



EVALUATION OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

Most females were allowed to pursue education without significant constraints in the Vedic period. Women's education, unlike in the subsequent periods was not neglected. Female scholars were also present during this period. The educators of this period had divided women into two groups – Brahmadinis and Sadyodvahas. The former were life-long students of philosophy and theology. Sadyodvahas used to continue their studies until they got married. There were many women poets and philosophers, such as Apala, Ghosha, Visvavara, Sulabha Maitreyi and Gargi. The Church Missionary Society tasted greater success in South India. The first boarding school for girls came up in Tirunelveli in 1821. By 1840 the Scottish Church Society constructed six schools with roll strength of 200 Hindu girls. When it was mid-century, the missionaries in Madras had included under its banner, 8,000 girls. Women's employment and education was acknowledged in 1854 by the East Indian 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 richer 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 Phule became pioneers of female education when they started a school for girls in 1848 in Pune. In eastern India, apart from important contributions by eminent Indian social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune was also a pioneer in promoting women's education in 19th-century India. With participation of like-minded social reformers like Ramgopal Ghosh, Raja Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee and Pandit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, he established Calcutta's (now Kolkata) first school for girls in 1849 called the secular Native Female School, which later came to be known as Bethune School. In 1879, Bethune College, affiliated to the University of Calcutta, was established which is the oldest women's college in Asia. In 1878, the University of Calcutta became one of the first Indian universities to admit female graduates to its degree programmes, before any British universities would begin to do the same. This point was later raised during the controversy surrounding the 1883 Ilbert Bill, a proposed legislation which would allow Indian judges to judge European offenders. The Anglo-Indian community in India largely opposed the bill, claiming that Indians (both male and female) were largely uneducated and thus unsuited to judging European offenders in court. Indian women who supported the bill responded by noting that they were more educated as a whole than the Anglo-Indian women who opposed the bill, pointing out that more women in India had gained academic degrees than those living in the United Kingdom.

KEYWORDS

INDEPENDENT INDIA

After India attained independence in 1947, the University Education Commission was created to recommend suggestions to improve the quality of education. However, their report spoke against female education, referring to it as: "Women's present education is entirely irrelevant to the life they have to lead. It is not only a waste but often a definite disability."

However, the fact that the female literacy rate was at 8.9% post-Independence could not be ignored. Thus, in 1958, a national committee on women's education was appointed by the government, and most of its recommendations were accepted. The crux of its recommendations were to bring female education on the same footing as offered for boys.

Soon afterwards, committees were created that talked about equality between men and women in the field of education. For example, one committee on differentiation of curriculum for boys and girls (1959) recommended equality and a common curricula at various stages of their learning. Further efforts were made to expand the education system, and the Education Commission was set up in 1964, which 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.

Before and after Independence, India has been taking active steps towards women's status and education. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2001, 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. The government has undertaken to provide this education free of cost and make it compulsory for those in that age group. This undertaking is more widely known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

Since then, the SSA has come up with many schemes for inclusive as

well as exclusive growth of Indian education as a whole, including schemes to help foster the growth of female education.

The Major Schemes are the Following:

1. Mahila Samakhya Program: This program was launched in 1988 as a result of the 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.
2. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBV): 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 BPL (below Poverty line) females.
3. 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 who 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

One notable success came in 2013, when the first two girls ever scored in the top 10 ranks of the entrance exam to the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). Sibbala Leena Madhuri ranked eighth, and Aditi Laddha ranked sixth.

In addition, the status and literacy rates between West Bengal and Mizoram were found to be profound; a study compared the two states as they took on politically different approaches to helping empower women (Ghosh, Chakravarti, & Mansi, 2015). In West Bengal, literacy rates were found to be low even after fulfilling the 73rd amendment from 1992. The amendment established affirmative action by allotting

33% of seats at panchayats, or local self-governments, to women. Mizoram chose not to partake in the 73rd Amendment but has seen greater literacy rates, it is second highest in the country, and also has a better sex ratio. It was thus found that affirmative actions steps alone were not enough. Women also need to be given the opportunity to develop through formal education to be empowered to serve and profit from holding these public leadership roles.

Raising Awareness

The Canadian start-up Decode Global has developed the mobile game Get Water!, a game for social change focusing on the water scarcity in India and the effect it has on girls' education, especially in slums and rural areas. In areas with no ready access to water, girls are often pulled out of school to collect water for their families. Another step in this direction has been Shakti program started by Anandmurti Gurumaa where girls are trained in entrepreneurial skills for financial independence

Phule watched how untouchables were not permitted to pollute anyone with their shadows and that they had to attach a broom to their backs to wipe the path on which they had traveled. He saw how untouchable women had been forced to dance naked. He saw young widows shaving their heads, refraining from any sort of joy in their life. He made the decision to educate women by witnessing all these social evils that encouraged inequality. He began with his wife, every afternoon, Jyotirao sat with his wife Savitribai Phule and educated her when she went to the farms where he worked, to bring him his meal. He sent his wife to get trained at a school. The husband and wife set up India's first girls' school in Vishrambag Wada, Pune, in 1848.

He championed widow remarriage and started a home for dominant caste pregnant widows to give birth in a safe and secure place in 1863. His orphanage was established in an attempt to reduce the rate of infanticide.

In 1863, Pune witnessed a horrific incident. A Brahmin widow named Kashibai got pregnant and her attempts at abortion didn't succeed. She killed the baby after giving it birth and threw it in a well, but her act came to light. She had to face punishment and was sentenced to jail. This incident greatly upset Phule and hence, along with his longtime friend Sadashiv Ballal Govande and Savitribai, he started an infanticide prevention centre. Pamphlets were stuck around Pune advertising the centre in the following words: "Widows, come here and deliver your baby safely and secretly. It is up to your discretion whether you want to keep the baby in the centre or take it with you. This orphanage will take care of the children [left behind]." The Phule couple ran the infanticide prevention centre until the mid-1880s.

Phule tried to eliminate the stigma of social untouchability surrounding the exploited castes by opening his house and the use of his water well to the members of the exploited castes.¹

Savitribai was illiterate at the time of her marriage. Jyotirao educated Savitribai and Sagunabai Shirsagar, his cousin sister at their home along with working at their farm. Once she completed her primary education with Jyotirao, her further education was the responsibility of his friends, Sakharam Yeshwant Paranjpe and Keshav Shivram Bhavalkar. She also enrolled herself in two teacher's training programs; the first was at an institution run by an American missionary, Cynthia Farrar, in Ahmednagar, and the second course was at a Normal School in Poona (Now Pune). Given her training, Savitribai may have been the first Indian woman teacher and headmistress

After completing her teacher's education, Savitribai Phule started teaching girls at Poona. She did so alongside Sagunabai Kshirsagar, sister of Jyotiba Phule who was a revolutionary feminist and a mentor to Jyotirao. Not long after beginning to teach with Sagunabai, Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule along with Sagunabai started their own school at Bhidewada. Bhidewada was the home of Tatyasaheb Bhide, who was inspired by the work that the trio was doing. The curriculum at Bhidewada included a traditional western curriculum of mathematics, science, and social studies.

By the end of 1851, Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule were running three different schools for girls in Pune. Combined, the three schools had approximately one hundred and fifty students enrolled. Like the curriculum, the teaching methods employed by the three schools differed from those used in government schools.

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