



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Education

WOMEN'S EDUCATION: THE MYTHS AND REALITIES

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ABSTRACT

Education is considered both as a tool for development as well as a parameter of development. But education with relation to women is a very crucial aspect. Because education plays a vital role for the empowerment of women. It is through education that women can confront all the challenges in the society and can also challenge the traditional practices of the society. Education can help the women for reducing the gender inequalities and bringing the equilibrium in the society. So with this aim various policies schemes, provisions have been formulated for main stream the women's education in the society. But the reality gives a different picture. This paper has made an attempt to capture that gap between the words and the actions taken.

Defining Education:

The term Education is used to refer three meaning: knowledge, subject and a process. Etymologically the term "Education" is derived from two Latin words Educare and Educatum. "Educare" means to train or mould and "Educatum" means the act of teaching. According to Swami Vivekananda "Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man. Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind. Suggestion is the friction; which brings it out. According to Aristotle "Education is the creation of sound mind in a sound body."

"The central task of education is to implant a will and facility for learning; it should produce not learned but learning people. The truly human society is a learning society where grand parents, parents and children are students together." Eric Hoffer From all the above definition it has been evident that though various philosopher defined education is various ways but one common feature of education is that it is a continuous process. Education is always required for the betterment of the individual as well for the welfare of the society. Education includes two crucial aspects: knowledge and the experience. Both the aspect are equally important. Education is a dynamic process that helps the individual according to the changing times and situation. Even as a process it involves both the psychological and the social development in individuals resulting in the unmitigated development of the society.

Education is considered as major tool for social change and development. In other words the progress of a society relies mostly on the level of education of a society. Education is the key factor behind the complex relationship of the individual and the society. Change is the unchangeable law of nature. When we are referring change it means the social, economic, political, technical changes. All such changes are only possible when education is the major pre requisite behind this. This 21st century global world is the result of development arising out of education.

The globalized world is able to meet the diversified need of the people through the human intelligence and the creativity. Jaques Halk (1990) stated that "Education is human right since it leads to individual creativity, increases the participation to the economic, social, cultural activity in the society, contributing this way to the process of Human development.

Women's education in India: Past and Present

"If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered mean mother India empowered."

Jawaharlal Nehru India is patriarchal society, where the status of women has always been subjected to change with the passage of time. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the

promotion of equal rights by many reformers the history of women in India has been eventful. Education of women therefore occupies top priority among various measures to improve the status of women in India. (Ruchi 2013)

History says that women during the vedic periods enjoyed a very higher position. During this period women were allowed to access education. Women from Brahmin caste were taught the vedic knowledge and the Kshatriyas were taught the use of sword, bow and arrow. In the post vedic-periods with the arrival of Aryans in India there was a gradual decline in the status of women. Education was far from reach of women and various evil practices got introduced during this period. Among the various evil practices some common practices are child marriage, purdah system, sati. During the British periods the interest and access for women's education got revived. The eminent reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar emphasized more on the women's education. They also made the attempt for putting a ban on the evil practices that had began in the medieval period. The significant attempt was taken by Mahatma Jyotibha Phule along with the help of his wife Savitribai in 1848 through opening school for Shudra and Atishudra girls in western India. Phule was of the thought that education among women is a matter of justice in itself and the denial of education results in the low status of the women.

The post-independence period has the remarkable changes in the status of women's education. After independence the first major attempt was establishment of University Education Commission (1948-49) where there were some recommendations for women's education. With the Indian Constitution there was the guarantee for the equal rights for all the citizens also made some changes for women's education. The most crucial factor for the development of women's education in the post-independence period was the establishment of National Commission for Women's Education in 1958 under the chair person ship of Smt. Durgabai Desmukh.

Representing the statistical data on the women's education with the passage of time it shows a progressive figure. The literacy rate of 7 percent in 1901 has increased to 8.86 percent in 1951, along with the gradual rise in the figure through various decades as 15.35 percent in 1961, 21.97 percent in 1971, 29.76 percent in 1981, 39.29 percent in 1991, 53.67 percent in 2001 and 65.46 percent in 2011. Though there is a constant rise in the female literacy rate but the gap between the male and female literacy rate still exists. The figure for the existing gap between male and female literacy rate is represented in table 1.

Table 1 Literacy Rate in India (percent)

Census Year	Persons	Male	Female	Gap in Male Female Literacy Rate
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30

1961	28.3	40.04	15.35	25.15
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India 2011 (the 1981 literacy rates excludes Assam where the 1981 census could not be conducted, the 1991 census Literacy rates excludes Jammu and Kashmir).

The above table has clearly reflected that the literacy rate has increased for women but the gap in male female literacy rate still exists.

MYTHVs REALITY

Education is considered as an equalizer, empowerment measure and emancipating agency for women. Thus to strengthen the Education among the women various initiatives, provisions and policies has been formed. These initiatives can be classified into two broad categories; International and the National initiatives.

International:

- The international Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 in Article 26 focuses on Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship

National:

among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

- The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women Beijing, 1995 says that education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving gender equality. So the equality of access to education is required on the part of the women. Education among the women can make them capable enough to have the knowledge on health, nutrition and economic aspects. Women can also take a major part in the decision making process of the family and the society through education.
- The UN Millennium Declaration agreed by 191 governments in September 2000 in its goal 3 has emphasized on gender equality and women empowerment. With regard to this it has focused on reducing the cost of education, improving the quality of education, managing parental concern on safety of women and increasing the returns of investment done on women's education.
- The right to education: Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also emphasized on education for women. It has considered education as a basic human right and the fundamental freedom for all.
- The National Policy on Education (NPE) and the Programme of Action (POA) (1986, revised in 1992) marked a significant departure in India's educational history. The chapter titled 'Education for Women's Equality' states: Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well conceived edge in favour of women. The national education system will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the

development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering... The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education will receive overriding priority through provision of special support services, setting of time targets, and effective monitoring (GOI 1986, 1992).

- Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan (SSA) (2001) is another major attempt of Government of India towards \strengthening women's education where the provisions are made for the quality education from age 6-14 years. One of the major objectives of SSA is to bridge the gender gaps in primary and secondary education by 2010.
- The Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, commonly Known as Right to Education Act (RTE) tried for addressing the disparities in access to education and focused on the quality of education.
- And the most recent Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2015) is an attempt of Government of India where women's education is given at most importance. Because it emphasizes that the education of women can help them to overcome the poor conditions in society and can help to overcome the low child sex ratio of the country.

Apart from all the above measure there are various other constitutional provisions to safe guard the women's education. Various other schemes are also launched for the development of women's education like Mid-day Meal scheme, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme, Distric Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Natinal Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL). There are also various state wise interventions have also been adopted to improve the educational level among the women. Still the statistics on women's education represents a pitiable picture.

So it is quite explicable that even if there are efforts to make women's education a viable aspect of development still the target could not be achieved due to various reasons. The barriers for women's education are numerous like poverty, social constraint, lower position of women,

improper curriculum, lack of female teachers and lot more. But the report of DFID (2005) has broadly categorized these reasons into five aspects. Those are:

- Women's education is considered as a costly affair. In a patriarchal society like India women are considered inferior to men. Their role is only limited within the domestic sphere as a daughter, wife and mother. So investing o women's education is not profitable rather is taken as a burden for family.
- Poor and Hostile Environment of school. Parents are quite protective for their daughter for which they do not want to send their daughter to an environment where they feel their daughter to be unsafe. Even with the development of girls school too they existence of male teachers too create some kind of fear among the parents for their daughters.
- The weak position of women in society. As women are considered inferior in society so they have a less control over their own future. Despite various initiatives taken for the women still the drop outs among the girls is still higher as compared with men.
- Conflict hurts mostly the girls. Girls are quite sensitive in any situation. So the conflicting situation of family, school and society also is a major obstacle for the lower status of women's education.
- Tackling Social Exclusion. Our social structure is itself a barrier for women's education. Society stratifies itself on diversified factors like caste, class, race, and gender. So this stratification of society on the basis of gender gives women the second rank in the society. Therefore the

education for women is given comparatively less important than men. If a woman again is from a lower caste group in the society then her situation is miserable. In such a situation a woman is doubly deprived both for her gender and also for her caste.

The above cited reasons make that there is the opportunity for women's education but it is the human psychology or the social structure that results in the low level of women's education and the huge gap in male female literacy rate.

Bridging the Gap:

As discussed above there are enough measures taken at various levels to develop women's education. But the access to it is quite evident with the fact and the statics of 65.46 percent of literacy rate among the women in 2011. So the gap between the availability of scope and the access to it is quite visible. In order to bridge this gap there are few recommendations:

- There is the need for change in the attitudes of society making it more flexible for women's education. It is this change in attitude of the individuals which can reduce the existing gap male female literacy rate. If education is provisionally done compulsory for all then both male and female should get the equal access to it.
- Awareness campaign should be promoted at a higher level to make everyone understand the need of education for women. This campaign should range from micro to the macro level, from street plays to the media and internet. While creating this awareness among the individuals the successful stories of various great women can also be focused, which can create a motivation among the people regarding the importance of education of women. Making people aware is the most crucial factor that can result in the rise of literacy rate among the women.
- Another major factor that is most important is creating a fear free environment. With the passage of time the atrocities against women has also increased in various forms. No matter the age but atrocity in some form is found in every society. So there is the need for developing a fear free society, where the parents can feel secure for sending their daughter for education. That security is required at every sphere of the society from home to the educational institution.
- Encouraging the investment on women's education. Considering women as a burden is a age old concept. Now days in every field women have made their own path and have succeeded. So investing on women's education is equally admirable as investing on the education of men. If there is no disparity in the scope and in the educational process for men and women then this idea on investing women's education needs to get dissolved.

CONCLUSION:

Education is a determinant of growth and development. It is both an indicator and an instrument for development. Education is considered as a mechanism of gender equalizer. It is this education which can provide women with the scope to bring changes for themselves and for the society too. Historically the women have been discriminated on various grounds which have given them the second rank in stratification system of society. But history has also the evident of the reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and lot more, who have brought the changes in the status of women. So at the current scenario there is also the need to bring reformation in the system of education that can be women friendly. If such an environment is created then the targets of various national and international initiatives for women's education can be achieved. So the right to education which is free, compulsory and emancipating need not be questioned or bargained for women. The voice of the women needs to be heard for a better future. Ramchandran (1998) has rightly said that generating a demand that we can no longer ignore could be the mother of

innovations for women's education.

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