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EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION AND ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

Abstract

Women's empowerment is a new phrase in the vocabulary of gender literature. The phrase is used in two broad senses i.e. general and specific. In a general sense, it refers to empowering women to be self-dependent by providing them access to all the freedoms and opportunities, which they were denied in the past only because of their being 'women'. In a specific sense, women empowerment refers to enhancing their position in the power structure of the society. The word women empowerment essentially means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day- to- day lives in the social, political and economic terms a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage. Empowerment actually is a process that addresses all sources and structures of power. An important means of women's empowerment is economic independence through information, knowledge and necessary skills. The UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education (1998) and the World Education Forum (2000) made a commitment to the attainment of many goals for women's education and empowerment. Education is the tool that can help break the pattern of gender discrimination and bring drastic change for women in developing countries. Educated women are essential to end gender bias. Higher education can open up better paying jobs for women in a country like India. The longer the girl is able to stay in the field of higher education, the greater her chances to pursue worthwhile employment. Higher educated girls can play proactive roles for women empowerment which is the challenge for 21st century. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills, and self- confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process.

Key words: Women empowerment, Higher education and Universities

Introduction

Woman is the builder and molder of a nation's destiny. Though delicate and soft as a lily, she has a heart, far stronger and bolder than man..... She is the supreme inspiration for man's onward march, an embodiment of love, pity and compassion, she is no doubt, her commanding personality, nevertheless, is given by solemn. Higher education is considered to be one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Higher education for women has gained a wider role and responsibility all over the world. Today, in the twenty first century, one cannot afford to ignore the importance of higher education for women any longer. Women which almost constitute half of the population of the country are required to play important role in the development of the country. A nation goes ahead only through the contribution of all its members. It is true that a number of initiatives have been taken for the empowerment of women and significant changes is seen in the status of women in India. But to realize our dream of becoming a developed country, there is a need for mobilization of women in large numbers by empowering them. It is an established fact that higher education plays an important role in empowering women.

What is Empowerment?

Empowerment is a construct shared by many disciplines and arenas. In recent empowerment literature, the meaning of the term empowerment is often assumed rather than explained or defined. Rappoport (1984) has noted that it is easy to define empowerment by its absence but difficult to define in action as it takes on different forms in different people and contexts. Even defining the concept is subject to debate.

Zimmerman (1984) has stated that asserting a single definition of empowerment may make attempts to achieve it formulaic or prescription – like, contradicting the very concept of empowerment. According to Baily (1992), how we precisely define empowerment within our projects and programs will depend upon the specific people and context involved.

Role of Higher Education in Empowerment of Women

It has been realized that social change can take place only if both men and women are educated. Education is made free for all girls up to the higher secondary stage in most of the states and union territories. Further, several states have been made girls' education free up to the university level.

A. Higher Education System

At the time of independence, in 1947, there were only 20 universities and 500 colleges in the country. The number of students and teachers in the higher education system was also very small. But after independence, there has been an exponential increase in all these numbers. During 2013-14, there were 666 universities, including 129 deemed to be universities recognized by UGC. 313 have been state universities and 175 universities which have not been declared eligible to receive Central Assistance under Section 12(B) of UGC Act.

B. Faculty Strength

In the academic year 2013-2014, the total number of teachers in universities and colleges was 10.49 lakhs as compared to 9.51 lakhs teachers in the previous year. Out of the 10.49 lakhs teachers, 82.73% teachers were in Colleges and the remaining 17.30% in University Departments / University Colleges.

C. Growth in Enrolment of Women in Higher Education

There had been a phenomenal growth in the number of women students enrolled in higher education, since independence. The women enrolment which was less than 10 per cent of the total enrolment on the eve of Independence had risen to 44.40 per cent in the academic year 2013-2014. The pace of growth has been particularly faster in the last two decades. As the data in **Table-1** show, the number of women enrolled per hundred men registered more than five times in 2013-2014 as compared to 1950-1951.

Table- 1 Women Students per Hundred Men Students

Year	Total Women Enrolment (000s)	Women Enrolment Per Hundred Men
1950-51	40	14
2013-2014	10552	79.87

D. Distribution of Women Enrolment by State and Faculty

(i) Distribution of Women Enrolment by Faculty

The faculty-wise distribution of women enrolment in higher education during 2013-2014 had been as under

Table - 2

Table -2 Women Enrolment: Faculty-wise* : 2013-2014

NO.	Faculty	Women Enrolment	Percentage to Total Women Enrolment
1	Arts	4738713	44.91
2	Science	1911122	18.11
3	Commerce/Management	1733350	16.42
4	Education	438877	4.16
5	Engineering/Technology	992765	9.41
6	Medicine	464617	4.40
7	Agriculture	30416	0.29
8	Veterinary Science	9373	0.09
9	Law	129089	1.22
10	Others	104127	0.99
	Total	10552449	100.0

* Provisional

(ii) State-wise Distribution of Women Enrolment

During 2013-14, distribution of women enrolment by state shows that the percentage increase has been almost minimal in the enrolment of women as compared to the total enrolment in all the states over the preceding year. Among the states and UTs, Daman and Diu had the highest percentage (68.55%), followed by Goa with 60.23% in terms of women enrolment as a percentage of total enrolment of the state. There are 22 states/UTs which had higher enrolment of women than the national percentage of 44.40%. In the rest of the states, the percentage of women enrolled had been less than the national average with Arunachal Pradesh recording the lowest women enrolment of 36.82% only. In absolute numbers, Uttar Pradesh State had been on the top in enrolling women students (16.77 lakhs), followed by Maharashtra (12.54 lakhs) and Tamil Nadu (11.12 lakhs), etc.

E. Women Colleges

From the following Table -3, one can find that in 2009-10 there was 3612 colleges. As on 31.03.2014, there was 4506 colleges exclusively for women.

Table - 3 Number of Women Colleges during the period 2009-10 to 2013-14

Year	Number of Women Colleges
2009-2010	3612
2010-2011	3982
2011-2012	4266
2012-2013	4386*
2013-2014	4506

* Provisional and includes Nursing colleges

Women's participation in higher education has been improved and considerable progress has been made. A lot needs to be done. We should adopt strategy for empowering women based on the prescription of the national policy for empowerment of women. They include social empowerment, economic empowerment and

gender justice. We should create enabling environment through various affirmative developmental policies and programmes for development of women. Provision of training, employment and income generation activities should be available to women. Women should be allowed to enjoy rights and fundamentals freedom on par with men in all spheres.

Role of Universities in Empowerment of Women

Universities should play a vital role in order to achieve the target of cent per cent literacy in women population. Even though legislation and policy changes were important to consider women as the equal partner for development of the nation, yet therefore certain other factors which are still to be achieved to fulfill the objectives and goals. Those factors are given below:

- Equal participation in policy making
- Creation of proper infrastructure and facilities oriented towards women.
- Appointment of female teachers in higher education
- Empowerment of women in true sense of the term
- Reservation for women for admission in various courses

Certain steps are essential in universities/colleges for introducing the contents of women's studies for greater involvement of the women in related areas and subject disciplines. At university level, major roles may take place which are highlighted below:

a. Scholarships for girls

Universities should start giving scholarships to the outstanding girls in different disciplines. It will also motivate girls from different communities to come ahead for education and compete their classmates. These scholarships should be given in these areas where there is a need of girls for the development of society e.g. nursing, teaching, pathology and pharmacy etc.

b. Start short term courses for women

Universities should offer new short-term courses for women like Yoga Education, Nursing, Cutting and Stitching etc. These courses will help them to start work at their own for their economic independence. Along with it, university degrees will provide them better job opportunities in the market.

c. Interaction of universities with girls school

Universities should arrange seminars and extension lectures of the experts in girl's school in different areas. These experts will share with girl students the possibilities of new areas where they can seek admission. Not only this, they will also make aware the girl students about the future need of the different subjects. They can conduct the interviews with the girl students and provide guidance for future studies on the basis of their abilities.

d. Introducing new professional courses for women

Universities should keep on introducing new professional courses for women which they can join after completing senior secondary education. These courses should be from those thrust areas which are job oriented. After doing these courses either they can go for jobs in offices/institutions or they can do work on their own. The courses like interior decoration, script writing for TV and radio, computer hardware, technical know-how of electronic gadgets etc.

e. Reservation of seats for girls in different disciplines

Universities should suggest amending of laws to provide the provision of reservation of seats for girls in different disciplines as there is reservation for SC and ST candidates. It will certainly motivate the parents to send their daughters for higher education which will prove a milestone in empowering women.

f. Relationship of universities with industries

Universities should establish the relationship with different industries. By doing so, the university authorities should understand the type of jobs in different areas. Along with it, they can also find out the jobs which are suitable for girls. They can start such courses with the help of different industries. Also these industries will provide placement to the girl students.

g. Courses in agriculture

Nearly 80% of our population is involved and dependent upon agriculture. Undoubtedly, women are also working in the fields. If they are provided training in different aspects of agriculture, they can certainly do wonders in this domain also. It will not only increase the productivity of land but it will also provide monetary gains to the individual/family.

h. Income generating activities

The women should be encouraged to develop and market their handicrafts using modern design. Self financing, need based, continuing courses should be started at the university centre to strengthen the UGC financial continuing courses. It can be organized in micro credit, flower making, toy making and other income generation programme. University through distance education programmes for the women personnel of NGO in the area of entrepreneur health, nutrition and allied areas.

i. Women's reproductive health and child care

Health areas like vaccination, immunization, post and pre-natal care, awareness of sexually transmitted diseases and reproductive tract infection need to improve a lot among them. Rural development can be achieved only if women become enlightened and empowered. This is an unchallenged global experience, and need to be given special attention by the universities

j. Resource centre for women

University can also serve as the resource centre for women at the state level with an aim to strengthen institutional capacity of the department of social welfare in the state and for the holistic development of women.

Conclusion

In this way, university can play active role in society for the empowerment of women. Such type of active participation of universities will make women self confident and self-reliant. Various action plans suggested should be employed by various universities all over India so as to empower women and to create a vibrant society.

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