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EMANCIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION & CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

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Abstract

Education is a light of life. Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because of education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have double effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girl's education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Education especially of women has a major impact on health and nutrition as an instrument of developing a sustainable strategy for population control. Moreover educated women can play an equally important role as men in nation building. Empowerment refers to increasing the economic, political, social and cultural strength of individuals and communities. Empowerment is one of the main procedural concerns when addressing human rights and development. The human development and capabilities approach, the millennium development goals, and other credible approaches, goals point to empowerment and participation as a necessary step if any country is to overcome the obstacles associated with poverty and development. Women empowerment means the process through which women, who are currently most discriminated against, achieve gender equality. This will include support from men to change those aspects of their behaviour, roles and privileges. Women's empowerment may require support by development agencies at household, community and also at the macro level. Women empowerment is essential as their throughout and value system lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately good nation. Empowerment of women is multi-dimensional process and involves many things such as economic opportunities, property rights, political representation, social equality, personal rights etc. The paper discusses the emancipation and empowerment of women through education and constitutional provisions provided by the Government.

Keywords: Women, Emancipation, Empowerment, Education, Development.

INTRODUCTION

“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.”

Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. The greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. It is indispensable that education enables women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside of her hearth and home but helps her to get status, positive self-esteem, and self confidence, necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Apparently it also facilitates them to procure a job and supplement the income of family and achieve social status. Education especially of women has a major impact on health and nutrition as an instrument of developing a sustainable strategy for population control. Moreover educated women can play an equally important role as men in nation building. Thus there is no denying fact that education empowers women. Indeed the different organs of the United Nations and experts on women's liberation argue for women's education as the basic step to attain equality with men. One of the recommendations of National Policy on Education (1986) by the Government of India is to promote empowerment of women through the agency of education and it is considered to be a landmark in the approach to women's education of illiterate. The National Literacy Mission is another positive step towards eradication of illiteracy in the age group of 15-35 years. Women's education has assumed special significance in the context of India's planned development, as it is incorporated in every Five-year plans as the major programme for the development of women. Universalization of elementary education, enrolment and retention of girls in the schools, promotion of balwadis and crèches, raising number of schools and colleges, multipurpose institutions and adult education programmes are some of the steps being taken by both central and state governments in India to boost-up women's education

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The role of education is facilitating social and economic progress. It opens up opportunities leading to both individual and group entitlements. Education can be explained in broad sense of development of women, which is the most crucial input of empowering people with skill and knowledge and giving them access to productive employment in future. Improvements in education are not only expected to enhance efficiency but also augment the overall quality of life. In this regard, India is reputed to have a progressive education policy in reference to the women. The National Policy on Education (1986) put specific emphasis on women's education. This policy states that education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Educational system will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women (NCERT, 2006). The twelfth Plan considers the highest priority as a central instrument for achieving rapid and inclusive growth. It presents a comprehensive strategy for strengthening the education sector covering all segments of the education. The major challenge ahead includes bridging regional, social, and women gaps at all levels of education.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment can be viewed as means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation. It strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996). Women's empowerment is very essential for the development of society. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercises choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. As per the United National Development Fund for women (UNIFEM), the term women's empowerment means:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.
- Gaining the ability to generate choices exercise bargaining power.
- Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Thus, Empowerment means a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights. It is a multi level construct referring to individuals, organizations and community. It is an international, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to the control over these resources.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN EMPOWERMENT

Education is an important human activity. It enriches the women in the self development and as well as the society as a whole. Empowerment is a strategy that has as a primary goal an equitable redistribution of power and resources. The empowerment of women has been recognized through many international, regional and national conferences as a basic human right and also as imperative for national development, population stabilization and global well-being. Education makes individual who he is and what he does. It chooses his faith and when he is on the right path, he leaves him on his own, to make his own decisions with his new life with Education. It shows the surrounding people who you are, what you like and what you don't. Education is a basic need for prosperity. Therefore, all the human resources must be utilized for the progress of the country through education. Based on International conventions "Education has the dual function of transmitting to the new generation the heritage of the past with its accumulated wisdom in the history of human kind, and preparing it for the present and the future that the emergent needs of society and individuals hold for before us," While recognizing that the enhancement of the happiness and well-being of all individuals with due regard to their environment, inclusive of both the material world and all forms of life should be our goal, it is safe to assume that we should increasingly expect the unexpected in every facet of existence, educational enterprise, present and future, for its successful function from the point of view of both the individual and society. Literacy level and



educational attainment are vital indicators of development in a society education are the most important mean for women empowerment. No country can socially economically, politically and culturally develop unless the quality of life of women is improved as equal to men in all contexts. Education plays a vital role in the day to day life. It enhances the personality of an individual. Education makes life worth living. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence which is necessary to participate fully in the development process. Education helps the women in realizing their importance in the society. It helps them in understanding the duties of women. Women come to understand or know about their rights and duties, which helps them better decision making.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR EDUCATION:

In the Indian Constitution, education is both a Union and a State subject. It means that both the centre and the state are responsible for its expansions and progress. Our Constitution has guaranteed free and compulsory education to every child up to the age of 14 years. It is the responsibility of the Centre and the States to see that every individual is equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to discharge his duties as a responsible and cooperative citizen so that the proper functioning of democracy in the Nation and also at the international level can be maintained with its limited resources in all aspects like social, economic, political, educational and familial, etc. There are a number of Articles and Clauses in the Constitution which directly or indirectly make provision for education and apportion educational responsibilities to the Centre and the States. Briefly speaking the Constitution of India makes the following provisions for education:

1. **Article 15(1):** "The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them".
2. **Article 15(3):** "Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children".
3. **Article 16(1):** "There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state".
4. **Article 28(1):** "No religious institution shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds".
5. **Article 29(2):** "No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the state or receiving aid out of state funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them".
6. **Article 30(1):** "All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice".
7. **Article 30(1A):** "In making any law providing for the compulsory acquisition of any property of an educational institution established and administered by a minority, referred to in Clause (1), the state shall ensure that the amount fixed by or determined under such law for the acquisition of property is such as would not restrict or abrogate the right guaranteed under the clause".
8. **Article 30(2):** "The state shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of minority, whether based on religion or language".
9. **Article 39(a):** "The state shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing that the citizens, men and women, equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood".
10. **Article 39(d):** "That there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women".
11. **Article 39(e):** "That the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength".
12. **Article 45:** "The state shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years".



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13. Article 46: “The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker section of the people and, in particularly, of the Scheduled castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation”.

14. Article 257(1): “The executive power of every state shall be so exercised as not to impede or prejudice the exercise of the executive power of the Union, and the executive power of the Union shall extend to the giving of such directions to a state as may appear to the Government of India to be necessary for that purpose”.

15. Article 282: “The Union or a State may make any grants for any public purpose, notwithstanding that the purpose is not one with respect to which parliamentary or the legislature of the State, as the case may be, may make laws”.

INDIAN GOVERNMENT ENACTMENTS

The National Commission for Women has in the last few years introduced several new bills in the parliament from time to time towards eradication of many social evils. Some of the significant enactments are mentioned here.

The Hindu Widow Re-Marriage Act of 1856: In the traditions at Hindu society there was a ban on widow remarriage, it was one of the most important evils from which women in the traditional Hindu society suffered a lot. This act allowed widow to remarry and section 5 of this Act ensured her to enjoy all the rights, which a married woman did.

The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929: The practice of child marriage was another social evil from which women in traditional Hindu society suffered a lot. Age at marriage for girls was 9 or 10 and after passing this act the minimum marriageable age of women was fixed to 15 years. Later this age was increased up to 18 years.

The Hindu Women’s Right to Property Act of 1937: In the traditional society women had no property rights. In the eyes of law she was a minor or ward. This act recognized a widow of a deceased person as a surviving personality with the same right as his in the joint property. Thus, through this Act women in the Hindu society received the property right to a limited extent.

The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955: This Act has recognized the equal rights of men and women in the matters of marriage and divorce. Under the provision of this Act either the man or woman can present a petition in a court of law for divorce, wife has got equal right to divorce husband.

The Hindu Succession Act of 1956: This Act recognized an equal right for women in the matter of inheritance of property. She can inherit the property of her father along with her brothers. She can also sell or mortgage the inherited property or use it for herself. For the first time absolute ownership was conferred to a woman through this Act.

The suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act of 1956-57: This Act aims to deal with the problem of prostitution and to promote the welfare of fallen women. Main objectives of this Act are to reduce the scope of prostitution and to reform prostitution under this Act. Every state is expected to set up protective home and to appoint women police and women social workers. In protective homes these fallen women will be given training in tailoring, toy and basket making and other crafts so that they may earn for their maintenance in proper way.

The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961: The main objective of this Act is to abolish giving and taking dowry at the time of marriage. The term dowry refers to a valuable property or thing, which is determined by the parties to a marriage for a marriage. The practice of dowry had produced very bad effects. Dowry system, dowry cases have not been reduced. Still this Act makes some effort in bringing social change.

The above mentioned are the important legislations, which brought an upward trend in the status of women in India.



EMPOWERING WOMEN: CHALLENGES AHEAD

We are in 21st century and ostensibly the world has moved forward and globally everyone talks of progress on all fronts, yet the above statistics present a totally different picture with empowerment still a distant dream for the majority of the women. The end of development is the human being. Education is among the most important drivers of human development. Everybody has the right to education, which has been reaffirmed in all major international human rights conventions. Many of these same instruments encourage, but did not guarantee, post-primary education. These rights have been further elaborated to address issues like quality and equality, moving forward the issue of what the right to education means, and exploring how it can be achieved. As a minimum: one must ensure that basic education is available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable for all. The right to education is one of the most critical of all rights- because education plays an important role in enabling girls and women to secure other rights. Women's education is a catch-all term for plethora of issues and debates surrounding education for females. It includes areas of gender equality and access to education, and its connection to the alleviation of poverty. The other issues are those of single-sex education and religious education, because the division of education along gender lines, and religious teachings on education, have been traditionally dominant, and are still highly relevant in contemporary discussion of female importance of the issues attached to female education is global consideration. While the feminist movement has certainly promoted the importance of the issues attached to female education, discussion is wide-ranging and by no means confined to narrow terms of reference. In spite of the forceful intervention by a bastion of female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programmes over the last 65 years and above all, the United Nation's enormous pressure with regard to the uplift of the plight of women in terms education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons. Like all other spheres of social change in India, there is an undeniable gap between policy and practice. More notably, the deeply entrenched social hierarchies based on class, caste, ethnic, and communal divisions leave many communities on the margins with little knowledge of their rights and even less protection from local, state, and national governmental policies. Inequality between men and women runs across the board, including in education, economic opportunities, representation in governance, and other state and private institutions. Though it is gradually increasing, the female literacy rate in India is less than the male literacy rate. Far fewer girls than boys are enrolled in school, and many girls drop out. In urban India, girls are nearly on a par with boys in terms of education. However, in rural India girls continue to be less well-educated than boys.

CONCLUSION

Education leads to individual freedom and empowerment, which yields significant societal development gains and makes an individual self-reliant. It is seen as the foundation of society, enabling economic wealth, social prosperity and political stability. Education is therefore increasingly being viewed as a fundamental right across the globe and essential for the exercise of all human rights. All individuals are entitled to education. Education is an essential right, which permits each person to receive instruction and to blossom socially. The right to an education is vital for the economic, social and cultural development of all societies. Education is the process of instruction aimed at the all round development of women.

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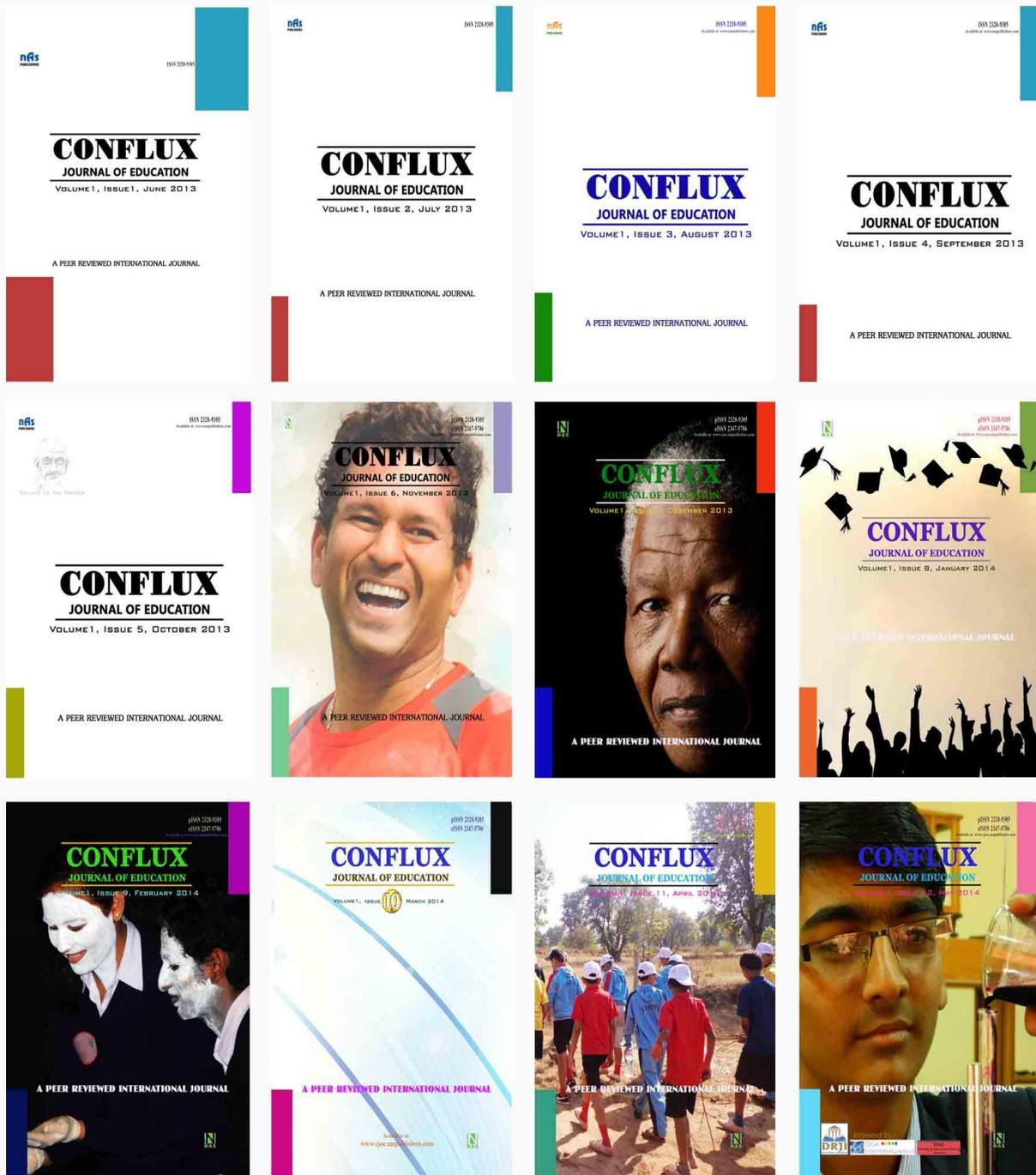
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