

# Women Education in India and Economic Development Linkages: A Conceptual Study

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## ABSTRACT

Women have been recognised as a crucial force in economic development of any nation. However, it is imperative to mention that traditionally their lives were confined to the four walls of the house. They were mainly engaged in household chores, bearing and rearing of children and were treated on different footings. Their existence was deeply influenced by the prevailing patriarchal system which often results into deprivation of their basic rights as enjoyed by their male counterparts including their right to education. But, with the advent of various legislations, social reforms and women's movement worldwide, there was a major shift in the socio-cultural set up and women's entitlement to education begun to be recognised as pivotal for nations' economic development. On the other hand, history has revealed that in Indian sub-continent, there was a worst scenario of women education. Women were denied their basic right to education and such bias was deeply rooted in prevailing socio-cultural set up where females were treated inferior to men. But, in the backdrop of various social reform movements, women movements, Christian missionaries and new economic reforms of 1991 popularly called as LPG concept (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization), women education in India witnessed a drastic change. Further, research has noted a strong positive linkage between women education and economic development of any nation. Thus, keeping in view the importance of women education for an economic development of a nation, the present study is an endeavour towards identifying, reviewing and analysing the prior work with respect to above linkages. Moreover, the study has also identified the various issues pertaining to women education in India which has remained unaddressed and demands utmost attention. At the end of the study, various valuable suggestions have also been drawn in order to fill the identifiable gaps in women education structure so as to change its state and enhance its contribution towards achieving robust economic development.

**Keywords--** Economic Development, LPG, UNESCO, World Bank, Women Education

## I. INTRODUCTION

In earlier times, the condition of women across the globe was worse. They were treated differently in all spheres of life- social, cultural economic, political and were also devoid of their varied rights including right to equal education. However, after the culmination of world

war II, various international organisations like- UNESCO, World Bank emerged which played a significant role in driving the international education agenda. Thus, in order to make a transition towards modern world, it became imperative for the world community to focus on women education. Further, collaborative efforts were also taken at international level so as to encourage the participation of women in public life and enhance their contribution towards economic development. In 1950's and 1960's, the UNESCO positioned its mainstream operations towards women education and considered it instrumental to the economic development of mostly newly independent nations including India. Further, in 1980's different framework was developed which emphasized more specifically the linkage between women education and specific economic outcomes (World Bank, 1974, 1975, 1980 and 1988). Thus, by the end of 1980 women education began to be recognised as a critical force worldwide for economic development. It is important to note that it was Schultz (1988), who pioneered the concept of education from an investment point of view and not consumption. He illustrated that education increases the skills and productive knowledge which in turn increases the productivity and profitability. Therefore, with the advent of such philosophy, education begun to be witnessed by the world community from Schultz's point of view. Further, it is the human capital theory which has better explained and illustrated the link between women education and economic development in the sense that skills and knowledge of women gets enhanced with education which in turn increases their productivity in the labour force and thus contributes towards an economic development of a nation.

Within the Indian context, it is notable to mention that during pre and early period of British India, the education system was limited and confined mostly to Brahman males, higher castes among the Hindus. But, later on with the establishment of the Christian missionaries, emergence of various social reform movements, there was a change in a socio-cultural system. Further, history revealed that India had the most complex system of patriarchy where males were considered superior to females and were entitled to various rights and privileges than women. Women were treated differently and were subjected to extreme bias and

prejudice. They had no role to play in different spheres of lives- social, cultural, economic and political and were even denied their basic right to education as enjoyed by their male counterparts. However, with the onset of varied women movements' that can be traced back to the social reform movements of early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the status of women education had undergone a tremendous change. A new dawn was witnessed in India as the modern education for girls begun to gain momentum. Thus, with the emergence of new cultural milieu, the highly Indian patriarchal society accepted the hard core reality that women should be given their basic right to education as it is indispensable for social as well as for nation's economic development. Moreover, since independence rigorous efforts have been taken by Government of India in an attempt to improve the condition of women education that are evident in the form of varied key education strategies formulated from time to time viz- the report of the commission on women's education in 1959, the report of the commission on status of women in 1974 and the National Policy on Education in 1986 which was later revised in the year 1992. In addition, commendable roles have been played by varied women movements and social activists in highlighting the importance of women education for nation's economic development. Hence, it is imperative to mention that for India to achieve the target of \$5 trillion economy, continuous up gradation of skills and knowledge of women is one among the critical development issues.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify, review and analyse the prior research work pertinent to linkages between women education in India and economic development.
- To analyse the current state of women education in India.
- To provide valuable suggestions in order to improve the complete condition of women education in India so as to achieve new heights in an economic development.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is purely conceptual and descriptive in nature. It has been done by identifying, reviewing and analysing the findings and conclusions of prior research work pertinent to linkages between women education in India and economic development. Further, the study is also an attempt to describe the current state of women education in India in order to identify the varied issues which have remained unaddressed till date and needs more attention.

## IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies noted across the globe have shown that there exists a strong positive link between women education and economic development. Research posits that a clear correlation exists between women literacy levels and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and it has been found that, an increase in literacy levels from 20%- 30%, results into an enhancement in GDP from 8%-16% for a number of countries worldwide (Tilak & Jandhayala, 1987). Further, in 1980's, research done across 18 countries of Latin America has revealed that education is the variable with the strongest impact on income equality. It has also been observed that 1% increase in secondary education of the labour force would increase their income from 15%-60%. In addition, Ravis et al., (2000) have conducted a study across 76 developing countries, the results of which revealed that cross country regressions have shown a significant positive relationship between women education and economic development. Thus, indicating that an investment in women education causes variance in a nation's economic development. Moreover, with the advent of Schultz philosophy which viewed education from an investment point of view, various studies have also reported that nation's should pool their resources in women education as it ekes their capacity, skills and knowledge which in turn can achieve robust economic development (Unterhalter, 2005 & Vaughan, 2010). In addition, the review has also noted that across the globe, the state of women education has not been changed altogether. There still exists the gaps and thus, much more is needed to be done which requires the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders viz- government officials, international organisations, women activists and academicians (John, 1999 & Vaughan, 2013).

### *Indian Scenario of Women Education*

In India, during pre and early period of British era the condition of women education was almost worse. History has revealed that India was deeply influenced by the complex patriarchal system which deprived women folk from their basic rights to education. However, with the establishment of Christian missionaries and mushrooming of various social reform movements, modern education for women paved its way in India. Soon, after India's independence, a revolutionary change was promised for the women regarding equal access to education with the promulgation of constitution in 1950 and in order to ensure an equitable participation of women in education, free and compulsory education was enunciated in the constitution from the age of 5 to 14 years. Further, it has been observed that from time to time government of India had come up with the series of commissions viz- Commission on Women Education (1959) and Commission on Status of Women (1974) which recommended a common course curriculum for both boys and girls in order to eliminate the sex stereotypes. Moreover, research has revealed that contemporary women's movement in India emerged as the burgeoning movement that challenged gender

inequalities and marked a significant shift in understanding the women issues (Agnihotri & Mazumdar, 1995). In addition, research posits that in order to increase the labour productivity and economic development, women education in India must go beyond the elementary level (Geeta Gandhi, 2001). However, the above study has not undermined the importance of elementary education. But, its findings have revealed that in order to achieve robust economic development, education beyond an elementary level is a prerequisite. Further, it is pertinent to note that with the major reformation of Indian economy in 1991 (Liberalisation, Globalization and Privatisation) popularly called as “LPG concept” India has achieved strides in economic development. It has been observed that literacy rates have not only continued their trends, but have also shown a remarkable improvement over the last decades for both males and females. However, after going through an extant review of literature, it was observed in a study “Towards the Millennium Development Goals” (Bajpal & Goyal, 2004) that though India is moving forward towards achieving greater literacy for females. But, there still exists lacunas in Indian education system which is evident in the form of lack of availability of schools for girls in proximity of their rural areas which discourages their parents in sending their girl child to school. In addition, a report released by HRD ministry has revealed that though the number of females enrolled for higher education in India have gone up to 17.4 million in 2017-18 from 12 million in 2010-11. However, there still persists a significant gap in the professional and diploma courses for the women. Thus, indicating the presence of gender bias in higher education system of India.

#### ***Statistical Compilation of Gender Related Indicators in India***

It has been prepared by Central Statistics Office and reveals the following highlights of the last Census of India 2011.

- The previous census 2011 has revealed that literacy rates for females are 64.63%, whereas for males, it is over 80%.
- As per NSS 71<sup>st</sup> Round, the rural literacy rate for females is 56.8% as compared to 72.3% for males. For urban population, the literacy rate for females is 74.8% as compared to 83.7% for males.
- It has been witnessed that highest female literacy rate is in Kerala- 92.1% and lowest is in Bihar- 61.8%.
- As per the last census, Adult literacy rate above 15 years of age is maximum for males -78.8% and minimum for females- 59.3%.
- Last census data has revealed that enrolment ratio for females are only 44%. The major reasons cited for non- enrolments are- lack of interest in education, financial constraints and stereotypic beliefs.

- It was also observed that there were 93 girls for 100 boys in primary classes, 95 in middle and 91 in secondary level.
- It has been found that gender gap in literacy rate has reduced from 21.6% in 2001 to 16.3 % in 2011.
- Last census report 2011 has also reported wider disparities in educational outcomes across different regions of the country. It has been witnessed that southern states in India are performing well in education sector than Northern ones because the former puts more thrust on growth of education and not politics and bureaucracy than later.

## **V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

After making critical analysis of literature, it was observed that women education in India has undergone varied phases from early British era to the period of independence. It is evident from the Indian history that modern education for girls in India gained momentum with the advent of various social and women movements and Christian missionaries. Moreover, it was after the promulgation of Indian constitution that entitlement to equal education was recognised as women’s constitutional right. In addition, a tremendous growth was witnessed in women education after post economic reforms period (1991) and it was also observed that women education plays a pivotal role in achieving robust economic development. However, apart from developments witnessed in women education, the present review has also brought forth the various critical issues which have remained unaddressed and are discussed below. These issues call for utmost attention and require collaborative effort on the part of all stakeholders- government, civil society, NGO’s etc in order to change the complete state of women education in India so that it can contribute immensely towards achieving robust economic development.

- As per the last census report available, it has been witnessed that though the female enrolment ratio has increased in the primary, middle and secondary schools, but still there is a long way to go and gender gap in education still persists up to a certain level.
- It has been observed that gender gap in education still exists at both urban and rural areas, but the statistics reveal that disparity is wider in rural areas as compared to urban ones.
- It was also observed during the review that adult literacy gap in India is still significant- males 78.8% and females 59.3%.
- The statistics has revealed that female enrolment ratio in India is lesser- 44%. The reasons cited for the same are- financial constraints, gender stereotypic belief and lack of interest in education.

- It has also been found that there exists the wide disparity in India across the different regions in terms of educational outcomes. The previous census data 2011 reveals that southern states are found to be performing well than Northern ones because the former prioritize education more than politics. Statistics available have shown that education sector being a key area is often influenced by bureaucratic structure and maximum resources of our country are utilised in politics and bureaucracy rather than on growth of education sector.
- Prior literature available reveals that gender bias still persists in higher education of India as less number of females is enrolled in professional and diploma courses.
- In addition, the critical analysis of the literature has also bring forth that India's national policy on education(1986) which was later revised in 1992 is limited in scope and puts maximum thrust on basic education than higher one.

Therefore, on the basis of extant review pertaining to linkage between women education in India and economic development, it can be concluded that current scenario of women education in India is altogether different as was before independence and pre economic reform period (1991). Further, research has highlighted that no doubt the women education in India has achieved strides but there is still a long way to go because various issues already explained above have been identified during the review of literature which needs to be addressed well on time so that women education in India can contribute towards enhancing nation's economic development.

## VI. CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS

In the back drop of conclusions drawn, following suggestions have been made available so that the current state of women education in India can be changed altogether.

- Better Infrastructure- roads, buildings, technology, other facilities coupled with active and fair involvement of various stakeholders viz- government machinery, women activists, civil society, NGO's etc is the need of the hour so as to improve the complete condition of women education in India.
- Government of India should give full opportunity to private players in order to put their resources into women education and thus enhance the skills and knowledge of women folk for the betterment of nation.
- There is the need for the Government to shift its focus from bureaucratic structure to education. It should realise that education is a key area than politics and bureaucracy and is pivotal for a nation's economic development and thus should make adequate investment of resources in it.

- There is a need of bold strategy for universal education at least through 14 years of age. Special attention is needed to ensure the education of girls on the same basis as of boys.
- Government of India should enhance the budget allocation for education and keep certain ratio of it reserved particularly for women education. This money should be spent mainly by the State Governments, but with the local responsibility for overseeing the effective utilisation of resources.
- Apart from the efforts to be taken by the government, collaborative efforts are also needed on the part of other stakeholders- women activists, civil society, non-governmental organisations etc to change the mind-set of the people who are still influenced by gender stereotypic belief and give less priority to women education. They should be made realise that education for women is tantamount to men's.
- Further, there is a need to identify the reasons behind female's lack of participation in education. For this, various stakeholders should make an initiative by organizing door to door campaign in the areas where there is a less enrolment of females in education. Proper counselling of females and their family members need to be done so as to change their attitude and motivate them for acquiring education for their own wellbeing as well as for nation's economic development.
- The present review also suggests the government of India to revisit the policies formulated for women education and redraft the same so as to fill the gaps identified which have remained unaddressed and needs further attention. This can be a good initiative for improving the lacunas in women education system and thus can ensure a sound platform for achieving heights in nation's economic development.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- GDP: Gross Domestic Product.
- HRD: Human Resource Development.
- LPG: Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization.
- NGO'S: Non-Governmental Organizations
- UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

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