



Importance of Girls' Education in Maharashtra for Women Empowerment

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Abstract: *Women always have the potential to challenge men at every stage of life. However, it is not possible if they are not getting empowered and do not get a proper education. So, it is very much important to provide proper education to girls. A country can only prosper at its potential if all human beings of the country utilize its full potential. For that, we need to provide women with the opportunity they deserve. When we say 'we need women empowerment', it means we have already admitted that women have lacked behind. Yes, Women have lacked behind in our society due to ignorance, torture, prohibition, and prejudices of ages. Although girls' education was encouraged in ancient Indian society, however, they were ignored in the medieval period. Evil traditions like child marriage, sati dah, devadasi system were also prevalent during the period. In this study, we will discuss the objectives of girls' education and what is the present condition of women. We will try to determine the reasons for women's lacking behind and the importance of women's empowerment and, in the end, will discuss the recommendations of various commissions and committees regarding girls' education.*

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Girls' Education, Gender, Gender Inequality, Gender Equality.*

Introduction: India is now the sixth-largest economy in the world. Over 133 million Indians were lifted out of poverty between 1994 and 2012. It is an accomplishment that India and the world can be proud of; however, it would have been even more dramatic if a more significant number of women had been able to participate in the workforce. Between 2005 and 2012, nearly 20 million Indian women dropped out of the workforce, which is equivalent to the entire population of Sri Lanka. Only 27% of Indian women had a job or were actively looking for one, compared to 79% of Indian men. The contribution of Indian women to GDP is less than half of the world average, and it compares unfavourably to the 40% in China. If around half of women held jobs in India, it would be able to boost its growth by 1.5% points to 9% annually.

The rise of India has led to expectations and speculation about how it will change the global order. On the one hand, India is massive, with more than 1.3 billion people, and is on track to become the sixth-largest economy globally. However, India struggles with poverty and other challenges of a developing economy. According to the 2011 census, 35% of Indian women are not literate. As a result, the vast population of India is still not empowered.

Conceptual framework:

Women empowerment: As an umbrella term, female empowerment entails many different things, including accepting women's perspectives and seeking out their ideas, as well as increasing women's status through awareness, education, literacy, and training.

Girls' education: Girls' education includes all the facilities and opportunities available to her for education.

Gender: Societies define gender in terms of gender roles and norms, which are the roles, behaviour, and values appropriate for men and women.

Gender inequality: The term "gender inequality" refers to discrimination based on sex or gender that privileges or prioritizes one gender or sex over another.

Gender equality: The concept of gender equality means having equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for everyone.

Objectives of the study:

- To study the objectives of girls' education.
- To study the present position of women in India.
- To study the reasons of women lacking behind.
- To study the need and importance of women's empowerment.
- To study the recommendations of commissions and committees on girls' education.

Objectives of girls' education: National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has developed the following objectives for girls' education:

- Promoting girls' education and development.
- Research on the education and development of girls must be undertaken and promoted.
- Developing and applying women's studies concepts and methods.
- To eliminate gender bias and disparities, we must appropriately intervene in policy planning, curriculum and teacher education.
- Promote innovative girls' education programmes in the country by acting as a catalyst.
- To serve as a national resource centre for girls' education and development.
- Providing consulting services in the area of girls' education and development.

The present position of women in India: Women's position in Indian society changed after the independence. These are discussed below:

- **Literacy rate:** India's literacy rate was 12% at its independence. The literacy rate increased to 18%, of which 27% are male and 9% female are literate, according to the 1951 census. According to the 2011 census, the number has increased dramatically to 74%, of which 82% are male, and 65% female are literate.
- **Girls' Enrolment in school and colleges:** Despite government initiatives and non-governmental organizations encouraging girls from remote areas, rural areas, and weaker societies to participate in education, they are still the most affected due to their illiteracy. There is no doubt that the number of women enrolled in formal and non-formal education institutions has increased steadily after independence. Separate schools and colleges for girls have increased considerably since independence. The Tamil Nadu Government has given women's education priority. The number of girls students is

higher than that of boys from primary school to the university level. This is the same situation in many Indian towns and cities.

- **Economic condition:** Participation of women in economic empowerment has increased after the independence. By 2025, it is estimated that India could add \$770 billion to its GDP simply by giving women equal opportunities, according to a report by McKinsey Global Institute. However, women's current contribution to the GDP stands at 18%. In India, there are 432 million women of working age, of which 343 million are not in paid formal work. The women of rural India are achieving new milestones every day. Despite social and familial exclusion, they claim their right to financial independence, starting businesses from scratch and inspiring others.
- **Political change:** As part of the panchayat system, women receive 50% reservation, and many national programs, such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission, provide them with leadership opportunities; initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Mission and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act enable them to hold supervisory positions. For many decades, Indian voters have elected women to many states' legislative assemblies and national parliaments, including the posts of president and prime minister. During the 2019 Indian general election, Naam Tamilar Katchi from Tamil Nadu fielded 50 per cent of women candidates across the 40 Lok Sabha seats. It was the first Indian party to offer equal numbers of seats to women and men. In the 2021 legislators' election, 117 of the 234 assembly constituencies were offered to women following the same 50:50 ratio.

Reasons for women lack behind in India:

- **Male child fascination:** India has a long history of male child preference. Girls have to sacrifice for boys. At every stage of life, boys get preference over girls. This problem is reduced in society compared to earlier, but it still exists.
- **Early marriage:** Parents and relatives start preparing for marriage before a girl completes 18. There is still a belief that girls need to get early marriage in India. After the marriage, it is seen that most of the girls are not allowed to complete their education. As a result, they lack behind the boys.
- **Conservatism:** Across India, people believe that educated girls become morally depraved; Muslim girls' purdah system and Hindu girls' early marriage have been significant obstacles to the expansion of women's education; Traditional prejudices persist in rural and backward areas to some extent; The lower and poorer castes of society are the easiest to fall victim to these superstitions and prejudices.
- **Poverty:** Education has become an expensive affair, so parents prefer boys even if they want to allow their children to study. In underdeveloped countries like India, poor economic conditions are the biggest challenge to women's education.
- **Low literacy rate of parents:** There is no denying that most of the parents in our country are illiterate and ignorant and lack an understanding of the importance of education. They do not send their daughters to educational institutions; due to this ignorance, they discourage women from going to school.
- **Lack of female teachers:** The country does not have the required number of qualified women teachers; Those women who are available do not like to work at village schools because of the lack of facilities; The lack of female teachers discourages girls from attending school.
- **Lack of transport in rural areas:** It is challenging for women to access schools in rural, hilly, and remote areas because transportation facilities are not available; women teachers and girl students cannot travel to schools in these areas; therefore, women's education is hampered significantly.

- **Lack of physical facilities:** Hostels without proper security measures or hostels with inadequate hostel facilities hinder women's education; most parents do not allow their daughters to attend distant schools and colleges because the facilities are unsafe.

Need and importance of women's empowerment in India: Women's empowerment in India can solve many social problems that have existed in society for a long time.

- Increase girls' education rate:** A majority of Indian parents still believe that the male children are the ones who will earn and take care of them in future. This mindset can be changed if girls are empowered.
- Reducing early marriage:** India has been facing problems regarding girls' marriage for a long time. Earlier girls are forced to marry after 10-12 years. After the law that allows girls to marry only after 18 years, girls' average marriage age has increased. However, it is still low compared to boys. It is seen that when a girl is educated and empowered, her marriage age is automatically increased.
- Reducing child-birth mortality and fertility rate:** If a girl's marriage age increases, the child-birth mortality rate and women's fertility will decrease. If women's fertility rate decreases, it will help the country control its population explosion.
- Reducing maternal mortality rate:** In many cases, mothers lose their lives while giving birth to their children due to high blood pressure, bleeding, infection, malnutrition, and many other factors; this occurs for many reasons, including their immature age.
- Reducing female infanticide:** India has a long history of killing female children before birth or immediately after birth. Empowering women can abolish this problem very quickly.
- Establishing equality in society:** We talk about equality every time. Nevertheless, it is impossible to establish equality in a man-dominated society without empowering women.
- Abolishing the dowry system:** There is no hidden secret that the Government of India has tried to abolish the dowry system for a long time. However, even after strict law, the dowry system still exists. Empowering women is the only way to abolish such problems.
- Increasing decision making:** Empowering women can help increase women in decision making. An educated and empowered woman makes his home happy and healthy. Women have the power to run the family. They can easily share their valuable suggestions with their family and society if they are educated and empowered.

Recommendations of commissions and committees on girls' education:

The leaders in our country believe that no national progress can be achieved without encouragement for women's education. Therefore, women's education has been considered one of the most critical programmes in our country since independence. The central government, state governments, and non-government organizations have been actively promoting women's education; The expansion of women's education has been considered in the five-year plans of India. Let us look at the recommendations put forth by different education commissions and committees.

- **University Education Commission (1948-1949):**
 - Amenities of life:** As women are increasingly admitted to colleges initially intended for men, women must also be provided with the basic amenities of life.
 - Educational opportunities:** The educational opportunities for women should not be curtailed but rather substantially increased.

3. **Proper educational guidance:** An intelligent education should be provided to women according to their needs and capabilities by qualified male and female advisers to help them understand their real educational interests.
 4. **Cultural and social responsibility:** Men in mixed colleges should expect the right amount of courtesy and social responsibility.
 5. **Equality in institutions:** Women should be given due consideration in co-educational institutions.
 6. **Equal salaries:** Equal pay for equal work should also apply to women teachers.
- **National Committee on Women's Education (1958):**
 1. **Universal enrolment:** Attempts should be made to enrol girls in the age group 6-11 by 1979 and in the age group 11-14 by 1981 to expand girls' education.
 2. **Improvement programme:** The recommendations of the Central Advisory Board of Education should be implemented to improve women's education, and for this purpose, 100% assistance should be provided. The programmes include (i) construction of teachers' quarters; (ii) provision of school teachers; (iii) provision of rural allowance for the lady teachers working in the villages; (iv) provision of hostels; (v) provision of crèches (vi) provision of school uniforms; (vii) provision of mid-day meals; (viii) construction of sanitary blocks.
 3. **Facilities in isolated and backward areas:** The government should provide complimentary housing and transportation to students from hilly, backward, and remote areas to encourage them to get an education.
 4. **Publicity programme:** Documentaries and films about women's education should be prepared and exhibited to raise awareness about women's education.
 5. **Assistance to the voluntary organization:** Building hostels, libraries, and laboratories should be available to non-profit organizations promoting women's education.
 6. **Scholarships:** To encourage girls to continue their education, an adequate number of scholarships should be available.
 7. **Co-education:** Where it is not easy to start separate schools for girls, co-education should be encouraged.
 8. **National council for women's education:** A National Council for Women's Education should be established to study the needs and problems of women's education on a national level.
 - **Recommendations of Hansa Mehta Committee (1962):**
 - In primary schools, it is essential to encourage and practice co-education.
 - If there are a demand and enough enrolment, separate primary schools or middle schools, secondary schools, and colleges for girls should be established.
 - There should be a standard curriculum for both boys and girls at the primary and middle stages.
 - The number of women teachers at the primary level should be increased. Women teachers should be appointed at the secondary and college levels, which are meant for boys, but girls are also admitted.

- At the end of secondary education, girls should be allowed to attend vocational schools to learn about different vocations. Music, drawing, painting, tailoring, and fine arts are subjects of interest for girls. Therefore, proper facilities should be provided in educational institutions.
- **Kothari education commission (1964-1966):**
 1. It is important to consider women's education as a significant educational programme for a while. Moreover, bold efforts must be made to overcome the many challenges involved in female education.
 2. There should be a special administrative apparatus to focus on the education of women and girls. Unique plans should be prepared to meet this need, and their budgets should be allocated by priority.
 3. A special emphasis must be given to girls' education at the primary level. More ancillary services need to be provided. Specific action must be taken to curb wasteful consumption among girls. The expansion of girls' education needs to accelerate. At the secondary level, girls' education should progress more rapidly. The ratio of male to female education should reach 2:1 within 20 years from 3:1.
 4. In order to meet the needs of women in different fields, it should be emphasized that separate schools and hostels be established for girls, as well as part-time and vocational courses. The current ratio of female students to men (1:4) should be increased to about 1:3 at the university stage.

Conclusion: A country cannot prosper without the participation of women. In every country, women play a prominent role in its culture, social life, political life, and economic life. In the last few decades, we have seen a massive improvement in the status of women. However, women's status in rural India still needs to improve. Everyone should move forward to uplift the women's status in the rural area. We need to give up those traditions and customs which create gender inequality in society. "Only those nations progressed in the world that had respect for women and gave them a chance to get education"- Swami Vivekananda.

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