

Women Empowerment : Education and Employment



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Abstract

The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-qua-non of progress for a country; hence the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social scientists and reformers, women activists, politicians, academicians and administrators. Actually in the present era they are actively involved in all spheres and streams in our society.

Women-education is the backbone of social development and the essence of civilization. Mahatma Gandhi also believed that education was the most potent instrument for the regeneration of women. The education of women is very essential for happy and healthy homes, improvement of society, economic prosperity and national solidarity. Inspiring from the above ideas our government and public started to pay more attention to the women's education. The government took various steps for women's education like establishment of Education Commission and National Literacy Mission. She also took steps to bring meaningful improvements in Elementary, Secondary and Higher Education. Besides, the Indian government made some important efforts in the direction of women's training and employment. These may be enumerated as Women's Vocational Training Programme launched in 1977 under the Director General of Employment and Training; Women Industrial Training Institutes (WITIS); Rural Youth self-Employment Scheme etc.

The government has also taken several steps for creating a congenial work environment for women workers. The provisions for women's workers in the Factories Act, 1948; The Plantation Labour Act, 1951; The Employee's State Insurance (General) Regulation, 1950; The Mine Act, 1952; The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; The Beedi & Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment); The Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970; The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 tell the story of government's efforts in this regard.

In the end it may be said that though the government is showing its awareness for women's empowerment and is making a lot of efforts in this direction yet the efforts from the side of the society are still awaited. It is to be emphasized that only the efforts of the government and the society will not prove sufficient to make the women empowered but also they themselves should come forward to make them educated and to participate in the economic, social and political affairs with their full enthusiasm.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Education and Employment, Economic Empowerment.

Introduction

Empowerment of women has emerged as an important issue in our society in the recent time. The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-qua-non of progress for a country; hence the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social scientists, reformers, women activists, politicians, academicians and administrators.

Women are nowadays actively involved in all spheres and streams in our society. They are no more a passive part of our social fabric. Over the past decades, it has been practically proved that they have got a well-defined and definite role to play within the community and contribute their share to the development of the nation. In the words of Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, "In order to awaken the people it is the women who has to be awakened once she is on the move i.e. the household moves, the village moves and the country moves."

Hence India is determined to plan her progress in all fields and education in undoubtedly one of the most important spheres. Women education is the backbone of social development and the essence of civilization. In fact women's participation in work is not a new phenomenon. From the ancient time, through medieval age and till now, they have been

working in the fields and domestic affairs. However, it is true that their area of activity in decision-making was quite limited and narrow. They were not a part of management and administration. But today they are found in all the sectors including in police and army. Now we can easily see the women as governors, ministers, vice-chancellors, managers, engineers, pilots, police officers, clerks, peon and even drivers. They are also found as doctors, journalists, engineers and industrialists. Hence women's education and their employment are the prime factors, which are essential for the development of the nation.

Women and Education (Importance of Women's Education)

"Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. Education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on his own feet." These words of Swami Vivekanand prove that education is one of the important factors counted upon for improvement in the status of women, determines aspirations, technology, productivity and social mobility.

Underlining the importance of women's education Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru said in his speech in a public meeting, "Education of a boy is education of one person, but education of a girl is the entire family." Mahatma Gandhi also believed that education was the most potent instrument for the regeneration of women. The education of women is very essential for happy and healthy homes, improvement of society, economic prosperity and national solidarity. Inspiring from the above ideas of these great personalities both the government and public started to pay more attention to the women's education. The government has implemented the following plans for the upliftment of women's education:

1. Education Commission
2. Elementary Education
3. National Literacy Mission
4. Secondary and Higher Education

The need to bring women into the main stream of development had been a national concern since independence. Soon after independence when planned economic development became a necessity for increased production, employment and for abolition of poverty, the third and fourth plans accorded a high priority to education of women. The five year plans supported the economic development, employment and training for women as the principal focus for the over all socio- economic development of the society at large.

Women and Employment

Women form an important part of the Indian work force. According to the information provided by the Registrar General of India, the work participation rate for women was 25.68 percent in 2001. This is an improvement from 22.73 percent in 1991 and 19.67 per cent in 1981. The two important aspects are that while there has been an improvement in the work participation rate of women, it is continues to be substantially less in comparison to the work participation rate of men. In 2001 the work participation rate for women in rural areas was 30.98 per cent as compared to 11.55 percent in the urban areas. In the rural areas, women are mainly involved

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as cultivators and agricultural labourers. In the urban areas, almost 80 percent of the women workers are working in the unorganized sectors like household industries, petty trades and services. Women are also employed in large numbers in plantations, factories and mills. Women workers constituted only 5 per cent of the work force in the mine sector.

The government is running the following programmes aimed at providing equal access to education and vocational training to women:

1. Women's Vocational Training Programme launched in 1977 under the Director General of Employment and Training.
2. Women Industrial Training Institutes (WITIS)
3. Rural Youth self-Employment Scheme
4. Jawahar Rozgar Yojana

Employment of women has been achieved by a number of schemes such as Swyam Siddha, Support to Training-Cum- Employment Programme (STEP) and Self Help Group Scheme.

The government has taken several steps for creating a congenial work environment for women workers. A number of protective provisions have been incorporated in various labour laws. These laws are as below:

The Factories Act, 1948

Provision of crèches in every factory wherein more than thirty women workers are ordinarily employed.

The Employee's State Insurance (General) Regulation, 1950

Claim for maternity benefit becomes due on the date on which medical certificate is issued for miscarriages, sickness arising of pregnancy and premature birth of child or confinement.

The Plantation Labour Act, 1951

Provision of crèches in every plantation wherein fifty or more women workers (including women workers employed by any contractor) are employed or where the number of children of women workers (including women workers employed by any contractor) is twenty or more.

The Mine Act, 1952

Employment in mines below ground prohibited, provision of separate toilets and washing facilities for women workers.

The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961

Maternity benefits to be provided on completion of 80 days working. Not required to work during six weeks immediately following the day of delivery or miscarriages.

The Beedi & Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment)

Provision of crèches for the benefit of women workers in the industrial premises wherein more than fifty female employees are ordinarily employed.

The Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970

Provision of crèches where twenty or more women are ordinarily employed as contract labour.

The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

Payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers for same or similar nature of work protected under the act.

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Since women form an important part of the Indian work force and they bear a double burden, special steps have to be taken to promote their welfare and development. It is more important to create a general awareness and understanding to the problems of women's employment in all the top policies and decision-making and executive personnel. During this era of liberalization and globalization, the quality of women's employment will depend upon several factors. The foremost among these are access to education and opportunities for skill development. The solution lies in creating awareness among women about their legal rights and duties and by providing them adequate opportunities to upgrade their skill levels. The emphasis should be on effective enforcement of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. Proper enforcement of these development and training among women also need to given continuous attention.

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