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**EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING IN INDIA****Dr. Usha Kumari**

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**ABSTRACT :**

*“Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skill and confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process”.*

**KEYWORDS :** Empowerment, Distance Learning.**INTRODUCTION :**

Education is important for everyone but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievement of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations.

“Education is no longer limited to either schooling, college or the production of the entrepreneurs, capable of increasing the gross national products, but rather aims at the development of human resources for a wide range of purposes.” [Motilal Sharma]

Large increase in population coupled with a growing awareness of the benefits of education are leading governments to explore the possibility of using alternative means to provide education on a large scale. The such alternative that countries in the region are considering is Distance education.

Distance education is a global and rapidly growing phenomenon which offers formal learning opportunities to people who would not otherwise access to education.

The special characteristic of distance education is that it is endowed with high flexibility and can meet the demands of education for all. Distance education takes education to places and people hither a unreached, transcending social, economic and geographical equality and thereby opens a new vista in our striving towards breaking the barriers of opportunity and equity. Through distance education it is easier to transport knowledge to people than transport people to the people of knowledge. Because of these special features of distance education it benefits certain categories of people who for various reasons are unable to avail for the formal education system. Thus women as a category could really take advantage of the provision of distance education in a large measure.

Over the past few millennia, the status of Indian Woman has been subject to many great changes. From a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. But looking at the education, it is immediately visible that the female literacy rate in India is lower than the male literacy rate. Compared to boys, far fewer girls are enrolled in the schools and many of them drop out. According to the National Sample Survey Data of 1997, only the states of Kerala and Mizoram have approached universal female literacy rates. According to majority of the scholars, the major factor behind the improved social and economic status of women in Kerala is literacy. A modern Indian woman has to take care of two social spaces viz. marriage and occupation both of which call for education as the primary requirement. The most



damaging denial of opportunity that women in India suffer is the ability to receive an education. A woman's lack of education certainly has an adverse affect on the her family, most importantly on her children. Under Non-Formal Education programme, about 40% of the centers in states and 10% of the centers in union Territories are exclusively reserved for female. In urban India, girls are nearly at par with the boys in terms of education. However in rural India girls continue to be less educated than the boys. The International Institute for Population Sciences found that in India, infant mortality is inversely connected to the amount of education mothers received.

India still has one of the lowest female literacy rates in Asia. The Indian government is committed to improving the education of girls and empowering Indian women through its constitution, amendments and even a National Policy for the Empowerment of women. Regarding education for all, the main concern seems to be keeping girls in school. The differentials between primary school enrolments of boys and girls differ 12 percentage points, but that number grows to 23% points beyond primary school. Additionally, many women also find it difficult to gain higher education and advanced degrees especially after marriage due to the commitments to the family. In this paper distance education is looked upon as a flexible and appropriate means to deliver education to the need, especially women. The emerging new age women will have the ability to equip herself with education thereby seeking the own identity, confidence and self-respect.

Urban and Rural wise Male and Female literacy rate in India

Gender	Category		
	Urban	Rural	Total
Male	89.67	78.57	82.14
Female	79.92	58.57	65.46
Total	84.98	68.91	74.04

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

Pulist (2001) conducted a study on "Student Support Services in Correspondence/ Distance Education in India : A Historical Perspective". In the study author highlighted the necessity of Open and Distance Learning in imparting, quality higher education through optimum use of technology. According to the author the students support services eventually aim at compensating for the absence of live support from the teacher for the benefit of the isolated individual learners and making the necessities basic facilities to them directly or indirectly.

Srivastava (2002) in his study " A Comparative Study on Current Trends in Distance Education in Canada and India" highlighted that the formal system was unable to meet the demand for higher education in India and Distance Education was adopted as an alternative mode at the University stage in 1962. In both Canada and India Distance Education opportunities at the university level have increased enormously. Many trends are putting new pressure on the conventional education system, forcing many institutions to review and amend their existing policies and procedures.

### HISTORY OF ODL

The first Distance Education Programme began in 1830s with the advent of commercial correspondence classes. The rate of distance learning registration has increased 2.5% each year over the last 10 years. The Open University System was initiated in the country to augment opportunities for higher education as an instrument of democratising education and also to make it a lifelong process. The 1<sup>st</sup> Open University in the country was established by the State government of Andhra Pradesh in 1982. In 1985, the central government established the Indira Gandhi National Open University [IGNOU]. The Open University programmes have proved to be highly cost effective. The current indications are that their cost is much lower than the cost of normally incurred by the traditional system on comparable programmes. The open

universities arrive at lower costs through economies of a scale since part of its fixed cost will get distributed over a large number of students. The open university in the country have generally developed their programmes and courses with a view to ensure that they are relevant to the economic and employment needs. Most of their programmes are very different from those offered by the traditional universities.

Distance Education get overwhelming response in India, the universities introduced many new distance education job oriented courses according to the changing times and students requirement. Currently in India, the Distance Education departments are generating the maximum revenue for their universities, in many cases more than even the professional and self financing courses.

#### **TECHNOLOGIES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION :**

Following are the common technologies available for the instructional delivery of distance education courses :

- (i) Video Technologies : Two way video with two way audio.
- (ii) Audio Technologies : Two way audio transmission.
- (iii) Internet based technologies : Internet courses using synchronous computer based instruction and Internet courses using asynchronous computer based instruction.
- (iv) Other Technologies : CD-ROM Mixed mode packages and on open ended other specify category.

#### **IMPACT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION ON WOMEN LEARNERS :**

Following are the impact of Distance Education on women learners :

- (a) They gained confidence.
- (b) Improved their career opportunities.
- (c) Attained more degrees for satisfaction.
- (d) Updated their skills.
- (e) Second chance of learning for disadvantages / compelled drop out.
- (f) Acquisition of knowledge.
- (g) Change in socialization pattern of children.
- (h) Better decision making capacity.
- (i) Respect in family and community.
- (j) More opportunities for networking and communicating.
- (k) Vision broadened.
- (l) Flexibility in time and space.
- (m) Assists in facing the challenges in life of women.
- (n) Increased the literacy rate of the country and state.
- (o) Leads the empowerment of women.

The second source of data reveals that 40-50% of the students of the majority of the O and DE institutions are Women. In India, percentage of women in Distance Education is 30-40% .

#### **LIMITATION OF TECHNOLOGIES :**

- (i) While there is a very wide range of media and interfaces available. their effectiveness in terms of educational communication, compatibility with the subject have to be considered.
- (ii) Good domestic facilities in terms of power supply, maintenance, availability of whichever medium is selected, software production and trained personnel are very important to the success of a distance education project.
- (iii) There are, in many minds, questions regarding the pedagogical implication of using distance methods which depends so greatly on the media. Passive learning is still something in a problem of Asia and many be reinforced by excessive depends on the media.

- (iv) Many countries may need to opt for higher technology in communication out of their logistical and geographical problems, these technologies may include satellites and computers Ways can be found in which they become cost effective.
- (v) It is important to familiarise Asian countries with the language of new technology and it is important not to be left behind in gaining access to the most advanced technology.

### **DISTANCE EDUCATION : THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE.**

India is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest and the 2<sup>nd</sup> most populated country in the world. About 3 quarters of the population live in villages and their main occupation is agriculture. India achieved Independence in 1947 and has adopted a parliamentary form of government based on Universal Adult Franchise and a mixed economy. India has made notable advances in various sectors, but still is a developing country. Distance Education in India has a history of nearly 3 decades. Persistent efforts have been made by both government voluntary organisations to achieve Universal literacy and expand opportunities for female education.

### **SOME STATS:**

The enrolment of women in educational institutions has increased from 18.53% in 1987 to 64.81% in 2001. The numbers of girls enrolled in schools today is 56.49 lacs constituting 41% of girls in the relevant age group. The highest enrolment is in Goa and the lowest in Bihar. Both the central and state governments have taken steps to improve the overall gross enrolment ratio to 25%. The enrolment of women in professional courses stands today at 14% of the women in higher education.

### **CONCLUSION**

The concept of empowering women through education, like the concept of freedom, is intangible sometimes illusive and often subject to divergent interpretations. Distance learning can be used very effectively by women in need, both employed and not to gain higher education and degrees. The outlook of Distance Learning institutions may adapt suitably considering the social and economic basis of Indian women. Unless considerable time and energy are used in striving to establish and maintain a flexible distance education especially for women, unless the majority of these disadvantaged learners have access to the resources of the institutions and technological advances and unless Distance Learning institutions conduct ongoing research evaluate the impact of the new teaching and learning strategies, women education in the context of Distance Learning and the consequent empowerment will remain a mammoth challenge.

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