

Empowering Women through Education

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ABSTRACT: *Empowerment of women has becoming a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. For centuries women were not treated equal to men in many ways. Today we can see that women occupies respectable positions in all walks of life. Yet, they are not absolutely free, due to discriminations and harassments of the society. A few number of women have been able to establish their potentialities. So now we have come out of these dark days of oppessions of women. It is the present necessity to fight for the rights of women and to ensure that they get all the rights which men have or in other words a movement for the Empowerment of Women. This empowerment is possible only through education. So Empowering Women through Education is a need of the hour.*

I. INTRODUCTION

"If you Educate a man, you educate an individual; if educate a woman, you educate a family" -Mahatma Gandhi

Education plays a very significant role in every one's life. It is a human right and an essential tool for achieving equality. One of the major recommendations of the National Policy on Education in 1986 is to promote Empowerment of Women through education. Empowerment is self-governance, self-sufficiency and self-maintenance. The concept of Women Empowerment was introduced at the International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985. Empowerment is a process which includes:

- Equal access to opportunities for using societies resources.
- Prohibition of gender disparity
- Freedom from violence
- Economic independence
- Participation in all decision making bodies.
- Freedom of choice in matters relating to one's life.

Really, education only helps to meet all these to women in the society. It also ensures that women grow up with knowledge of the world, ability for critical thinking and practical skills which lead to self-confidence and self-respect. So education is a mile-stone for Women Empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities, to challenge the traditional roles and to change their lives.

People must think that the education of women plays a pivotal role in improving living standards not only of their families but also of the nation. High women literacy rate improves the quality of life both at home and outside of home, by encouraging and promoting education of female children, and in reducing the infant mortality rate. Lower level of women literacy rate results in higher levels of fertility and infant mortality, poorer nutrition, lower earning potential and the lack of an ability to make decisions with in the household. So giving proper education to women is necessary for both the society and family.

II. STATUS OF WOMEN

The women in India enjoy a unique status of equality with the men as per constitutional and legal provision. But the Indian women have come a long way to achieve these positions. Gender inequality is the main problem, a female was always dependent on male members of the family. Female was not allow to speak aloud in front of the elder members of her family. In the family, every faults had gone to her. In many social activities she is not permitted to mingle with others. She has very little share in political, social, and economic life of the society. National Movement act as a light to eradicate such disabilities so far. Social Reformers like Raja ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar etc., stressed on women education, prevention on child marriage, Sati, polygamy etc. After Independence of India, the constitution makers and National Leaders recognized the equal social position of women with men. The position and status of women all over the world has risen incredibly in the 20th century. Now the status of women changed alot. She has brought the property rights, Voting rights, an equality in civil rights, matters of marriage, employment etc.

Women, has given a prominent place in the family set-up by our heritage and culture. Today in the modern age women, has an important role to play in the national development at large. Swami Vivekananda in 1983 said, "women have many and grave problems but none that cannot be solved by that magic word education." Before coming on the role of education in women empowerment it is good to think about the place of women in society as The Goddess (Devi), The Mother, The Sister, The Wife and the Prostitute. Traditionally, women's place has been inferior to that of the average man. In this male dominating society, the education of women has been neglected for a long period of time. Insufficiency of education in women can adversely affect the health and living condition of children. For to achieve economic empowerment of women we should eradicate poverty, give chance for micro credit – Women's access to credit for consumption and production, women and economy, globalization, women and agriculture, women and industry support services etc., should be promoted. To achieve social empowerment of women we should promote education, Health and sanitation, Nutrition, Housing and Shelter good environment, Science and Technology supporting hand in difficult circumstances, violence against women, protecting rights of girl child etc., are essential.

To achieve all these we should promote mass media. It will portray images consistent with human dignity of girls and women. Their policy will specifically strive to remove demeaning, degrading and negative conventional stereotypical images of women and violence against women. Private sector partners and media networks will be involved at all levels to ensure equal access for women particularly in the area of information and communication technologies. The media would be encouraged to develop codes of conduct, professional guidelines and other self-regulatory mechanisms to remove gender stereotype and promote balanced portrayals of women and men.

In modern Indian society a lot of changes happened in women's life especially in Kerala compared to Bengal, Bihar, Orissa etc. We must remember that women are the makers or builders of any society and it is the duty of the society to make them educated so that they may be able to make any decisions of their own life. They must have the knowledge about their roles in their own family, society and nation. They should not be reduced to the status of just second or third class citizen.

III. WHERE AND WHEN WE FOCUS

We have to focus on Education and Empowerment of women in rural areas. Particularly those from socially and economically marginalized groups. It is necessary to create an environment for women to seek knowledge and information in order to make choices at their own pace. It deals exclusively with the quality empowerment of woman's lives, emphasizing on process and internalizations responding to the needs of women and girls. As women progress, everyone in society benefits, including men. Tapping into the limitless potential of women is not only the right thing to do but it is the smart thing. That is why the United States Government and our international partners are invested in a historic effort to empower women globally. We should give chance to woman in every level then in all walks of life she can make her own foot prints. Providing proper counselling to parents in proper time will ensure the educational opportunity of a girl. Government also take initiative to give basic infrastructure and financial aid in the right time. Education has to provide girls with the capacity to analyze their situation, expose them to a new role, build up aspiration and see a different future. It is evident that the increase in enrollment and retention alone do not automatically result desirable changes in girls. It becomes important to move from the dimensions of input into education to outcomes, which are wider than academic attainment and include personality development, self-esteem, self-efficiency and skill of critical thinking and problem solving. It is evident that programmes and project given over the years failed to bring desirable progress.

IV. STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN EDUCATION

It is sure that an imperative need to develop an action plan for girls' education making it a priority area in school education. Education of the girl child needs special focus in the content of achieving universalization of elementary Education. The latest national programme on Education for Girls at Elementary level (NPEGL) itself is not capable for joining the gap between literacy rates of boys and girls at the school stage. A lot of issues are faced by the girls in the socio-cultural context and modernization. All the commissions stressed on the need for giving essential education to girls and focused on parents also through motivation campaigns. We should be aware of the following facts such as,

- Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) is possible only when all the girls are educated along with boys.
- Traditional role of girls should change. Both girls and boys need to grow economically and play multidimensional roles for successful life.

- Girls need special attention in Education. So democracy cannot flourish politically, without the education of girls.
- Should obey the constitutional obligations to provide special focus to girls' education.
- Many laws are enshrined in the constitution to protect the rights of girls.
- Economic and social progress can't attain without girls education.

These factors are necessary to attain girls' education. We should utilise cultural, political and constitutional provisions to attain this.

V. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS SUPPORTING WOMEN EDUCATION

Constitution of India provides a large consideration to the welfare and development of children and women. There are a lot of provisions for children as it not only grants equality and prohibits discrimination of caste, sex and creed but also protects childhood from exploitation and abuse. Within the democratic frame work, legislation, development policies, plans and programmes have been formulated for the total development of children. Major constitutional provisions on the girl child are:

- Article 14 ". . . equal rights and opportunities to men and women . . . "
- Article 15 ". . . prohibits discrimination on any ground . . . "
- Article 23 ". . . forced labour are prohibited.
- Article 24 ". . . No child below the age of 15 years shall be employed to work . . . "
- Article 42 ". . . provisions for just and human conditions of work and maternity relief . . . "
- Article 45 ". . . Free and compulsory education for all children . . . "
- Article 47 ". . . raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living . . . "
- Article 73 & 74 ". . . participation of women in the political and grass root development process . . . "

These are some of the favourable constitutional provisions to girl children of our country. Retention is the main problem. The girl students enrollment is most often done, but retaining them to the whole process is very difficult.

VI. BARRIERS OF WOMEN EDUCATION

There are many barriers to female education like parental preferences, and social values. People think that to spend money or time on daughters would be in vain because they have to be at home. But their son would run their families. Most of the rural people give education to their daughters to learn read, write and count the money, then they think that it is sufficient and feel proud that they have done their duty very well. Some of the major barriers are listed below:

- Inadequacies in Teaching Learning environment
- Parental preferences
- Social and religious values
- Poverty
- Lack of efforts for resource mobilization
- Inadequate school facilities
- Shortage of female teachers
- Gender bias in curriculum
- Teacher competencies
- Basic Teaching amenities
- Ineffective administrative supervision and monitoring
- Pardah system
- Low retention and high dropouts
- Working as domestic servants etc.

According to a 1998 report by U.S. Department of Commerce, the chief barrier of female education in India are inadequate school facilities such as sanitary facilities, shortage of female teachers, gender bias in curriculum and also conservative cultural attitudes

VII. HOW TO PROMOTE WOMEN EDUCATION

Some of the factors that may encourage women education is given below:

- Through giving parental motivational campaigns
- Residential schools for girls.
- Parental associations should be formed to encourage and to take care of girls education.

- Various schemes and programmes by state and center government should be implemented to promote girls education.
- Arrange community awareness programmes.
- Imparting basic amenities including building and toilet facilities will promote women education.
- Promote gender sensitivity in curriculum
- Give Natural Learning Experiences (NLE)
- Promote Activity Based Learning.
- Provide apt counselling in apt time.
- Appoint councillors in Schools.
- Organize co-curricular activities

VIII. ROLE OF EDUCATION IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

International Convention in all forms of Discrimination Against Women (ICDAW) in 1993 mentioned that education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence, necessary to participate fully in the development process. Educating women benefits the whole society. It has a more significant impact on poverty and development than men's education. It is also one of the most influential factors improving child health and reducing infant mortality rate.

Educated women's responsibility is tremendous. Women have a significant role in shaping the behaviour and mental make up of the younger generation. She has the primary duty of nurturing and shaping the children, the leaders of tomorrow. Educated women are always cautious about the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education makes them able to know their rights and gain confidence. Educated parents have a good thought about their children's educational attainments. Mother's education will influence more in children's life than father's. The empowered women can stand with men. They are not inferior to men and they can do whatever the men can do, some times better than that of a man.

IX. CONCLUSION

A number of great women have made themselves wonderfully powerful and successful in their lives through their individual efforts. They are the source of inspiration and motivation of the women of today. A women can do whatever the man can do in this world. Self-confidence of them is an essential part of women empowerment. Indian' women literacy rate is very low when we compared to world standards. In India it was found that there is a large disparity between female literacy rates in different states. Bihar, U.P. Rajasthan etc., have very low female literacy rates. We know that health levels there is also very poor. They have the lowest life expectancies. There infant mortality rate is very high. Kerala is the state with the lowest infant mortality rate. In India majority of the states are very backward in the case of women education. To recover from these hazards we should keep in mind that "Women's Education is Women's Empowerment".

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