

Development of Women Education In India

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ABSTRACT

Women education is a catch-all term for a complex set of issues and debates surrounding education system. Women education in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as it can play a very important role in the development of the country. It includes areas of gender equality and access to education and its connection to the alleviation of poverty. Education is a milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to suspend to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. The development of women's education in rural area is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, weak, backward and exploited. Women education also involves issues of single-sex education and religious education, in that the division of education along gender lines as well as religious teaching on education have been traditionally dominant and are still highly relevant in contemporary discussions on education of females as a global consideration.

KEYWORDS: Women education, Surrounding, Gender equality, Empowerment, Complex set, Poverty, Global

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental means of human development and to bring about any desired change in a society, which is an accepted fact throughout the world. Education not only helps in the development of personality of a child but also determines his/her future. Education is a process of development which consists of a passage of a human being from the state of infancy to an old age. It is also a process whereby he adapts himself gradually in various ways to his physical and spiritual environments. Education is able to instill in a child a sense of maturity and responsibility by bringing in him the desired change according to his needs and demands of ever-changing society, of which he is an integral part. It promotes values and good habits and awareness towards corruption, terrorism and disease. Education helps an individual at a global platform (Agarwal, 2001).

Men and Women are just like the two wheels of a chariot.

They are equal in importance and they should work together in life. 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 life (Gupta, 2003).

The rise of feminist ideas has, however, led to the tremendous improvements in women's conditions throughout the world in recent times. Women education in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very significant role in the development of the country. Women power is crucial to the economic growth of any country. Little has been achieved in the area of women empowerment, but for this to happen, this sector must experience a chain of reforms. Improving girl's educational levels has been demonstrated to have clear impacts on the health and economic future of young women, which in turn improves the prospects of their

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entire community. It is revealed from studies that infant mortality rate of babies whose mothers have received primary education is half compared to those whose mothers are illiterate (Rao, 2001).

NEED AND IMPORTANCE

Women empowerment can only be achieved by providing adequate and functional education to the women folk. It is expected that purposeful occupational achievement and satisfaction is ensured by deep self-awareness and understanding which can only be achieved through the provision of effective and functional education with proper guidance and counselling services. This has been noted is likely to guarantee women empowerment with its root based on women struggle to improve their status. The empowerment suggested is such that it entails the process of challenging power relations and of gaining wider control over the source of power. This however cannot be achieved without the provision of reasonable access to formal and functional education to the women folk. The need for women education is also informed by the fact that purposeful occupational achievement and satisfaction is ensured by deep self-awareness and understanding which can only be achieved through the provision of effective and functional education and guidance and counselling. This is based on the premise that education has been adjudged to be a viable instrument of change in the positive direction. Provision of formal and functional is needed for the women folk, because

- (i) it would empower them to know and ask for their rights to education, health, shelter, food, clothing etc;
- (ii) it would empower them to fight against every form of discrimination against their folk, assert themselves about their right to equal treatment with their men counterpart as bonafide citizens of this nation;
- (iii) it would enable women to take decisions and accept responsibilities for taking such decisions concerning themselves;
- (iv) it would give economic power to the women and thereby enable them to contribute their quota to the economic growth of the nation;

(v) it would empower the women scientifically through exposure to science and technological education for the challenges of the present technological age and information computer technology break through unfolding worldwide and

(vi) it would avail women with the opportunity of participating keenly in the world of sophisticated politics and governance as enlightened citizens.

Gender discrimination still persists in India and lot more needs to be done in the field of women's education in India. The gap in the male–female literacy rate is just a simple indicator. According to the 2001 census, male literacy rate was >75% and female literacy rate was 54.16% and according to the 2011 census, the male literacy rate was 82.14% and female literacy rate was 65.46% only (Census of India, 2001). A woman has to play three roles in the course of her life. Each of these roles expects some duties from her. It is only with the help of education that she would be able to do them successfully. The first duty of a woman is to be a good daughter. The second duty is to be a good wife and the third duty is to be a good mother. Education teaches a woman what she should be. It also teaches her how she should do it to be a good daughter, a good wife and a good mother. Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. Moreover, educated women can also help in the education of infant mortality rate and growth of the population.

PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF WOMEN

Over the past 10 years, professional woman in India have witnessed a quiet revolution in gender relations at work and family relations at home, comparable to the social transformation the United States experienced starting in the 1960s. However, in a new Working Mother Research Institute report, entitled Professional Women in India: Changing Social Expectations and Best Practices for Global Corporations, researcher Karine Schomer, Ph.D., finds many obstacles still being faced by Indian professional women.

‘Ceilings to their aspiration are made of more than glass’, writes Schumer, who has studied trends among professional women in India for >20 years. ‘Traditional social attitudes and cultural patterns have not changed overnight. Overt discrimination may be receding, but the “old boys’ networks” may still be operational. The skills and confidence to push for career advancement are not instantly acquired. Practical infrastructure challenges can vex the most determined of women as they try to make lives that embrace both work and family’. Commissioned by Working Mother following its fourth annual Global Advancement of Women Leadership Summit, held in Bengaluru, India, in 2009, this important research report finds that Indian women professionals see themselves as true trendsetters both at work and home.

WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

It is very important to know the historical background, if we are to make a study of status of women in India. It is not easy to find answers for questions like when did women start losing their status or who was responsible for this situation.

Women education in Ancient Period

The history of education in India has its roots in ancient Vedic age. During the Vedic age, >3000 years ago women were assigned a higher place in society. They shared an equal standing with their men folk and enjoyed a kind of liberty that actually had societal sanctions. The ancient Hindu philosophical concept of ‘Shakti’, the feminine principle of energy, was also the product of this age. This took the form of worship of the female idols or goddesses. In India even today people worship Goddess ‘Saraswati’ as the Goddess of education. Vedic literature praises the birth of a scholarly daughter in these words. ‘A girls also should be brought up and educated with great effort and case’ (Mahanirvana Tantra), and ‘all forms of knowledge are aspects of Thee, and all women throughout the world are thy forms’ (Devi Mahatmya). Women of the Vedic period (circa 1500–1200 BCE) were epitomes of intellectual and spiritual attainments. The Vedas have volumes to say about these women, who both

complemented and supplemented their male partners. When it comes to talking about significant female figures of the Vedic period, four names – Ghosha, Lopamudra, Sulabha Maitreyi and Gargi come to mind.

Women education in Buddhist Period

In contrast to such hindrances and bigoted religious practices, Buddhism can certainly claim to have the least discriminatory attitudes against women. There is not the slightest doubt that the Buddha was the first religious teacher who gave women equal and unfettered opportunities in the field of spiritual development. Although he had pointed out on several occasions the natural tendencies and weakness of women, he had also given due credit to their abilities and capabilities. He truly paved the way for women to lead a full religious life. They were able to develop and purify their minds and realize the bliss of Nibbana just as men were. The testimonies of the Theris (Nuns) in the days of the Buddha speak amply to this fact.

The Buddha opened the gates for the full participation of women in the field of religion by making them eligible for admission to what was known as the Bhikkhuni Sangha – the Order of Nuns – that truly opened to women new avenues of culture and social service and ample opportunities for public life. This brought to women recognition of their importance to society and greatly enhanced their social status.

Women Education in Medieval Period

The condition of women in society deteriorated more during the medieval period with the entrance of Muslims. At this point of time, several evil practices like child marriage, sati and female infanticide were practiced largely. Purdah system was started. These women were also forced to practice ‘Zenana’. In this period, education for women’s was not common at every level, only few girls of rich and famous families could achieve the basic and religious education.

Women education in British period

Women’s education was acknowledged in 1854 by the

East India Company's programme: Wood's Dispatch. Slowly, after that there was progress in female education, but it initially tended to be focused on the primary school level and was related to the rich sections of society. The overall literacy rate for women increased from 0.2% in 1882 to 6% in 1947. In Western India, Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai became pioneers of female education when they started a school for girls in 1848 in Pune (Chandra, 2012).

Women Education after independence

After achieving independence, the Radhakrishnan commission (1948–1949) suggested for proper provision of women education. Our constitution came to force in 1950. Article 15 (3) of this constitution provides that any provision in this article will not impede the state government for special provision for women and children. Planned work for girls' education was started from 1951 for its propagation and expansion. In 1958, the union government constituted National Women Education Committee under the chairmanship of Durgabai Deshmukh for giving suggestions regarding women education. After the name of its chairman, it is also called Deshmukh committee. It submitted several suggestions for the propagation and expansion of women education, which chiefly included (i) establishment of National council for women education, (ii) additional finance for women education and (iii) equal education for men and women. The government constituted National Council for Women Education and assigned it the duty of planning and policy making regarding women education. In 1962, the Hansha Mehta committee was constituted. It also submitted almost similar suggestions for women education. The most effective suggestions were given by the Kothari commission (1964–66). It laid special emphasis on opening separate secondary schools and colleges for girls and hostels and transport facilities for girls coming from faraway. The Commission largely talked about female education which recommended a national policy to be developed by the government. This occurred in 1968, providing increased emphasis on female education (Agarwal, 2001).

CURRENT POLICIES FOR WOMEN EDUCATION

After independence, India has been taking active steps towards women's status and education. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002 has been a path-breaking step towards the growth of education, especially for females. According to this act, elementary education is a fundamental right for children between the ages of 6 and 14 years. The government has undertaken to provide this education free of cost and made it compulsory for those in that age group. This undertaking is more widely known Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Since then, the SSA has come up with many schemes for inclusive as well as exclusive growth of Indian constitution as a whole, including schemes to help foster the growth of women education.

The major schemes are as follows.

Mahila Samakhya Programme

This programme was launched in 1988 as a result of New Education Policy (1968). It was created for the empowerment of women from rural areas especially socially and economically marginalized groups. When the SSA was formed, it initially set up a committee to look into this programme, how it was working and recommend new changes that could be made.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

SSA was launched in 2001 with the aim of universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in elementary education and achieving significant enhancement in learning levels of children. Under this programme, special focus is on girls, children belonging to ST/SC communities, other weaker sections, minorities and urban deprived children. It is the government's flagship programme for achievement of universalisation of elementary education, as mandated by the 86th amendment to the constitution that made free and compulsory education to children in the 6–14 years age group a fundamental right.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme

This scheme was launched in July 2004 to provide education to girls at primary level. It is primarily for the underprivileged and rural areas where literacy level for females is very low. The schools that were set up have 100% reservation 75% for backward class and 25% for below poverty line females.

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)

This programme was launched in July 2003. It was an incentive to reach out to the girls whom the SSA was not able to reach through other schemes. The SSA called out to the 'hardest to reach girls'. This scheme has covered 24 states in India. Under the NPEGEL, model schools have been set up to provide better opportunities to girls.

Education for all

Education for all means not only having access to schooling but also having quality of education for all children. The SSA programmes of Government of India providing quality education for children between 6 and 14 years of age have increased the literacy rate of girls and boys. One of the main objectives of SSA (2001) was to bridge gender gaps in primary and secondary education. The National Literacy Mission was set up in 1988 with the aim to mobilize dropouts, introduce mass and functional literacy and involve the community in educating women to the secondary level.

EDUCATIONAL PROVISION IN THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio, economic, educational and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental rights among others ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law, prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment.

Article 21 A. The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6–14 years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine (86th amendment Act, 2002).

Article 41. Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases.

The state shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want.

Article 45. Provision for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of 6 years.

Article 46. Promotion of educational and economic interests of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other weaker sections.

Article 51A (k). Who is a parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of 6 and 14 years.

Article 14. The state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

Article 15. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

Article 39. The state shall, in particular direct its policy towards securing the following:

- (a) That the citizens, men and women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- (b) That the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter vocations unsuited to their age or strength.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE): RTE Act is being seen with much hope to bring about the long awaited changes in education of children aged 6–14 years, addressing

disparities of access and quality. The Act has also included duties of parents and guardians to get their children or wards admitted for elementary education in neighbourhood school. The biased parental attitude towards girl child in general and to education of girl child in particular will hopefully register a change by enforcement of the Act.

CURRENT STATUS OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

The percentage of educated women is significantly lower as compared to men in India. The Census report 2011 indicates that literacy among women as only 65.46%. It is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women in India is even much lower to national average. The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, weak, backward and exploited. Moreover, education is also not available to all equally. Gender inequality is reinforced in education which is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 65.46% against 82.14% of men. In the urban areas of the country, the female literacy rate is 79.9%, while in the rural areas it is only 58.7% (Census of India, 2011).

Table 1: Literacy Rate in India

Year	Persons	Males	Females
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.7	24.9	7.9
1961	24.0	34.4	13.0
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Census of India (2011).

Illiterate women have little autonomy, living first under the control of their fathers, then their husbands and finally their sons (Chatterjee, 1990; Horowitz and Kishwar, 1985).

According to Table 1 in pre-Independence time, literacy rate for women had a very poor spurt in comparison to that of men. The literacy rate of women has risen from 0.7% to 7.3%, whereas the literacy rate of men has risen from 9.8% to 24.9% during these four decades. During the post-independence period, literacy rates have shown a substantial increase in general. However, the literacy rate of male has almost tripled for example, 25% in 1951 and 76% in 2001. The female literacy rate has increased at a faster pace than the male literacy during the decade 1981–2001. The growth is almost six times, e.g. 7.9% in 1951 and 54% in 2001.

PROBLEMS OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

There are many obstacles that prevent girls from getting an education. Many factors responsible for low literacy level among women in India such as socio-cultural, economic, demographic, political and administrative. Other problems of women education include the major ones like lack of funds, inadequate facilities, inadequate manpower, sexual harassment, conflicting societal role expectations, government policies, low enrolment and high dropout from school, caste system, child labour practice, lack of basic amenities in school, early marriage, poverty and lack of political will power to implement the entire educational programme. The inferiority complex observable in Indian women can be attributed to the influence of environmental manipulation. Through the traditional socialization process of the typical society, women are made to accept negative self-fulfilling prophecy, stereotyping and stigmatisation that they are members of a weaker sex. Anxiety and depressive disorders were found to be significantly more common in women (Chandra, 2012)).

In many Indian families, girl children shoulder to bear major responsibilities of household work such as cleaning, cooking, looking after their sibling, fetching

water, collecting firewood etc. The actual problem of low educational attainment of girls is that they are often taken out of school to fulfill the family responsibilities. The female child in Indian culture especially in rural, tribal and poor families is expected to develop the qualities of inferiority, subservience and domesticity which place severe limitations on her education and development. Caste system plays a negative role in the education of girl children. Girls belonging to low caste families are forced to learn household chores and other petty work and not encouraged to go to school. This is one of the contributing factors for low status of women in society especially in rural areas. The high population growth rate, rapid urbanisation, migration etc. also attribute immensely for the poor literacy level of girls in India. Recent studies on out-of-school children show that most of them are neither engaged in full-time work nor they attend the school (Ramachandran, 2004).

At present, the forces which combine to hamper women education and development in India could be viewed broadly to include denial of access to education, early marriage, confinement to solitary living, subjugation by culture to accept choices forced on them, discrimination and harassment at work, political disenfranchisement from elective and political appointment and exposure to cruel mourning rites upon the death of their husband.

CONCLUSION

Education of women is the most powerful tool of the change of status in society. Education is important factor of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges to confront their traditional role

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and change their life. As various socio-cultural and economic factors such as dowry, child marriage, poor enrolment, high dropout, caste system, poverty, inadequate facilities, inadequate manpower and other practices deprive rights of education for girls particularly belonging to poor and underprivileged families, they should be eliminated through well-designed social welfare measures involving public, political parties, non-government organisations and government agencies. It is necessary to encourage women education at all levels and for dilution of gender bias in providing knowledge and education, establishment schools, colleges and universities even exclusively for women in the state. There should be an efficient monitoring system to ensure proper implementation of the welfare schemes launched from time to time by government to assure free and compulsory education for all children.

Education For All, Mahila Samakhya Programme, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme, National programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level and other many useful educational programmes are providing various facilities to enhance the education of women. These programmes are very important and helpful in improving women's education in India. Improving girls' educational levels has been demonstrated to have clear impacts on the health and economic future of young women, which in turn improves the prospects of their entire community. Education would help women to reduce maternal and infant mortality through improved nutrition, improved child rearing practice, health care and prevention against killer diseases.

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