



The Role and Responsibilities of Education in Social Empowerment of Women in India

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In ancient India, women enjoyed an equal status and had equal educational opportunities with men. Both boys and girls used to undergo a ceremony of Upanayan in Vedic days to study Vedas. Atharvaveda emphasized the importance of education of women for a successful marriage and happy home. It was only in Mediaeval India that political and social transformation lowered the status of women and consequently their participation in each activity. Society had built a prejudice against women's education and girls received little education at home. After the advent of British rule, however, a climate was built in favor of women's participation in economic & social life and female education received an impetus, although the opportunities remained limited and only a very small percentage of women could avail themselves of the educational facilities and pursued an independent career. Social tradition continued to stand in the way of bothering the scope and sphere of educational and employment avenues for women.

With the achievement of independence, the entire outlook towards women changed for the better and a new era was ushered in achieving the social, economical and legal changes required for equalizing the status of women with men and their equal participation in the national life of the country. The constitution of India provides for equal rights & privileges for men and women and also some specific provisions for their development & upliftment of their social, economic and political status.

There are two schools of thought about the role of women in our society. One traditional school of thought strongly advocates that the role of woman should be at home. The second school of thought, more radical, feels that women should be allowed to shoulder the same responsibilities as men in society and this extends beyond the home; consequently an opening available to men should be available to women also. The synthesis of the two views lies in extending the scope and openings for women in the field of education because if a woman has to stay at home and play the role of a housewife she can discharge this responsibility in a better way, if she wants to choose the independent career of if it becomes necessary for her to augment the family income. Educational development and acquisition of vital skills are therefore necessary for a woman, if she has to play effectively even her traditional role as a housewife and a mother. In short, this is the extent of inequality that exists between men and women in the country. The development of education among women is the main instrument through which we can narrow down this inequality and accelerate the process of social, economical and political change in the status of women. But one thing is clear that without education women's empowerment and progress is not possible at all.

Education has been an important factor for development which has helped in raising the status of women and their role in society since Independence when there has been an accelerated rate of expansion of women's education among girls and women. While the percentage of girls and women enrolled was only 25 of the total enrolment in 1951, it is raised to 35 at present. Similarly the literacy rate of women has in-

creased from 7.30% in 1951, to 24.88% in 1981. The proportion of enrolment of girls to boys in educational institutions has also risen from 33% to 55% during this period. At the primary stage of education, as against 38% in 1951. The number of literate women in the country has increased from 14 million in 1951 (Census) to nearly 80 million in 1981 (Census). By the end of 2001, 54.16% of women are literate. While at present the ratio of female education is generated. Empowerment means moving from a weak position to exercise a power.

Women's empowerment has five components- women's sense of self-worth, their right to have and to determine their choices, their right to have access to opportunities and resources, their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home, and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. Education is important for everyone but it is especially significant for girls. Girls who have been educated are likely to marry and to have small & healthier families. Educated women can recognize the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. However women's literacy rates are significantly lower than men's in most developing countries.

In pursuance of constitutional directive, the Government, since Independence, has enacted from time to time, a number of legislations to raise the status of women in India and to reduce the traditional gap of inequality between men and women in the socio-economic structure of the country.

To bring more girls, especially from marginalized families of BPL, in mainstream education, the government is providing a package of concessions in the form of providing free books, uniform, boarding and lodging, clothing for the girls' students under Central Government's Scheme for backward Caste of Girls' Students. While midday meals like Madhyambhojan Yojana; scholarship, free circles and etc.

The constitution not only provides equality for women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination for women. Empowerment of women is an important programme in development efforts. But the law is only the way, we are the walker and if we do not walk or talk, the situation of women may never change and so well do the nation's situation.

Attempts have also been made to introduce programmes of development aimed at enabling women to play their role in national life in an effective manner. Partly as a result of changes in the social structure and partly because of effective measures undertaken to speed up the process of development of women, the status of women in national life has undergone a considerable change. In all the Six Five Year Plans drawn for the national development, special provisions have been made for the welfare and development of women. Briefly, these programmes aimed at providing minimum health facilities integrated with family welfare and nutrition of women and

children; acceleration of women's education; their increase in labour force and welfare services for women in need. As a result of this and other welfare programmes, the living conditions of women have improved and they have become increasingly conscious of their right and capabilities.

As per the report of Task force on Education for Women's Empowerment, education can be effective tool for women's empowerment and the components of which are-

1. Enhance self esteem and self confidence of women.
2. Building a positive image of women by recognizing their contribution to the society, politics and the economy.
3. Developing ability to think critically.
4. Developing ability of decision making & acting through collective actions.
5. Enable women to make informal choices in areas like education, employment, & health especially reproduction health.
6. Insuring equal participation in development process.
7. Providing information knowledge and skill for economic independence.
8. Enhancing access to legal literacy & information relating to their rights & entitlement in society with a view to enhance their participation on an equal footing in all areas.

The following measures will be taken for achievement of the above parameters and the concerned bureau of the Dept. of Education & institutions will report on progress as stated below-

1. Every educational institution will take up active programs for women's development.
2. All teachers and institutions will be trained as agents of women's empowerment. Training programs will be developed by NCERT, NIEPA, DAE, SRCs, DIETs, SCERTs and the University System. Innovative training programs will be designed with the assistance of concerned organizations and women's groups.
3. Gender & poverty sensitization programs will be developed for the teacher, educators, and administrators. An environment will be created whereby all the sections of the education sector will become alive and sensitive i/to the role of motivate parents to send girls to school, preference will be given to recruitment of women teachers.
4. In order to create a greater confidence and to motivate parents to send girls to school, preference will be given to recruitment of women teachers.
5. The common core curriculum is potentially powerful instrument to promote a positive image of women. The Dept. of Women's Studies, NCERT will interestingly activities already initiated in area of developing gender sensitive curriculum removing sex bias from text books and trainings of trainers/teachers/SCERT and the concerned state level boards and institutions will imitate similar work.
6. Funds should be earmarked in all education Budgets for such awareness and advocacy related activities.

To empower woman, it has to be done by act not by words. The empowerment of the women will be one big step towards to overall development to the nation. As Nepal has already been entered into a new age of change, equality between male and female should be one of the top most priorities for policy makers.

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