

# A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON INDIAN WOMEN EDUCATION AND ITS POSITIVE LINKAGES WITH ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that world communities have recognized women as a critical factor in economic growth and development of any nation. But, this happened only when their lives undergo a drastic change with the advent of various legislation, social reforms and women's movement worldwide which led to major shift in the sociocultural set up. It is pertinent to mention that earlier they were engaged mainly in household chores, bearing and rearing of children and were treated on different footings. Their lives were deeply affected by patriarchal system which often results into deprivation of their basic rights including right to education. Further, with particular reference to Indian sub-continent, the picture of women education was gloomy as women were devoid of their basic right to education. However, with the passage of various social reform movements in India, various women movements, Christian missionaries and new economic reforms of 1991 popularly called as LPG concept (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization), Indian women education witnessed a major change. With this development, entitlement of women to education begun to be considered as indispensable for economic growth and development of any nation. Moreover, a plethora of literature has shown a strong positive linkage between Indian women education and its economic growth and development. Thus, in the backdrop of voluminous literature, present study is an attempt to discuss current state of Indian women education, to identify, critically review and analyze the prior literature pertaining to positive linkage between Indian women education and economic growth and development. This study has also bring forth various issues which have remained unaddressed earlier and demands utmost attention. At the end, various valuable suggestions have also been made with an aim to fill identifiable gaps in Indian women education system so that it can contribute immensely towards achieving robust economic growth and development.

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

## 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 organizations 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 growth and development. In 1950's and 1960's, the UNESCO positioned its mainstream operations towards women education and considered it instrumental to the economic growth and 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 recognized 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 growth and 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.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:** The study aims to achieve the following objectives as stated below

- ❖ To identify, review and analyse the prior literature revealing strong positive linkages between Indian women education and economic development.
- ❖ To analyse the current state of women education in India.
- ❖ To provide valuable suggestions so as to address the issues identified in Indian women education system which will prove helpful in achieving new heights in its economic development.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Though, the present study is purely conceptual and descriptive in nature. It has used desk research methodology to review previous research findings in order to gain a broader understanding about Indian women education and its positive linkage with economic development.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Plethora of literature has shown that there exists a strong positive linkage between Indian women education and its economic development. 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%. Further, prior research have posited a positive correlation between women literacy levels and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the sense that an increase in literacy levels from 20%- 30%, enhances GDP from 8%-16% for a number of countries worldwide (Tilak & Jandhayala, 1987). In addition, scholars like 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, it is imperative to mention here that various studies have reported their results based on Schultz philosophy that education should be viewed from an investment point and not an expenditure which suggests the nations to invest their resources in women education. This is highly needed to enhance women's capacity, skills and knowledge in order to achieve robust economic development (Unterhalter, 2005 & Vaughan, 2010). In addition, research has also noted that the state of women education in world has not changed altogether. There are still many shortcomings and gaps which need to be addressed with the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders viz- government officials, international organizations, women activists and academicians (John, 1999 & Vaughan, 2013).

## Women Education and Economic Growth and Development: An Indian Scenario

In Indian subcontinent, the state of women education was much gloomy during both pre and early period of British era. Lives of women were deeply dominated by complex patriarchal systems which deprived them from their basic rights to education. However, it is noteworthy to mention that modern education for women in India paved its way with the coming of Christian missionaries and mushrooming of various social reform movements. Later on, with India's independence, promulgation of constitution in 1950 led a revolutionary change in Indian education system as women were promised access to free and compulsory education from the age of 5 to 14 years. Further, in order to eliminate the sex stereotypes 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. Moreover,

research has revealed that contemporary women's movement in India emerged as the burgeoning movement that challenged gender inequalities in education and marked a significant shift in understanding the women issues (Agnihotri & Mazumdar, 1995). In addition, research has highlighted that Indian women education must go beyond the elementary level so as to increase the labour productivity and economic growth and development (Geeta Gandhi, 2001). This does not indicate that importance of elementary education has been undermined. But, the study has noted that in order to achieve robust economic growth and development, education beyond an elementary level is a prerequisite. However, India has achieved strides in economic growth and development with the major reformation of Indian economy in 1991 (Liberalization, Globalization and Privatization) popularly called as "LPG concept". After reformation, it has been witnessed 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. In addition, critical review of existing literature has revealed certain inconsistencies in the sense that though India is moving forward towards achieving greater literacy for females. But, there exists few lacunas in Indian education system which are evident in the form of unavailability of schools for girls in proximity of their rural areas which discourages their parents in sending their girl child to school (Bajpal & Goyal, 2004). Further, a report released by Human Resource Development Ministry in India 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, a significant gap is still persistent in professional and diploma courses for the women which clearly indicates a presence of gender bias in Indian higher education system.

#### **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 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 that there exists wider disparities in educational outcomes across different regions of the country. As, Southern states in India have been found to perform well in education sector than Northern ones. The reasons found for same have been that in Southern states the government lays main emphasis on growth of education than Northern States where politics and bureaucracy have been found to be major focus of government.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

After making critical analysis of existing literature, it was observed that Indian women education has gone through many 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 in 1950 that entitlement to equal education was recognized as women's constitutional right. In addition, post economic reform period of 1991 witnessed a tremendous growth in Indian women education and its pivotal role in achieving robust economic growth and development. However, apart from developments, it is pertinent to mention that current study has also brought forth various critical issues which have remained unaddressed earlier and which call due attention. These are discussed below in detail 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 growth and 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 gender gap in education is still persistent up to a certain level.
- ❖ The study highlights that gender gap in education still exists at both urban and rural areas, but disparity is wider in rural areas as compared to urban ones.
- ❖ The study has witnessed an adult literacy gap in India is still significant- males 78.8% and females 59.3%.
- ❖ During the critical review, it has been observed that female enrolment ratio in India is lesser- 44% and financial constraints, gender stereotypic belief and lack of interest in education are its major reasons.
- ❖ The study also notes a wide disparity in India across the different regions in terms of educational outcomes in the sense that Southern states are found to be performing well than Northern ones because they prioritize education more than politics. Thus, statistics has clearly indicated that education sector being a key area is often influenced by bureaucratic structure of our country and our maximum resources are utilized in politics and bureaucracy rather than in education sector.
- ❖ The current study has also noted that gender bias is still persistent in higher education of India as less number of females are enrolled in professional and diploma courses.

- ❖ The critical analysis of existing literature has also bring forth that India's national policy on education(1986) which was later revised in 1992 is limited in scope in the sense that it puts maximum thrust on basic education rather than higher one.

Therefore, on the basis of existing literature on Indian women education and its positive linkage with economic growth and development, it can be concluded that Indian women education has witnessed drastic change since independence and post economic reforms of 1991. It has achieved many strides but there is still a long way to go because the current study has identified various issues already explained above which needs to be addressed well on time so that Indian women education can contribute immensely towards achieving robust economic growth and development.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

In the back drop of critical analysis of existing literature and conclusions drawn, following suggestions have been made so that current state of Indian women education can be improved in order to achieve a sound economic growth and development.

- ❖ There is the need of an hour for 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 so as to improve the current state of Indian women education.
- ❖ Government of India should give full opportunity to private players in order to invest their resources into women education which will enhance skills and knowledge of women folk for the betterment of nation.
- ❖ In order to ensure robust economic growth and development, Government of India should make education sector its main priority than bureaucratic structure. It is the need of an hour to realize that education is a key area than politics and bureaucracy and pivotal for a nation's economic development. Thus, adequate investment should be made in it.
- ❖ Bold strategy for universal education is highly needed 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 utilization of resources.
- ❖ Collaborative efforts are also needed on the part of other stakeholders like- women activists, civil society, non-governmental organizations 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 understand that education for women is equally important as men's.
- ❖ 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 well-being which in turn will prove fruitful to nations economic growth and development.

- ❖ The present study has also suggested that government of India should revisit the policies formulated for women education and redraft the same so as to fill the gaps identified which have remained unaddressed earlier. This can be a good initiative for improving the lacunas in Indian women education system and can ensure a sound platform for achieving heights in nation's economic growth and development.

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