

## Gender Specific Education Policies and Empowerment of Women in India

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**Abstract:** Women constitute almost half of the country population and from ancient time to till now they have to play important role in the development of the nation. Women's access to education has been recognized as a fundamental right and increasing girl's education has been the main policy agenda of the governments all over the world. Education is the corner stone of women's empowerment because it enables them to respond to the opportunities and challenges for a better life. We often hear, "Ekk naari padhegi, saat peedhi taregi", and it is always true. Therefore, we can't neglect the women education in reference to women empowerment and it has been highly focused on both national and state agendas. Different policies, programmes and acts are being implemented to assess the progress of women education and to propose suitable interventions to promote their educational participation. These policies and programmes have made a great positive impact on girl's enrolment in all the stages of education and have helped in improving the participation of women of females at all levels of education. This paper is a modest attempt to understand the concept of women empowerment. It will also discuss the various initiatives taken by the government to increase women education and their impact on empowerment of women in India. It will also focus on major challenges faced by women education and at last there will be given some suggestions to improve the female education in India.

**Key-words:** Empowerment, Five Year Plan, Policies and Programmes

### Introduction

Education for empowerment means women gaining an understanding and control over social, economic and political force in order to improve their standing in society. As per a UN report, education for women is the single most effective way to improve lives and health of a family and a society at large. A woman with education is a powerful person, she has the power to educate the children in her family, guide them in taking decisions, contribute economically and offer valuable inputs for improvement on home and social front. Women constitute almost half of a country's population, when 50% of the population is denied education – a nation remains underdeveloped. Empowered women contribute to the development of the society, community and nation in numerous ways. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because it has ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investment in secondary school education for girls yields higher dividends. Girls who have been educated are likely to marry late and have smaller but healthier families. As per research results, it is proved that children who are taken care by educated mom are well-nourished and have all-rounded development. Education helps women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. India has also taken it as a challenge to develop its women by empowering them. This is not a matter of concern for only

governments and social scientist, but also of the masses at large. Empowerment aims at giving the power to women to take their own decisions and to have control over their destiny. Above all, society should give due respect and regard to women. An educated woman can get employed in of the field they like. Education has far reaching benefits in the journey of women towards self independence. It is crystal cleared that education is the main key to all ways and means of women's 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 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 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.

### Objectives of the study

- To discuss the benefits of women education.
- To discuss different policies and programmes

on education and empowerment of women.

- To discuss present literacy condition in India of women education.
- To identify the problems of women education.
- To find out the solution of this problem and to give alternative measures to improve the female education in India.

### Benefits of Women Empowerment

Women Empowerment adds to confidence of women in their ability to lead meaningful and purposeful lives .It removes their dependence on others and makes them individuals in their own right. The main benefits of women empowerment are:-

1. They are able to lead their lives with dignity and freedom.
2. It adds to their self esteem.
3. It gives them a distinct identity.
4. They are able to gain positions of respect in society
5. As they are financially independent they are able to able to spend on all their needs and desires
6. They are able to make meaningful contributions to the well-being of society
7. They act as capable citizens to make the country achieve enhanced gross domestic product growth
8. They get fair and equitable access to resources of the country

### Our Constitution and Women Empowerment

The constitution of India Guarantees several rights for women such as:-

Article 14 – equality before law for women.

Article 15(1) – The state not to discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex And place of birth etc.

Article 15(3) - the state to make special provision in favour of women and children.

Article 16 - Equality of opportunities in matter of public appointments for all citizens.

Article 39(a) - The State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens men and women, equally, the right to means of livelihood.

Article 39(d) – Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

Article 42 - The State to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Article 51 (A) (e) –To renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Article 243D(3)- Not less than one third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.

Article 243D (4) - Not less than one- third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the Panchayat s at each level shall be reserved for women.

Article 243T(3)- Not less than one third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality

Article 243 T (4) - The offices of Chairpersons in the Municipalities shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes,

The Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide 243 T (4)

### Five Year Plan and Women Empowerment:-

The **First Five-Year Plan (1951-56)** envisaged a number of welfare measures for women. Establishment of the Central Social Welfare Board, organization of Mahila Mandals and the Community Development Programmes were a few steps in this direction. This plan noticed the negligence of women's education and emphasized on the expansion of educational facilities.

The **Second Five-Year Plan (1956-61)** emphasized on the need to provide greater opportunities to girl's education. This plan recommended centrally sponsored schemes which included freed accommodation for women teachers. appointment of school mothers, condensed course for adult woman, stipends for high school students to take up teaching, exemption from tuition- fee, and construction of hostels in secondary school for girls etc. for ensuring sufficient number of women teachers.

The **Third Five-Year Plan (1961-66)** pinpointed female education as a major welfare strategy. In social welfare, the largest share was provided for expanding rural welfare services and condensed course of education. The health programme concentrated mainly on the provision of services for maternal and child welfare, health education, nutrition and family planning.

The **Fourth Five-Year Plan (1969-74)** gave emphasis on women's education. The basic policy of this Plan

was to promote women's welfare within the family as the base of operation. High priority was accorded to immunization of preschool children and supplementary feeding for children, expectant and nursing mothers. During this period, Central Social Welfare Board adopted the various programmes for welfare of women.

The **Fifth Five-Year Plan** (1974-79), saw a shift in the approach for women's development from 'welfare' to 'development' to cope up with several problems of the family and the role of women.

Constitutional directives received prominence in this plan. Provision of additional educational facilities was given by this plan. Facilities through evening colleges, correspondence courses and private study were expanded. National adult education programme (NAEP) and integrated child development services (ICDS) were launched.

The **Sixth Five-Year Plan** (1980-85), marked a landmark in the history of women's development by including a separate chapter and adopting a multi-disciplinary approach with the three pronged thrust on health, education and employment. Universal elementary education was specially directed towards higher enrolment and retention of girls in schools through provision of *balwadis* attached to school for sibling care, income generating programme for girls after school hours to supplement family, expansion of incentive like free uniform, text books and mid day meals, appointments of women teachers in rural areas and strengthen science teaching in girls, schools and colleges to enables their participation.

The **Seventh Five-Year Plan** (1985-90) operationalized the concern for equity and empowerment articulated by the International Decade for Women. During this Plan efforts were made to provide welfare measures to all sections of society especially the underprivileged section-the women. Department of women and child development was established. This plan made the rural visible by highlighting their economic contribution in agriculture, animal husbandry etc.

The concept of literacy received attention in the **eight five year plan** (1992-1997). Since the plan recognised human development has the core of all development, literacy among the women had been given importance.

The focus of the **Ninth Five-Year Plan** (1997-2002) was growth with social justice and equality. This plan adopted a strategy of women's component plan, under which not less than 30 percent of funds/benefits were earmarked for women-specific Programmes.

The **Tenth Five-Year Plan** (2002-07) aims at

empowering women through translating the recently adopted National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) into action and ensuring Survival, Protection and Development of women and children through rights based approach.

The **Eleventh Plan Approach (2007-2012)** paper aimed to raise the sex ratio for the age group 0 – 6 to 935 by 2011 – 12 and to 950 by 2016 – 17. Further, this plan intends to ensure 33 percent of the direct and indirect beneficiaries of all government schemes are women and girl children. It also proposes to ensure that all children enjoy a safe childhood without any compulsion to work.

The vision for the **XII Five Year Plan** is to ensure improving the **position and condition** of women by addressing structural and institutional barriers as well as strengthening gender mainstreaming.

Twelfth Five Year Plan entitled as 'Faster, Sustainable and More Inclusive Growth'. This plan had decided at the growth rate 8.2%. The Planning Commission is pushing for special dispensation for single woman, particularly those who are single by choice. Women participation in favour related work, both in agriculture and animal husbandry. In framing policies/schemes for the Twelfth Five Year Plan, the special needs of women must be taken due care of. The focus of the Twelfth Five Year Plan is on the health, education, urbanization and governance.

#### **Government policies and programmes on Education and empowerment of women**

##### **1) Recommendation for women in National education policy(1986)**

The national policy on education was concerned about the status and education of women in the country. Educational will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of woman. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well –conceived edge in favour of women. The education educational system will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curriculum, textbooks, the training and the orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of education institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering. Women studies will be promoted as a part of various courses and educational institutions encouraged taking up active programmes to further women's development. The policy of non-discrimination will be pursued vigorously to eliminate sex-stereo



typing in vocational and professional courses and to promote women's participation in non traditional occupations, as well as in exiting and emergent technologies.

## 2) National policy on education review committee (NPERC-1990)

The committee reviewed the NPE and POA in the context of women's education and made recommendations with regard to the following dimensions:-

- Access to education and quality of learning
- Content of education and gender bias
- Vocational education
- Training of teachers and other educational personnel
- Research and development of women
- Representation of women in the educational hierarchy
- Employment of women
- Adult education
- Number of women-teachers in co-educational schools to be increased
- Hostel facilities to be made available for girls at all levels.

## 3) Programme of action 1992

The committee recommended the following measures to be taken to make the education an effective tool for women empowerment such as:-

- Enhancing self-esteem and self confidence of women
- Enabling women to make informed choice in areas like education, employment and health
- Providing information, knowledge and skill for economic independence
- All teachers and instructors to be trained as agents of women's empowerment
- Special efforts to be made to recruit women teachers and to augment teacher-training facilities for women

## 4) National policy for empowerment of women 2001

A national policy for the empowerment of women was announced on 20<sup>th</sup> march 2001. the goal of this policy was to bring about the advancement ,development and empowerment of women through a process of change in societal attitudes towards women, elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and active

participation of women in all spheres of life, which will empower women both socially and economically in the context of adopting human development as the ultimate of all our development efforts, empowerment of women gains priority on the country's development.

In 2016 the ministry of women and child development had unveiled the draft of national policy of for empowerment of women 2016 which will replace the existing 2001 policy.

The main aim of this policy is to “re-scripting” women empowerment by following a socially inclusive right-based approach. The main emphasis of this draft is on mindset change through advocacy campaigns, multi sector actions, awareness generation and community mobilization on the ground through programme and schemes.

## Trends of female literacy rate in India

The literacy profile of India has been given from 1951 to 2011 in table 1.As we can see in data; there is a gradual increase in literacy rate from 1951 to 2011. In 1951 the total literacy rate was only 18.3%, then it rose to 28.3 in 1961, then it increased in 34.5%in 1971, 43.6% in 1981, 52.2 in 1991, and 65.4% in 2001.

**Table -1 Literacy Rates  
(In Percentage)**

Census Year	Persons	Males	Females	Gender Disparity Rate
1951	18.3	27.2	8.9	18.3
1961	28.3	40.4	15.4	25
1971	34.5	46.0	22.0	24
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8	26.6
1991	52.2	64.1	39.3	24.8
2001	64.8	75.3	53.7	21.6
2011	73.0	80.9	64.6	16.3

1951-1971: Aged group 5 and above, 1981-2011: Aged group 7 and above

**Data Source:** Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India

(Website: <http://censusindia.gov.in/>)

We can easily understand from the Table -1 that literacy rate of males had rapidly increased from 27.2 % in 1951 to 56.4 in 1981 and further to 80.9 in 2011. Though there is a significant increase in female literacy rate but still it is lower than the literacy rate of males. So there is more has to be done in the field of female education. The female literacy rate had improved from 8.9 % in 1951 to 64.6% in 2011. It is clearly shown in this table that the gender disparity rate GDR in literacy has indicated an erratic trend from 1951 to 1981 and thereby indicated a declined trend.however.by 2011 this gender disparity in literacy is about 16.3%, which indicates an alarming

trend.

### Growth of educational institutions

After 1947, our government took major steps to establish a large number of primary, upper primary, higher secondary, colleges for professional education and universities in this country. The table 2 shows the data on the number of recognised educational institutions in the country during 1950-51 to 2014-15.

**Table-2: Number of Recognised Educational Institutions**

Level/ Year	(in hundreds)		(in absolute numbers)			
	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary	College	University
1950-51	2097	136	NA	74	578	27
1960-61	3304	497	NA	173	1819	45
1970-71	4084	906	NA	371	3277	82
1980-81	4945	1186	NA	516	6963	110
1990-91	5609	1515	NA	798	5748	184
2000-01	6387	2063	877	384	10152	254
2005-06	7726	2885	1060	536	16982	350
2006-07	7849	3056	1122	574	19812	371
2007-08	7878	3252	1138	592	23099	406
2008-09	7788	3656	1221	642.29	27882	440
2009-10	8199	3941	1222	717	25938	436
2010-11	7485	4476	1312	720.46	32974	621
2011-12	7143	4788	1283	841	34852	642
2012-13*	8539	5778	2189	1224	35525	667
2013-14*	8589	4215	1335	1036	36634	723
2014-15*	8471	4251	1353	1093	38498	760

### Available

Note: from 1950-51 to 1990-91, figures for Class XI-XII include Class IX-X

### Data Source: For School Education:-

(i) figures for 1950-51 to 2011-12: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

(ii) figure for 2012-13 & 2014-15: National University of Educational Planning & Administration, New Delhi (website: <http://dise.in/>) \* Figures related to School Education are provisional.

**For Higher Education:** Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

As we can see from the above this table that there is a huge increase in the recognized institutions in India during 1950-51 to 2014-15. It is clearly shown in this table that the growth rate is highly increased for the period 1951 to 2014. during this period, the establishment of educational institutions increased in every level. The data shows that in primary it was increased from 2097 hundreds to 8471 hundreds, in upper primary it was 136 to 4251, in secondary it was just 877 in 2000-01 then it had increased in 2014-15 1353, in sr. Secondary from 74 to 1093, in colleges 578 to 38498 and in university from 27 to 760 hundreds. The growth rates are calculated for the periods from

1950-51 to 2014-15. the rates are 303.95 percent for primary, 3025.73 for upper primary, 1377.02 for Sr. Secondary, 6560.55 for colleges and 2714.81 percent for universities.

### Female Enrolment at the various stages of education

After independence the government had decided to take serious steps to increasing girls/women education in India. Several strategies had been designed and implement to increase in female education at 3656 each level of education. For this, separate institutions for girls were opened also various types of incentives are introduced to attract the female. With these initiatives taken by the government the female literacy rate has gone up from 8.9% 1951 to 64.6% in 2011. the share of female enrolment into various faculties has increased very substantially in the field of higher education. The increase in female enrolment in the educational institutions has made a greater impact of women employment in educational institutes.

Table 3 clearly shows the progress of female enrolment in various stages. In 1951 the enrolment of girls was only 54 lacks at primary school stage, 5 lacks at upper primary stage, 2 lacks in sr. secondary level, and nil at higher education as compared with boys of 138, 26, 13 and 4 lacks in higher education among boys/male.

Now in 2014-15 the status of women enrolment at all levels has considerably improved in favour of women. It was .629 lacks in primary level, 327 lacks in upper primary level, 182 in secondary level, and 111 lacks in Senior secondary level and 157 lacks in higher education as against 676 in primary level, 345 in upper primary level, 201 in secondary level, 124 in senior secondary level and 185 in higher education stage among boys/male.

Career counselling is being actively promoted to ensure that the skills acquired by girls are appropriately utilized by them. These positive initiatives have helped in improving the participation of girls/women at all levels of education especially in higher education since the post-independence period. It is evident that the enrolment of girls/women has increased at a faster rate than that of boys at all stages. So the analysis clearly shows that due to major steps taken by the government, the growth of enrolment of girls/women in all stages of education than that of boys/men.

Table3: Levelwise Enrolment									
A: All Categories of Students									
(In lakh)									
Level/	Primary			Upper Primary			Secondary (IX-X)		
	(I-V)			(VI-VIII)					
Year	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1950-51	138	54	192	26	5	31	NA	NA	NA
1960-61	236	114	350	51	16	67	NA	NA	NA
1970-71	357	213	570	94	39	133	NA	NA	NA
1980-81	453	285	738	139	68	207	NA	NA	NA
2000-01	640	498	1138	253	175	428	116	74	190
2005-06	705	616	1321	289	233	522	145	105	250
2006-07	711	626	1337	299	246	545	149	110	259
2007-08	711	644	1355	311	262	573	159	123	282
2008-09	706	647	1353	314	270	584	165	130	295
2009-10	697	639	1336	317	278	595	169	138	307
2010-11	701	646	1347	327	292	619	175	143	318
2011-12	726	672	1398	331	299	630	186	155	341

Table3: Levelwise Enrolment									
A: All Categories of Students									
(In lakh)									
Level/	Senior Secondary			Higher Education					
	(XI-XII)								
Year	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total			
1950-51	13	2	15	4	0	4			
1960-61	27	7	34	8	2	10			
1970-71	57	19	76	26	7	33			
1980-81	76	34	110	35	13	48			
2000-01	61	38	99	54	32	86			
2005-06	78	56	134	88	55	143			
2006-07	81	60	141	96	60	156			
2007-08	93	70	163	106	66	172			
2008-09	95	74	169	112	73	185			
2009-10	99	79	178	124	83	207			
2010-11	109	86	195	155	120	275			
2011-12	116	94	210	162	130	292			
2012-13*	107	93	200	166	135	301			

NA: Not Available

Note: from 1950-51 to 1990-91, figures for Class XI-XII include Class IX-X

Data Source For School Education:-

Figures for 1950-51 to 2011-12: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India Website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>

Figure for 2012-13 & 2014-15: National University of Educational Planning & Administration, New Delhi (website: <http://dise.in/>)

\* Figures related to School Education are provisional.

For Higher Education: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

### Major Barriers of women Education in India

Though different plan objectives, policies and programmes for the solution of the problems of women's education and for its expansion, even then there are certain problems still persist in that field such as:-

- Persisting gender based inequality.
- Suitable Curriculum.
- Social discrimination such as parents' attitude, customs, cultural constraints etc.
- Lack of qualified lady teachers.
- Lack of proper physical facilities.
- Early marriage.
- Financial difficulties.
- Lack of proper transport facilities.
- Problem of co-education.
- Lack of hostel facilities for girls etc.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

After independence, the government of India has taken many initiatives to increase women's education. During these periods, number of academic institutions were established to improve the girls'/women's education in India. We can easily see that the growth rate from 1950-51 to 2014-15 in primary section is approx. 304%, while in upper primary section it has a huge increase approx. 3023%, similarly the rate of growth of colleges for general education is 6560% and the growth of universities is near about 2714%. So it is now clear that the growth of recognised educational institutions has increased in all levels. This shows great interest of our country in women's education. Next, it is evident from table 3, that the enrolment of girls'/women has increased at a faster rate than that of boys in all the stages of education. In the field of higher education also, the share of females' enrolment in various faculties has increased very substantially. The increase in women's enrolment in educational institutions has its impact on the women's employment in educational institutions, which has its impact on the women's

employment in educational institutions. The government's initiatives for the increase in women education has made a positive impact of improving girls /women participation in all level of education especially in higher education in past 7 decades. Besides these, we can easily understand that the growth rate of enrolment of girls/women has been higher than that of males, yet much lower to their population to the total population.

So in a nut shell, there is a strong need to improve the women education in India and to rethink about the education of women in India. There is a strong consensus that the enrolment of women in all stages of education must be raised at least to cover their share in the total population. Efforts must be directed to retain the girls in primary and secondary education levels and enables them to pursue higher studies. But government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiatives to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in the social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality. It is concluded that Women empowerment which is declared as Millennium Development Goal by UNDP, can be achieved only when all concerned bodies will work in Cooperation and understanding. Apart from the government initiatives, the strong efforts must be needed from various NGOs and from enlightened citizens of the country and above all efforts should begin from our homes, and then certainly India will become a powerful country.

### **Suggestions to improve the Women Education in India**

There are some suggestions to improve the women education in India, such as:-

- Proper schooling facilities should be provided nearer to the place of residence of girls
- Proper transportation facilities
- Adequate lady teachers especially in rural areas.
- Separate institutions for girls should be established wherever it is needed.
- Provide alternative forms of schooling i.e. combine formal schooling with non-formal means for dropouts
- Proper system of wastage and stagnation
- Proper Safety measures should be taken
- Awareness campaign should be conducted for the parents in rural areas where hesitation regarding girls Education prevails amongst the parents
- Distance education should be emphasised

- Various incentives like uniforms, study material, attendance scholarship, laptops, cycles and scooty etc.

- Introduce flexible school timings and region specific school calendar etc.

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