

Correlation between Women Empowerment and Education

Abstract

Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. Women have been living as the suppressed section of the society since a long time now and there is a need for them to be educated in order to become their own advocates to address problems and situations affecting them that were previously ignored. Since women play an important role in country's development, empowering women will in turn help India to achieve its dream of being a developed nation by 2020.

Keywords: Empowerment, Literacy Rate, Gender Gap, Workforce Distribution, Policies and Reforms, General Practices.

Introduction

Empowerment has become a widely used word. In spheres as different as management and labor unions, health care and ecology, banking and education, one hears of empowerment taking place. However, empowerment in its real sense is a serious word--one which brings up the question of personal agency rather than reliance on intermediaries, one that links action to needs, and one that results in making significant collective change. Change is the law of nature which affects the principles, thoughts, values and fundamentals of the society. A renowned scholar "George Bernard Shaw" once said, "Progress is impossible without change and those who cannot change their mind cannot change anything."

Applied to gender issues, the discussion of empowerment brings women into the political sphere, both private and public. Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. Women and men are placed in bipolar categories by numerous institutions in society. These institutions, through day-to-day practices embedded in long-standing beliefs, construct male and female subjects who face strong forces to conform. Family practices, religious myths, the social division of labor, the sexual division of labor, marriage customs, the educational system, and civil laws combine to produce hierarchies, internalized beliefs, and expectations that are constraining but at the same time "naturalized" and thus seldom contested. In this context, empowerment is a process to change the distribution of power, both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society.

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to identify the reasons and analyze the correlation between women empowerment and education. The paper highlights the role that education plays in empowering the women in our society. It further evaluates the current scenario and identifies the roadblocks in the path of attaining the vision, "Education for All".

Hypothesis

Women have been living as the suppressed section of the society since a long time now and it is the lack of education that prevents them from addressing problems and situations affecting them. Moreover, the limited willingness by those in control to see the seriousness of their condition and the lack of resolve to solve it worsens the issue. It has to be understood that women power is crucial to the economic growth of any country. In India this is yet to meet the requirements despite reforms. Little has been achieved in the area of women empowerment, but for this to happen, this sector must experience a chain of reforms. Though India could well become one of the largest economies in the world, it is being hindered due to a lack of women's participation. Empowerment ultimately involves a political process to produce consciousness among policy



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makers about women and to create pressure to bring about societal change.

Tools and Methodology

This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been made to analyze the empowerment of women in India. The data used in it is from secondary sources according to the need of this study. Also, in order to verify the secondary data a small survey of 100 women in and around Shamli district was conducted.

Review of Literature

In India, traditionally the society has interpreted women's needs to suit its own preferences. The typical and enduring consideration that women have received from the society has been in their capacity of mothers and wives. In such a scenario, lack of education in the women section has made the condition even worse. However, thousands of years ago, the situations were completely different. When divulged into the Indian history, one can clearly see the rise and downfall the women have faced in the society. Women held the same place as men during Indus Valley civilization and Vedic Era. However, it was during the Mughal and English rule that the differentiation between men and women gained prominence. Women since then have been classified as the weaker section of the society, dependant on the male or the dominant section for every basic need. As mentioned earlier, during the Vedic period, female education was at the peak. Women were allowed to go to schools (Ashrams). They had equal rights in the male dominated society. But the scenario of women education changed in Mughal period. It was then that the process of female education took a backseat, partially based on social customs and the girls had to live in 'parda' with the evil of child marriage also prevalent in the society. After the entry of East India Company, initially no fruitful effort was made in this direction. But in 1854, "Woods Despatch Report" brought a change in the prevalent conditions as far as the women education is concerned. After the implementation of its recommendation female education in India got a momentum. Further, in 1921-22, 1929 and 1944 many positive efforts were made by the British Government which in turn led to opening of number of girl's school, colleges and other educational institutes and marked the beginning of co-education in India. During this period, various socio religious movements led by eminent scholars like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar emphasized on women's education in India. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Baba Saheb Ambedkar were leaders of the lower castes in India who took various initiatives to make education available to the women of India.

Post Independence Reforms

Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. We can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment. India is poised to becoming superpower, a developed

country in the coming years. This can become reality only when the women of this Nation become empowered. During the initial years of independent India, despite of the reforms in British Rule, only 9% percent of the women section was literate. This led to several policies in the coming years which aimed at improving women literacy rate in India. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plan and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the fifth five year plan (1974 – 78) onwards, a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development has been observed. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission of Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the right and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local level.

Post independence, Dr. Radhakrishnan recommended for provision of necessary facilities in the coeducation colleges, expansion of educational opportunities for girls, establishment of right status for girls, provision of some kinds of special education for girls and provision for equal remuneration in case of female teachers as males. According to the Human Development Report (1993) literacy is a person's first step in learning and knowledge building. So literacy indicators are essential for any measurement of human development. In India National Policy on Education (NPE) was set up in 1986 for the development of education and eradication of illiteracy. The National Literacy Mission (NLM) is a nationwide program started by Government of India in 1988. It aimed at educating 80 million adults in the age group of 15 - 35 over an eighty-year period. By "literacy", the NLM meant not only learning how to read, write and count but also helping people understand why they are deprived and helping them move towards change. Various reforms such as Rashtriya Madhyamik Vikas Karyakram, Mid-day meals, Savitribai Phule Balika Shiksha Yojna, Women empowerment programmes in rural sector, Ganag Kalyan Yojna etc focused towards addressing the issue of female literacy in India. The Mahila Samakhya Programme (Education for Women's Empowerment) started in 1987 focused especially on the socially excluded and the landless women. This programme was an example of creative collaboration between the voluntary sector and the State. In recent years, The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the right and legal entitlements of women. The National Policy on Education (1986, revised in 1992) is perhaps the most luminous document on women's education. It emerged as a major breakthrough in addressing gender issues in government policy, which projected that education can be used as an agent of basic change in the status

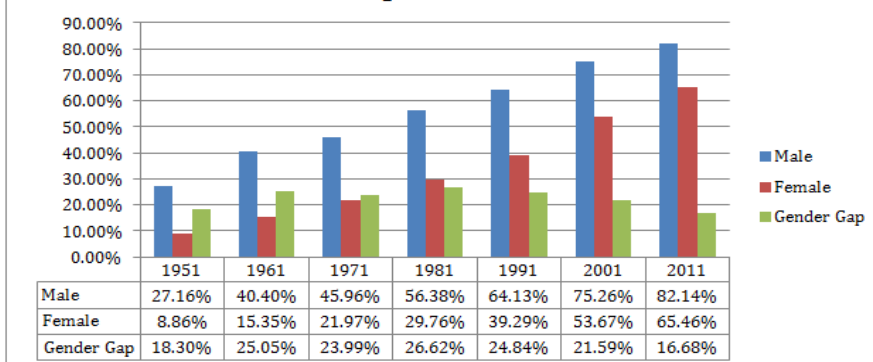
of women. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) started in 1994 has a holistic approach to reducing gender and social disparities and universalizing access, retention and achievement. Enrolment of girls has shown significant upward trend in DPEP districts as compared to non-DPEP districts. The 86th Constitutional Amendment made free and compulsory education a fundamental right for all children in the 6-14 age group which increased the enrolment of girls in schools that is 64.1% in 1980-81 to 85.2% in 1999-2000. The Government of India has declared 2001 as Women's Empowerment year. The national policy of empowerment of women has set certain clear-cut goals and objectives. The policy aims at upliftment, development and empowerment in socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects, by creating in them awareness on various issues human rights, fundamental freedom, providing access to health care, quality education at all levels, career building, vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational opportunities, health, safety, social security and public life etc. in relation to their empowerment. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA – Education for All), which was launched in 2001-02, is the national umbrella programme that is spearheading the universalizing the elementary education through a community-owned approach, with a specific focus on the provision of quality education. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, commonly known as the Right To Education (RTE) Act, has brought much needed hope to bring about the long awaited changes in

education of children aged 6-14 years, addressing disparities of access and quality. While stating the duties of appropriate Government authorities at various levels, the Act has also included duties of parents and guardians to get their children /wards admitted for elementary education in neighborhood schools. The biased parental attitude towards girl child in general and to education of girl's child in particular registered a change by enforcement of the Act. Such reforms proved a great impetus for Women Empowerment in our society. One of the challenges accepted during the 12th Plan was establishing more Women's Universities. University Grants Commission(2011, 83) enhanced Participation of Women Schemes for capacity building for women administrators, Post-doctoral Fellowships for women, women hostels, facilities and infrastructure for women, scheme for single girl child was expanded and strengthened during the 12th Five Year Plan.

Review of Current Situation

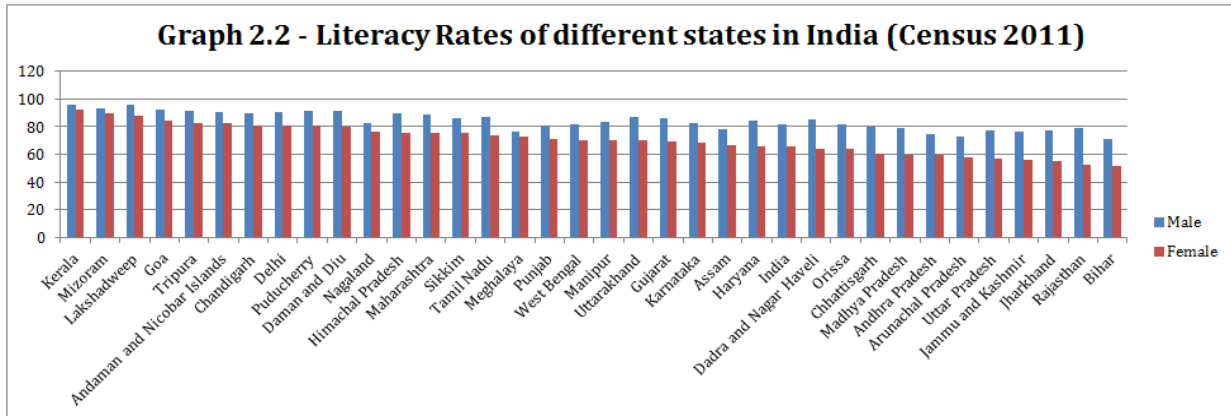
As a result of such movements, literacy rate for women in India have risen from 15.35% in 1961, to 21.97% in 1971, to 29.76% in 1981, followed by 39.29% and 53.67% in 1991 and 2001 respectively and finally 65.46% in 2011. Though the rise shows signs of improvement but the efforts are not enough considering the current situation. Sadly, the gender wise gap between male and female education has not shown as considerable shift over years. The Gap which was around 25.05 percent in 1961 now stands at 16.68% (refer the Graph 1.1 for details)

Graph 1.1 - Gender Gap in Literacy Rate over the past decade

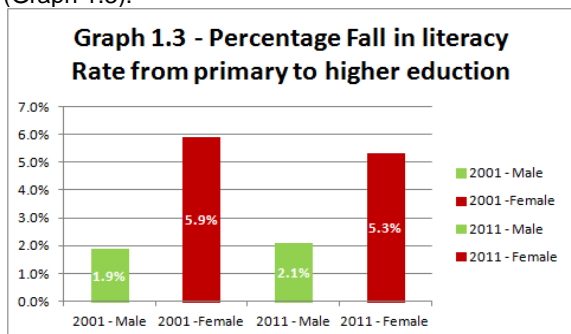


If the state wise literacy rates are compared, it can be observed only 16 states in India have their literacy rates above 70% with Kerala topping the literacy charts with 92.07% and Bihar at the bottom with the literacy rate of 51.50%. However, in case of Bihar it may be noted that though the overall literacy rate of the state is lowest, the rate of increase from 2001 is quite satisfactory and noteworthy, that is, in 2001 the literacy rate of Bihar was 37.97 which has

now increased to 51.50% in 2011. In Uttar Pradesh, the literacy rate is only 57.18% even when the education of girls has been made free of cost by the government. In this scenario, it should be noted that the increase in the population rate has also aggravated the issue of illiteracy among masses. The Literacy rates of different states as declared in Census 2011 are can be seen in Graph 1.2

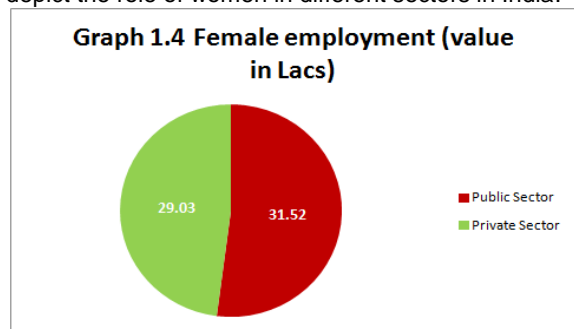


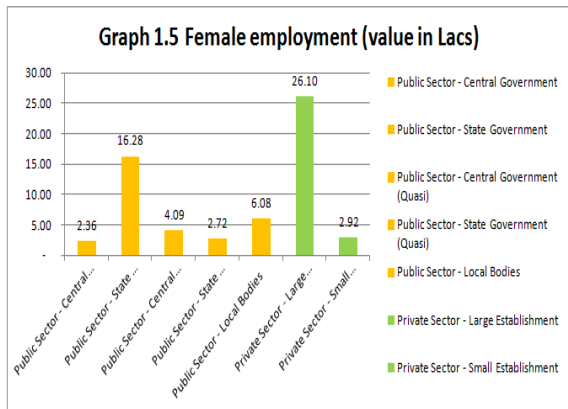
However, despite of the concrete steps taken in view of improving female literacy in India, the results are not satisfactory and hence the situation calls for a detailed review of the situation at all levels of education, which involves primary, secondary and higher education system. As per the reported figures by the government, only around 62% of the female population has been registered for primary education out of which only 35% are complete the secondary level. This number observed as sharp decline when it comes to higher education with only 7 to 8 percent of the population completing it. The situation is worse in technical education which is attained only by 4% of the female population. As far as the rural population is concerned, 10% of the villages in India donot have a primary school while schools in almost 40% of the remaining villages lack in basic facilities and infrastructures for female education. This in turn leads to female school dropout as high as 73.78% in the rural areas. A drop of 5.3% has been observed in case of women moving from primary to higher education while the drop is only 2.1% in case of men (Graph 1.3).



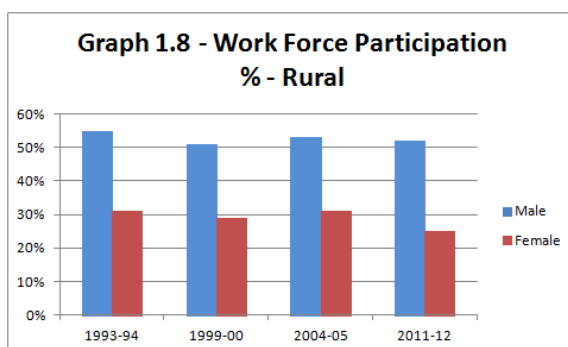
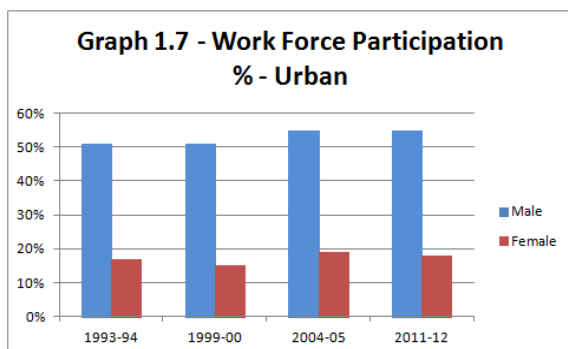
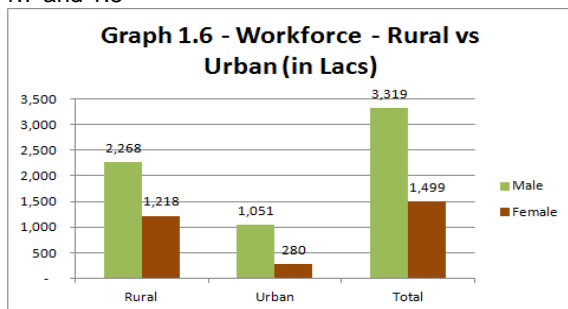
Initially, the emphasis to women education was focused on her role as a homemaker. It was believed that educating women would in turn help in passing on those learning to the future generation. Though the thought hold true in today's world as well, however, with changing time the role of a women has undergone a shift. Increasing women's participation in the economy is considered as a critical source of growth for countries around the world in the 21st century and improved work participation is conceived as an indicator of women's improved status in the society. One third reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions as per the 73rd

amendment of the Indian constitution has made remarkable changes in the political and social involvement of women and has enabled them to contribute to the arenas of decision making at the local level. Though the need for economic stability in the family, the changing requirements of the family, the enhanced social space, the urge for higher status in society and the changing life situations have forced more and more women to enter the labour force, the gender division of labour and the increased responsibility assigned to women towards family and childcare restrain women from attaining better education and employment opportunities other than the stereotyped patterns. The processes of globalization and accompanying modernization and industrialization have introduced dramatic changes in the social and economic conditions of women in India. Globalization has brought about increased job opportunities, especially to women, whether highly educated or not, and let them enter into the various fields of productive economy. Graphs 1.4 and 1.5 depict the role of women in different sectors in India.





However, an important point to be noted here that the female workforce participation is more in rural areas than in the urban. This is probably due to the fact that in rural areas females are employed in various farming and other low pay activities which do not have a substantial impact in their upliftment. It is due to lack of education that women have to indulge themselves in such menial jobs. A comparison of female and male workforce is depicted in graphs 1.6, 1.7 and 1.8

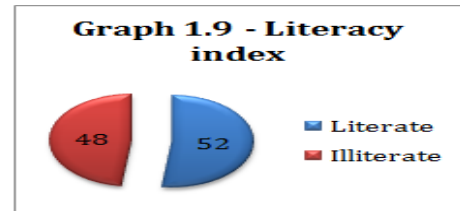


Survey – Results and Findings

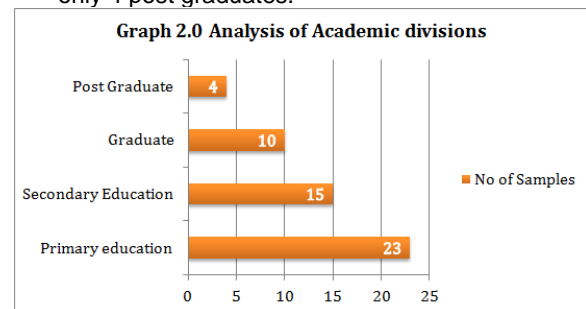
A survey was conducted among 100 women in Shamli district, Uttar Pradesh to gain a fair idea of the situation. The results seen are as mentioned below

Results of the Survey

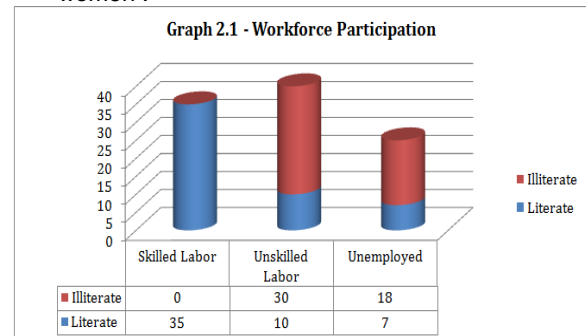
- 52 women out of 100 were literate.



- However, only 15 out of 52 had completed secondary education while the number further decreases to 10 for graduates while there were only 4 post graduates.



- As far as workforce participation is concerned the graph below shows the comparison between skilled labor, unskilled labor and unemployed women.



Findings and Analysis

The following points sum up the findings

- 52 women among of the sample of 100 were literate. This was less than the national average. However, it was close to the literacy index for Uttar Pradesh (57.18)
- The drop out from primary to higher education is quite high. Out of the 52 literate women, 23 had acquired primary education while only 15 completed secondary. The number shows a sharp fall when it comes to graduation and post graduation with only 10 graduates and 4 post graduates. This trend gives an insight to the importance given to women education. Women

education is not aimed at empowering them to build a better future for themselves

3. Moreover, if we look at the workforce participation, illiteracy has increased woman participation in unskilled workforce, the segment of the workforce associated with a limited skill set or minimal economic value for the work performed. Thus, working as unskilled labor does not empower woman while on the other hand education bring with it an opportunity to for skilled employment, thereby empowers the women.

Discussion and Suggestions

In the view of the entire situation, we still need to think over the fact, majority of the families in India still consider the education of the male child and marriage of the girl child as their priority. The education conveniently takes a back seat when it comes to a girl. Another problem closely related to this is the reluctance to acquire western education and misunderstanding on the part of the girls themselves about the values of the acquisition of formal education. In education, equity means equal access to good schooling. In rural areas, girls are required to help in household work. The resources of the rural poor are so limited that they do not have anything to spare for children's education. If resources are available, it is the boy who is sent to school first. Parents also do not see the value of educating especially a daughter who would get married and remain a housewife. Since they cannot see any direct relationship between education and economic betterment, they have very little motivation to send their children to school. Restricted access to education by women in this country is profoundly rooted in history, religion, culture, the psychology of self, law, political institution and social attitudes which interact in several ways to limit women's access to formal education when compared with their male counterparts. It has been observed that Indian women are lagging behind their counterparts in developed and some developing nations due to the late start in educating them. This is caused by our traditions and culture which are hostile to women. This tradition reduces them to kitchen managers and producers of babies. Thus, their education ideally, is expected to end in kitchen a condition which ironically is detested by many parents thereby discouraging their investment in girl-child education. According to Article 45 of the Constitution, universal compulsory and free education until the age of 14 was to be achieved by the year 1960. Looking at the present condition of primary education in villages, it is doubtful whether we can achieve 100% enrolment of girls. It is unfortunately true of our society that children are sent to school not according to their intelligence or aptitude but according to their sex.

Suggestions

The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, since illiteracy is the root cause. Hence, education for women has to be paid special attention. Awareness programmes, creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights, esp

right to education, need to be conceptualized and executed. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the society. Strict implementation of Programmes and Acts is needed in order to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society. Empowerment of Women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings. In order to create a sustainable world, we must begin to Empower Women.

Conclusion

It has to be understood that an equal and active participation of women, alongside men is needed to eradicate the evils of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Unless women are educated they will not be able to understand about their rights and their importance. Empowerment of women aims at striving towards acquiring higher literacy level and education, better health care for women and their children, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of their rights, improved standard of living and to achieve self-reliance, self-confidence and self-respect among women. The similarities among oppressed groups are considerable because they face the common problem of limited willingness by those in control to see the seriousness of their condition and to work to solve it. Under the circumstances, the oppressed must themselves develop power for change to occur; power will not be given to them for the asking. This is where the role education makes a difference in order to implement the change. Access to education has been one of the most pressing demands of the women's rights movements. Women education in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country. India is poised to emerge as one of the most developed nations by 2020, more literate, knowledgeable and economically at the forefront. No doubt, women will play a vital role in contributing to the country's development. From "women for development" the time has come to shift focus to "women in development", Woman education and empowerment, thus, is crucial to the economic growth of our economy.

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