Research Paper Education

Education for Women Empowerment in Indian Society: Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Gender discrimination continues to be an enormous problem within Indian society. Traditional patriarchal norms have relegated women to secondary status within the household and workplace. This drastically affects women's health, financial status, education, and political involvement. Women are commonly married young, quickly become mothers, and are then burdened by stringent domestic and financial responsibilities. They are frequently malnourished since women typically are the last member of a household to eat and the last to receive medical attention. Additionally, only 54 percent of Indian women are literate as compared to 76 percent of men. Women receive little schooling, and suffer from unfair and biased inheritance and divorce laws. These laws prevent women from accumulating substantial financial assets, making it difficult for women to establish their own security and autonomy. A strong "son preference" exists in the society, as it does throughout the country, and high rates of female infanticide and female feticide is a common practice in some areas. Having sons is economically advantageous to families due to cultural institutions; these institutions serve to drastically devalue the roles women play in the traditional society. Women continue to struggle to achieve equal status to men, making women's empowerment an issue of particular importance.

KEYWORDS Women Empowerment, Literacy, Female feticide etc..

Introduction:

Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. The greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. It is indispensable that education enables women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside of her hearth and home but helps her to get status, positive self esteem, and self confidence , necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Apparently it also facilitates them to procure a job and supplement the income of family and achieve social status. Education especially of women has a major impact on health and nutrition as an instrument of developing a sustainable strategy for population control. Moreover educated women can play an equally important role as men in nation building. Thus there is no denying fact that education empowers women. Indeed the different organs of the United Nations and experts on women's liberation argue for women's education as the basic step to attain equality with men.

One of the recommendations of National Policy on Education (1986) by the Government of India is to promote empowerment of women through the agency of education and it is considered to be a land mark in the approach to women's education of illiterate. The National Literacy Mission is another positive step towards eradication of illiteracy in the age group of 15-35 years. Women' education has assumed special significance in the context of India's planned development, as it is incorporated in every Five-year plans as the major programme for the development of women. Universalization of elementary education, enrolment and retention of girls in the schools, promotion of balwadies and crutches, raising number of schools and colleges of arts , science, and professional for girls , polytechnics, girls hostels, multipurpose institutions and adult education programmes are some of the steps being taken by both central and state governments in India to boost-up women's education

WOMEN'S EDUCATION: CHALLENGES :

Gender discrimination continues to be an enormous problem within Indian society. Traditional patriarchal norms have relegated women to secondary status within the household and workplace. This drastically affects women's health, financial status, education, and political involvement. Women are commonly married young, quickly become mothers, and are then burdened by stringent domestic and financial responsibilities. They are frequently malnourished since women typically are the last member of a household to eat and the last to receive medical attention. Additionally, only 54 percent of Indian women are literate as compared to 76 percent of men. Women receive little schooling, and suffer from unfair and biased inheritance and divorce laws. These laws prevent women from accumulating substantial financial assets, making it difficult for women to establish their own security and autonomy. A strong "son preference" exists in the society, as it does throughout the country, and high rates of female infanticide and female feticide is a common practice in some areas. Having sons is economically advantageous to families due to cultural institutions; these institutions serve to drastically devalue the roles women play in the traditional society. Women continue to struggle to achieve equal status to men, making women's empowerment an issue of particular importance. The Census report indicates that literacy among women as only 54 percent It is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women in India is even much lower to national average i.e. 65.38 .The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, the 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 54% against 76% of men as per 2001 Census.

THE ROOT CAUSES FOR LOW LITERACY AMONG WOMEN IN INDIA:

Women education is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. No single factor or cause can be held responsible for very low literacy rate of women in India. Subsequently it is associated with combination of many factors including social, cultural, economic, educational, demographic, political and administrative and so on. The following are the some of the important factors which could be attributed for the present poor state of affairs of womenfolk in education.

The Lower Enrolment: The lower enrolment of girls in schools is one of the foundational factors which stand as stumbling block for women empowerment in India. According to the latest statistics, two out of every ten girls in the age group of 6-11 are still not enrolled in schools. **Higher drop-out rate among girls from schools**: The incidence and prevalence of drop –outs among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas seem to be quite high. According

to available sources, occurrence of drop-out and stagnation amongst girls is nearly twice that of boys all over India.

Girl Child as Second Mother: In many families girl children play the role of second mother by shouldering the responsibilities of household work such as looking after the sibling, fetching water, collecting firewood, bringing fodder for cattle, cleaning and cooking etc. In rural India especially in poor families this traditional sex role makes girl child handicapped and conditioned by the attitude of mother and the family and discourages girl child to go school as it becomes secondary.

Bonded Labour System: This social evil is a quite discouraging phenomenon which stand as barrier for girl's education in rural areas for the underprivileged families of washer men and agricultural labour, scheduled caste and scheduled tribes.

Cast System as a Barrier; Children belonging to low caste families are forced to learn skills and work ways and not encouraged to go to school due to various factors in the sphere of strict instruction /threat from high caste communities for their selfish motives of keeping them as domestic servants and child laborers in the farms or factory.

Dowry as cordon: Dowry system and other social practices act as main causes of the neglect of the girl child and discrimination against girl child including the deprivation of right of education. In many families especially poor and down-trodden think that if their daughters are educated more, they have to accumulate more assets and properties to provide as dowry in large proportion at the time of marriage, so prefer rather to either stop their children with average education and so on but never higher education. This prevails more in underprivileged families and communities.

Child Labour Practice: A large segment of child population in India is engaged in child labour practices. According to UN sources India is the most child labour populous nation in the globe with more than 50 million child laborers indulged in beedi works , carpet making , bricks, mining , quarrying ,glass, bangles, match and fireworks, gem polishing ,handloom works. zari, embroidery ,coir industry, domestic works, construction etc. In most of these industries girl children are preferred for high productivity and low cost.

Poor School Environment for girls: In general the school environment for girls in India is not really interesting and encouraging. The subjects taught in schools are also not related to the environment of girl children. The methods of teaching are mostly out – dated, rigid and uninteresting. There are still hundreds of schools with poor basic amenities such as drinking water, latrine and toilet facilities, improper building, and inadequate number of teachers' especially female teachers preferable for any parents for safety of their girl children from different types of exploitation and abuse.

Female age at marriage: There is high association of female literacy with female age at marriage. By and large the female age at marriage of 18 (recently 21 years) as prescribed by various legislations not at all followed in India .It is very much ignored and neglected by the families of parents with low literacy and illiteracy background. This obnoxious practice discourages female children to continue their schooling and higher education as they enter into family life at the early age which is not advisable from the physical and mental health point of view and also of social development.

I**nferiority, subservience and domesticity:** 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 sever limitations on her education and development. **Poverty as a Barrier:** In many poverty stricken families, children especially girls are considered as economic assets as they bring income for livelihood as well to save from economic crises due to death or incapacity of parents (sick/ handicapped/aged).

Ineffective Law Enforcing Machinery: Indian constitution and various legislations pertaining to education to children assure free and compulsory education all children of this nation but unfortunately the enforcement machinery fail to discharge its duties and responsibilities to the satisfaction of the public interest and welfare of women **Demographic Factors:** The high population growth rate, rapid urbanization, migration etc ..also attribute immensely for the poor literacy level of women and girls in India.

Poor Political Will and Conviction: Government officials, policy makers, politicians etc of our country have neither political will nor conviction for the empowerment of women in general.

Conclusion:

Women around the world share a common condition; they are not full and equal participants in public policy choices that affect their lives. Nowhere is the gap between de jure and de facto equality among men and women greater than in the area of decision making. The top decision making position remain largely male dominated spheres where women have little influence. The lack of women's participation in political decision making has important consequences. It deprives women of important rights and responsibilities as citizens, and excludes their perspectives and interests from policy making and decision making. Their voices are missing from key decisions on national budgets and setting of government priorities. Their skills and viewpoint often remain unheard, underrepresented or ignored.

India as a country is still recovering from years of abuse in the time of the Raj and more years of economic suffering at the hands of the License Raj. It is only now that globalization, liberalization and other socio-economic forces have given some respite to a large proportion of the population. However, there are still quite a few areas where women empowerment in India is largely lacking. To truly understand what women empowerment is, there needs to be a sea-change in the mind-set of the people in the country. Not just the women themselves, but the men have to wake up to a world that is moving towards equality and equity. It is better that this is embraced earlier rather than later, for our own good.

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