the spread of women's education. Today, there are no obstacles in the way of spreading the free rights of women anywhere in the work domain.

Activities undertaken by various committees, education commissions, five-year plans are based on constitutional directives. From the early years of independence several of such Commissions and Policies have emphasized Women's Education inter-alia the general development of the nation. University Education Commission (1948-49), Mudaliar Commission (1952-53), Kothari Commission (1964-66), National Policy on Education (1968) and National Policy on Education (1986) have all recommended that Women's Education be put in the driver's seat of social transformation.

National Policy on Education – 1986

The main objective of the National Education Policy of 1986 was to eliminate inequality. The policy emphasized the redistribution of opportunities such that those deprived for so long may overcome this outstanding with growing equal opportunities. Education was sought to be made the vehicle giving women a special place in society. Designing of new curriculum, textbooks, teacher education and a change in the administrative approach of schools so as to encourage various programmes for the development of women was given priority in the 1986 NEP. The education of girls was emphasized not only on grounds of social justice but also for accelerating social transformation. Special measures were recommended to get girls to complete their primary education. Participation of women in vocational, technical and professional education was also sought to be increased in this NEP. Increasing the literacy rate of women and removing its barriers had been given special importance in the 1986 Education Policy.

National Education Policy 2020

In National Education Policy 2020, even greater emphasis has been laid on women's education. Several steps have been outlined to make women's education even more progressive. Among them are setting up non-formal education programs enabling out-of-school girls to enter the mainstream of education and providing education to remote rural women through open schools or distance education systems. Appointing of more female teachers to fructify these means of expanding women's education have also been suggested in the NEP 2020.

The NEP 2020 also recommends expanding the scope of vocational education which could provide employment to women and thereby lead them to economic freedom. Without economic empowerment the clarion call for Women's Empowerment is meaningless as it is primarily due to economic dependence that women have been assigned a secondary place in society. This, in turn, has led to the proliferation of many of the social evils plaguing our society like dowry demands and deaths, domestic violence, malnutrition of women, female foeticide, etc.

The NEP 2020 envisages creating a new sense of responsibility through the participation and involvement of a large number of women at the regional, state and central levels at each level of education. It also advocates quality education being provided to every woman so that they can achieve success along with staying power in the work domain.

Role of NGOs in women empowerment:

NGOs play a very important role in sowing the seeds of women's empowerment at the grassroots. Many NGOs work primarily to alleviate women's poverty, while some NGOs work to improve women's quality of life. The various roles of NGOs in women empowerment are:

- (i) Educating women in remote rural areas.

- (ii) Promoting technology among women, both in urban and rural areas.
- (iii) Arranging work for women through self-help groups.
- (iv) Helping women's groups secure loans by standing as guarantor.
- (v) Providing training to women so that they may become economically independent.
- (vi) Encouraging women to venture into unchartered territory.
- (vii) Educating women regarding reproductive, menstrual and general health and hygiene.
- (viii) Educating women to take control over their bodies and the general health of their families through available foods.
- (ix) Providing legal aid to women in distress, suffering marital discord and/or domestic violence.

Government Schemes and Programmes for Women Empowerment:

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) and the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) are implementing various welfare schemes and programmes for Indian women. These schemes and programmes are listed below:

- (i) Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)
- (ii) Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)
- (iii) Support to Training & Employment Programme for Women (STEP)
- (iv) Working Women Hostel (WWH)
- (v) Women Empowerment and Livelihood Programme in Mid- Gangetic Plain (Priyadarshini)
- (vi) Swadhar Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances (SSWDC)
- (vii) Scheme for Combating Trafficking
- (viii) Family Counselling Centres (FCCs)
- (ix) Short Stay Home Programme (SSHP)
- (x) Awareness Generation Programme (AGP)
- (xi) Condensed courses of Education for Adult Women (CCE)
- (xii) Integrated Scheme for Women's Empowerment (ISWE)
- (xiii) Gender Budgeting Scheme (GBS)
- (xiv) Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme (BBBPS)

How Education has helped Women Empowerment:

Education is one of the most important tools for improving the condition of women. It is possible to empower women in the society through education. It is not only limited to developing the personality of an individual but also plays an important role in economic, social and cultural development. Education makes women conscious. As a result, women make efforts to change their condition. Increased awareness and education have inspired women to come out of the four walls of the home. Industrialized and technological

change has opened vast opportunities of employment for women in different sectors of the national economy. Social attitudes are turning for the better. But such change needs to be accelerated both in terms of velocity and direction so that such winds of change transform the life of women and help them surpass their own goals.

Stumbling Blocks on the Pathway to Education □ Enlightenment □ Empowerment:

There is no doubt that post-Independence interest in women's education has increased manifold and avenues of education for women have expanded considerably. However, it needs to be observed that in many areas women are still lagging behind men in education as well as empowerment. The major stumbling blocks on this pathway are enumerated below:

Poverty and undeveloped conditions: Extreme poverty and miserable living conditions of a large section of the rural and urban poor is a major obstacle to the advancement of women's education. In many cases they cannot meet the basic necessities of life, like food, clothing, shelter, etc., in which case there is reluctance to send their children to school.

Attitudes of parents: Negative attitudes of parents often become a major obstacle to women's education and empowerment. Parents, especially in remote rural areas, still feel that sending girls to school and educating them is an unaffordable luxury. A large section of society is still unable to comprehend the social and cultural significance of education, more so, women's education.

Lack of girls' schools and women teachers: There is a dearth of girls' schools, especially in rural areas. Many villages have no primary schools for girls. The secondary education system is inadequate and the lack of sufficient female teachers is a hindrance discouraging the education of girls.

Patriarchal society: Indian society still remaining essentially patriarchal, the true education of women is readily put on the back burner by a large section of society. Wherever there is a competition for family resources between sons and daughters, the sons invariably win the race, talent notwithstanding.

Social evils and outdated conventions: Prevalence of ancient customs, attitudes and blind superstitions still stand in the way of women's education in large parts of the country. Girls are still considered good only for housework and bearing male progeny. So entrenched are these values that education is considered an evil which will turn good marriage-worthy girls into rebels and unfit to make good marriages!

Lack of proper planning: In many cases, lack of proper planning is hampering women's education and empowerment. It is observed that in remote rural areas, at the administrative level no proper plan has been adopted for women's education.

The Way Forward:

In order to overcome the roadblocks to fuller empowerment of women in all strata of society the following steps need to continuously undertaken and scaled up:

- (i) All general, technical, vocational, higher technical education as well as all types of vocational training should be accessible to women in both rural and urban areas.
- (ii) Introduce quality curriculum, recruit qualified teachers and improve institutional infrastructure so as to become women-friendly.
- (iii) Women need to be provided scholarships/stipends for higher education.
- (iv) More schools need to be set up for women, especially in remote rural areas where girls do not have access to education.

- (v) Safe and affordable hostelling facilities need to be developed so as to encourage girls and families to opt for studies and work away from the home.
- (vi) Opportunities should be provided for active participation in sports and physical education.
- (vii) Look into the reasons for dropout of girls and undertake various initiatives for girls and women who are dropping out of school ahead of time.
- (viii) Government should give more emphasis on female education to increase empowerment level of women.
- (ix) Provide non-monetary incentives to families to send their girls to school and college.

Conclusion:

Women being the hand that rocks the cradle and the creator of new life should be empowered. And the first step towards women's empowerment is education. Irrespective of whether women work outside the home, educating girls and women still serves as the most effective investment towards building a developed nation. Today Indian women have broken many barriers and hit through the *glass ceiling*, be it in the arena of company management, entrepreneurship, technology, research, scientific advancement, space research, joining police and armed forces – you name it, our women are there. If our society makes provisions for and takes necessary steps towards women's empowerment, it will unveil a new era in the life of all Indians. By empowering women, social, political and economic development of the country will automatically take place.

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