



Women as Antidotes to Unlearning

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a vital role in every one's life, women is not the exception. It is a major avenue of upward social mobility. In the Vedic period, women participated in all the fields like men and took active part in every sphere of human life. After the Vedic period, the status of women deteriorated considerably. Women are economically, socially, educationally and politically dependent on men.

Education of women is even more important than that of men. The benefit of education of women is to create awareness of other rights to which they are entitled. The Constitution of India, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and five year plans brought women on an equal footing with men.

KEYWORDS: women, education, rights, awareness

Education means knowledge and knowledge itself is power. Swami Vivekananda says, "so long as the millions live in danger and ignorance. I hope every man a traitor who having been educated at their experience."

THE IDEA BEHIND EDUCATION:

Behind the idea of the right to education is to eliminate the discrimination. The initial education is to equip one with basic minimum levels of knowledge, attitudes, values and skills to start one's life journey. The benefit of education of women is to create awareness of other rights to which they are entitled.

Education is the same at all times and in all places. Education is a preparation for a living and for life, here and hereafter. An old Sanskrit adage states: "That Education which leads to liberation", liberation from ignorance which shrouds the mind; liberation from superstition which paralyses effort, liberation from prejudices which bring the Vision of the Truth.

EDUCATION'S ROLE:

Education plays a vital role in every one's life, women is not the exception. It is a major avenue of upward social mobility. Education is the key that opens the door to life which is essentially social in character. It is a guarantor of this to women belongs to different social groups. Stub makes a very pertinent remark in this direction. No one doubts that there is a close relationship between education social stratification, and mobility. In studying social life, sociologists rely heavily on factors related to the stratification of society; and education ranks high on the list of important stratification variables.

WOMEN IN VEDIC PERIOD:

In the Vedic period, women participated in all the fields like men and took active part in every sphere of human life. Women was man's friend, his co-worker and never his inferior, she had enjoyed the rights and problems freely with man. Women went to Gurukula to receive education and married only after getting education.

AFTER VEDIC PERIOD:

After the Vedic period, the status of women deteriorated considerably. Women are economically, socially, educationally and politically dependent on men.

There are various reports which through light on the position of Women's education during the last two hundred years. Gandhiji who championed the cause of women has made extensive and meaningful efforts to stress the need for women's education. Education of women is even more important than that of men. They count more during the life early formative years of person's life. Being enlightened them; they can bring up a generation of enlightened citizens".

It generally understood that education for women should also relate to jobs in offices and factories and in this sense, rural women suffer because this would mean their migration to urban areas. It also said

that education would lead to alienation from home making role. It is desirable to pause for a while and refer to the observation of Lewis on this issue. He says, "The expanded education opportunities available to girls have served to make them less satisfied with their traditional home making role. There is considerable evidence that many women, having been encouraged by our educational system to think like men. They earn for adult companionship and for persons with whom they can share intellectual interests. A job may meet these needs reasonably well"

HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE:

Education is a fundamental human right. It occupies a central place in Human Rights. Achieving the right to basic education for all is thus one of the biggest moral challenges of our times. The right to education must be given greater importance so as give everyone the benefit of education and an awareness of other rights to which they are entitled, woman is not the exception.

Education is set forth in article 26 (1) by Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is also enshrined in article 13 in ICESCR. To pursue the aim of education for all is therefore an obligation for States. Education for all is more than an ambitious objective: it is an ambitious ethic – predicated on human dignity. Education must also be accessible at all stages of life, so as to give a "second chance" to the excluded and enable every individual to adapt to a changing world and work environment. It must give access in the first instance to necessary knowledge, and then make available throughout life - not only in school but also through non-formal and informal education - what Robert Carneiro, in Keys to the 21st Century, calls "antidotes to unlearning".

It is true that this effort will only bear fruit if education for all is integrated in national development and poverty-reduction programmes. Today the essential link between education, development and poverty-reduction is universally recognised. This is why the poor and the excluded – particularly women and girls, too often deprived of education, and marginalised groups – should be the main targets of Education for all.

CONSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE:

Historically, education is an instrument of development and a factor for social change. The said right is not an absolute right. It flows from Article 21. Article 46 commands; the State shall promote this right to weaker sections. Articles 54 and 41 said as every citizen or worker or child of this country has right to free education until completes the age of 14years and (b) after completion of 14years, within the economic capacity he continues his or her studies. The fundamental purpose of Education is the same at all times and in all places. Education is a preparation for a living and for life, here and hereafter.

The 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1993 further paved way for effective participation of women in the political arena at the Panchayat local body level.

Indian women had been asking for the franchise and the Constitution

of India gave it to them willingly. This brought women on an equal footing with men. This adult franchise granted in article 326 was the least the constitution makers could do to remove gender discrimination. At the time of partition, women were educationally backward, emotionally disturbed, socially subordinate, economically handicapped.

That the government also had similar views is reflected in the 1913 Resolution of the Government of India, which stressed the need for a special curriculum of practical utility for girls. The preference of western educated Indian males for educated brides further reinforced this purpose of women's education and motivated parents to send their daughter to school. Thus, like in the Zenana set up, schools not only provided the girls with the basic in reaching writing and arithmetic but also taught them hygiene, needlework, embroidery, cooking i.e. those subjects that would prepare them for their future roles. Moral education, which imparted the values of obedience, chastity, patience and the joy of motherhood, was another ingredient of the curriculum. In effect, as Karlekar puts it "the liberation role of women's education emphasized by radicals was clearly subordinate to the wide social goal which stressed willing acquiescence and not a questioning and enquiring mind."

The whole issue of separate curriculum for boys and girls, in fact gained momentum in the 20s and the 30s. The majority view as expressed in the Hartog Committee (1929) and the Basic Education Committee (1838-39) supported differential curriculum for boys and girls. It was argued that since girls were to be married after finishing their schooling, the education should equip them with those skills that would enable them to be better wives and mothers. The All India Women's Conference on Education Reform (1927) demanded specialized education for women to fulfil "peculiar" role in society. Lady Irwin College, founded in 1932, was a result. It sought to make "women utilize the advantage of science in their homes and to add to that the loveliness of art."

INITIATIVES IN WOMEN DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA:

A major initiative towards women development during the first five year plan (1951-56) was the establishment of the Central Social Welfare Board in 1953 and State Social welfare Boards in 1954. The stress was on the organization of women in Mahila Mandals or women's clubs. The issues for concern during the Second Five Year Plan (1956-61) were social moral, hygiene and Post-care services. Policies were initiated for equal pay for equal work, training facilities for women to compete for better jobs and expansion of opportunities for part time employment. The Third Five Year Plan (1961-66) the three annual plans (1966-69) and the Fourth Five year Plan (1969-74) gave high priority to the education of women in addition to the regular welfare programmes. Thus the women were at the receiving end, not an integral part of development. The planning benefited women only incidentally and residually. They were viewed as objects of development 'not as subjects of development'. The facts revealed by the National Committee on Status of Women (1974) the observance of the International Women's Year (1975) and the International Women's Decade (1975-85) brought about a change in the thought process of the planners. There was a shift from the women welfare approach to 'Women and Development'

approach. To recognize women as a separate target group and give them their rightful place in development planning the Sixth Five Year Plan document of Government of India included a separate chapter viz 'Women and Development'. Women's lack of access to resources, education and employment was recognized as the main stumbling block in the integrationist approach. The strategy adopted under the Sixth Plan was therefore education, employment and health all these being inter-dependent. This required positive discrimination in favour of women and the creation of cells within the administrative structure.

The right to education commits us to "ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality". The second involves "achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults."

Thus the scale of the task before us is clear. In the course of generations to come we shall have to take up the unmet challenges of the 20th century – education for all – and those of the 21st century – life long education for all and the construction of knowledge societies. And these challenges concern all societies: even in the richest nations education systems cannot ensure sustainable literacy among the population. Studies show that over one-tenth, and more often than not one-fifth, of the population of the industrialised countries is affected by illiteracy – defined as the inability to read and write with understanding a short simple statement in relation to everyday life.

The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan's focus on creation of educational infrastructure and improving quality of education in rural areas has had positive outcomes. The National Literacy Mission or Saakshar Bharat Mission, with its objective of extending educational options to those adults who have no access to formal education, targeted female literacy as a critical instrument for women's empowerment. The advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has brought new opportunities for knowledge gathering for both women and men. The challenge is to put in place a policy and execution plan to ensure women's full engagement in the knowledge society in all areas including e-government, agriculture, e-learning, business development, and entrepreneurship.

Reta Jo Lewis says "Women's Education is Women's Empowerment," is timely and significant. Today, the world faces a unique set of challenges—economic, social, and political—that will require collaborative innovation and determination of all our world's best minds, before they can be tackled.

Global, inclusive partnerships, which put aside personal philosophies and focus on solutions, will be the way to solve, together, the most complicated problems on the planet. It will require every single woman in this room to make a commitment to support their peers and seek new opportunities, but it is possible. To invoke the motto of The White House Project, "Add women, change everything."