

## Changing education paradigms and rural Indian women

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### Abstract

The women in the rural India cannot be ignored and nor it's desirable. The women in the rural landscape of the country are intertwined between various relationships consisting of domination and subordination. The eighty sixth amendment act, 2002 inserted Article 21-A in the constitution of India to provide for education which is free and compulsory to all within the age bracket of six to fourteen years as a fundamental right. In order to increase the political activism and participation of rural women they have been given reservation at in the Panchayati Raj elections. The women on the rural front are confronted with various progressive legislations. Such legislations have also morphed young rural women with urban desires. But for any such desires to translate into action, role of qualitative educations comes to the fore. The paper analyses and interrogates about role of qualitative education in mobilization of women and making them empowered in sociocultural, economic and political aspect.

**Keywords:** education, rural, empowerment, women, politics

### Introduction

With almost equal in number to men in the world, she has manifested herself as deity for many, Goddess of her subjects, a daughter, wife, mother. Amongst such various identities she usually misses out on one of the most important manifestation of women as self, the image of self which she decides for herself, which she chooses and makes. In the process of various manifestations she usually misses out on the one she decides for herself.

The discourse of women struggle in India is majorly driven by the euro centric approach. The discourse in the Indian subcontinent about women cannot ignore the timeline of the era when the land witnessed women such as Maitre, Lopamudra and Shakuntala. The women who were educated hence empowered and enlightened.

The era today guarantees Right to education as a Fundamental Right. The women through various articles in the constitution such article 15, 21-A and through directive principles of state of state policy and various other positive discriminatory legislations have been empowered de jure. Yet we have women both educated and uneducated, rural and urban legitimizing social evils and undue restrictions of the patriarchal structure. The cases such as Nirbhaya has not made the society precarious but accustomed to such incidents. Education in the meanwhile has lost its meaning till has just become a tool primarily for economic independence. The institution ignores the social and cultural aspect of the society. Being educated is often confused as being literate. We are becoming the generation of information rather than knowledge. We have data but we yet less informed.

Amidst such stark realities and paradoxical viewpoints mobilization of women despite being humongous in number can be seen in relation to homogenization of women issue. The lack of qualitative education also deprives one from the association and relation of women to the umbrella protest. The problems and issues of women varies at micro level and hence qualitative

education can help women associating themselves with the latter strategic interest.

The paper analyses and interrogates about role of qualitative education in mobilisation of women and making them empowered in sociocultural, economic and political aspect.

Out of the total of 1210.2 million populations in India, the size of rural population is 833.1 million (or 68.84% of the total population). (Chandramouli, 2011) [9]. The number of literates in India is 778.5 million rural it is 493.0 million and in urban it is 285.4 million there has been an increase of 217.8 million literates since last census in 2001 out of this, 131.1 million were in rural areas and 86.6 million in urban areas. There has been improvement in female literacy is more than males in both rural and urban areas. (Chandramouli, 2011) [9]. such positive change can be attributed to both awareness and progressive legislations brought in by the government of India. The Right to education act to Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, many such legislations and rights have undoubtedly proved to be empowering and beneficial. The improvement in literacy rate in rural area is two times that in urban areas. The rural urban literacy gap which was 21.2 percentage points in 2001 has come down to 16.1 percentage points in 2011. (Chandramouli, 2011) [9]. The gender gap in literacy has come down from 24.6 in 2001 to 19.8 in 2011 in rural areas. Visibility of women has increased both in rural and urban areas. According to the Census 2011 the sex ratio in the country has risen from 933 in 2001 to 940 in 2011. For rural areas in the country as a whole there has been an increase by only 1 point from 946 in 2001 to 947 in 2011.

Pace of increase in female literacy rate is perceptibly higher in rural areas. It has increased from 46.13% in 2001 to 58.75% in 2011.. The social system of rural India is morphing. The social and legal norms play a crucial role in this process of metamorphication. Despite of most progressive legislation put in place the rural women are

yet not able to receive what the constitution desired for them. Gender gap in literacy rate has narrowed down considerably over the censuses but continue to be high (19.81). This gap is largest in Rajasthan (31.2 points). (Chandramouli, 2011) <sup>[9]</sup>. This to a certain extent also is a drawback of lack of quality education for women. Despite of women given the right to reservation in Panchayat election, they are unable to utilize it to its optimal level. This again is linked with lack of strategic decision making power of women which is the cause of inadequate education, an education which compromises on its qualitative aspect.

Meena didn't tell her guardians about her harassment by older boys in school, while she used to walk back from school to home in Khadar, South Delhi. As she feared that she'll be the one who is blamed for encouraging such actions from the boys. She was right; the family found out and banned her from going to school. Another girl wants to be a doctor but the teacher hardly comes to her desk as the class has seventy pupil. The paper takes into consideration multiple factors that hold back women from progressing such as rigid patriarchal structure, bigoted customs, mores and religious restrictions. Such factors mushroom under the darkness of ill-informed citizenry and hence are an effect of lack of education and awareness, which lets women legitimise such subjugations on her. Those monitoring the progress on the millennium development goal of achieving universal primary education have increasingly realised, is one thing: the quality of education you get is another. The paper discusses role of education in de facto realising political empowerment for women and mobilisation of women.

### Research Methodology

In order to substantiate theory and verify the hypothesis a combination of qualitative research techniques and quantitative research techniques were considered. The balance of two research methods was chosen with the wisdom to suffix the lacunae of one method with the other method. The method of survey was chosen. It was deemed to be appropriate to collect, analyse and use data to come to substantive empirical conclusions by referring and inferring from the first hand data. Surveys are useful in describing the characteristics of a large population. No other research method can provide this broad capability, which ensures a more accurate sample to gather targeted results in which to draw conclusions and make important decisions. Wyse, S. E. (2012, March 15).

The method of Stratified random sampling was chosen as the most appropriate research method. The rural village is not a homogeneous society in terms of caste, religion, gender, class. The various stratum needed to be inquired and included in the research in order to check through it's reliability and validity. Stratified random sampling therefore included various females from all major castes having visibility in the village. It also included women across different caste. The survey also included women from different educational background in order to compare and re-evaluate inter-generational variability amongst them. This also helped in realising and tracing the changing trend and pace of change in younger

generation women along with change in the mind set and ideas.

The method of face to face interview was chosen keeping in mind the dynamic nature of village women. The method of interview helped women to empathise with the problem and also answer uncomfortable truths. Questionnaire was prepared keeping in mind rural nuances and nitty gritty of rural women. Interview helped in digging out matters which the rural women ab initio hesitated in discussing. A detailed analysis however was possible through this method of research.

### Limitations of the study

1. The younger women in the rural India during the process of interview gave answers which made them look smart and urban. This limitation was later removed by using the method of Observation and the validity of the answers was ensured through the combination of two methods; interview and observation.
2. The survey includes limited number of units of village.

### Review of the literature

Educating mind without educating the heart is no education at all.

-Aristotle

Meaning and purpose of education carries various perspective and dynamics. It brings forth varied views and a question that what needs to be our definition for education. The institution, meaning and nature of education has morphed along with changing contexts. The Durkheimian functionalist analysis suggests that the society's shared norms and values can be transmitted through the education system. Whereas Marxist perspective argues that education institutions end up transmitting dominant culture and practices. (Holborn & Haralambos, 2013) <sup>[12]</sup> The flag bearer of the postmodern thought puts forth aim of education to liberate humanity from ignorance and backwardness. (Lyotard, 1984) <sup>[16]</sup>. Education can be equated with freedom per se where the only motive it has is to free the minds of an individual from shackles of ignorance, where one develops capacity to both learn and unlearn. The individual process at micro level would result into social progress at the marco level. The task of education under modernity was 'one of "bringing out", of helping to realise the potential, so that subjects became fully autonomous and capable of exercising their individual and intentional agency'. (Usher & Edwards, 1994) <sup>[24]</sup>. Usher and Edwards argues that 'post modernism teaches us to be sceptical of foundationalism in all its forms of totalising and definitive explanations and theories and thus of all dominant taken for granted paradigms in education, whether these be liberal, conservative or progressive'. (Usher & Edwards, 1994) <sup>[24]</sup>. Education needs to teach many different things and make one comfortable with different truths.

Post modernists push for decentring of truth which would lead to greater diversity within education. (Holborn & Haralambos, 2013) <sup>[12]</sup>. It has been observed that 'adult education has become simply another consumer product

involved in lifestyle choices'. Knowledge is becoming a commodity that is being bought and sold. (Holborn & Haralambos, 2013) <sup>[12]</sup>. There now exists a system of 'global education policy' based on neoliberal ideology. (Ball, 2012). Education's prominence is now being derived from its usefulness. The economic aspect of education helps to achieve economic independence and hence greater bargaining power. (Ball, 2012)

The social democratic perspective is somewhat similar to functionalism. Both these see education as a means towards equality of opportunity, and both see education as essential for economic growth. (Holborn & Haralambos, 2013) <sup>[12]</sup>. Economic growth will in turn bring prosperity to all. But education with a perspective of consumption may eclipse other aspects and agencies that education is also married to. Women are more likely to control their own destinies and effect change in their own communities when they have higher level of education. According to Usher PG 673, postmodern education can play an important role in helping oppressed groups because of its openness that it gives chance to various voices. (Usher & Edwards, 1994) <sup>[24]</sup>.

### **Education as empowerment**

A holistic Education leads towards empowerment per se only when it adopts a holistic approach and includes under its ambit political, socio-cultural, historical, psychological factors. While the economic dimension of empowerment is important as it encompasses the ability to access lucrative and rewarding occupations as well as the ability to both earn and control an income, it constitutes only one aspect of empowerment. The socio-cultural, inter-personal, political and psychological dimensions are also critical. Empowerment include women's 'control over resources and their life', 'mobility', 'participation in public life' and 'attitudes, perceptions and beliefs'. (Aslam, 2013) <sup>[1]</sup>. The education we receive has more orientation towards the economic aspect, this leads to eclipse the other aspect of social enlightenment and awareness which ab initio was the purpose of education that is to open up the critical faculties and sense of wisdom in an individual. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. (UN, 2013) <sup>[23]</sup>

### **Heterogeneity of interests**

Universalization and homogenization of women interest under one umbrella can be fallacious. Molyneux, M (1985) <sup>[17]</sup>. Interests of women are not only different between different classes but also different in different ethnicities, races, nationalities, classes and castes. A Jat woman for instance in Kadera village have a different set of problems than he Rajput woman from the same village. These differences exist at micro levels and are faced by women in their daily lives. These interests as strategic gender interests one which are framed by external agencies as homogenized interests for women and practical gender interests the one which are faced by women on micro level each day and can probably be a factor of the above. While interrogating a woman from

Rajput community of the village she complained of restrictions been put on her higher education. She wasn't permitted to go outside the village for studying in the college. While A woman from the Jaat community when asked for her discontinuance from studies after eighth she blamed it because of getting married at the age of 13. When asked if women in their villages or the EWR were able to fully capitalize such gains arising out of reservation in PRI, majority of the women had a negative sentiment to the answer as they believed that women did not possess the necessary decision making power, education and faced tough socio economic condition. For these women to go and sit with the male heads in Panchayat meeting or even contesting elections on their own terms they first need to resolve the problems which they face every day which can be the consequence of the larger strategic gender interests. For reservation to be functional these women should be well equipped to deal their everyday challenges first. For women to unite on strategic interest levels first their needs at practical level needs to be resolved which may be heterogeneous in nature. This brings forth the importance of a construction of unity amongst women to which again education can serves the most powerful tool. It again can be used as an instrument to create linkages between strategic and practical gender interests. It is only when they realize that the consequence is a factor of the larger cause they will adopt for solutions for eliminating the wider problem.

### **Rhetoric versus Reality**

The narrative of reservation portrays confrontation between realism and idealism. Despite being one of the most well thought, empowering affirmative action taken with the best of intentions, reservation for rural women doesn't yet seem to have catered what qualifies as quantitative participation. Converting gender related policies into practice is the most important challenge. The affirmative legal norms cannot work in void, for it requires various other institutional and non-institutional agencies to make it enabling and not just a mere rhetoric. In a social structure the legal formal norms and informal laws share a complex relationship. There exist various permutations of formal and informal norms which influences the functioning of the society. Many a times they may not follow syncretic patterns. Cases like such often might lead to legal anomie in the society, where legal laws are disobeyed. The working of Khap Panchayats can be understood in such a light. The informal mores, folkways, customs sabotage the already existing progressive laws. The Khap imposes its writ through social boycott and alienation which is considered by the victims as far more humiliating than imprisonment by law. In khap Clan exogamous marriages are considered a taboo and defiance of the rules can lead to honour killing. There have been incidents where the kins of the couple were themselves responsible to kill them in order to preserve the family honour. Another instance is of the village of Shani Shringnapur where the homes, offices and even the banks donot have doors. The uncanny practice is based on folklore that Shani- a Hindu deity will protect the villagers from any kind of theft or burglary. Bryatnal, A. (2011, February 11) <sup>[7]</sup>. Shani, who

is believed to be manifested in the planet Saturn, is considered so mighty that his shrine cannot be kept under a shelter, and he will not let thieves in the village of open homes go unpunished. Why this village, including its bank, has no front doors, TOI. These bring forth the influence that informal norms exert on society for social control and social order. Why this village, including its bank, has no front doors. (2015, January 6) <sup>[25]</sup>. Mores and folkways in society exist even before laws came into play. Bierstedt, R. (1963) <sup>[6]</sup>. The converse may also be true, the laws when enacted before its provision have support in the society. Sometimes mores may get additional compliance than laws as they often have a larger ancestry in terms of their durability in terms of time and also due to the kind of soft power they use to impact and embrace the psyche of the society at large. They are framed and impacted by multi causal factors and derive their sanctity from mutually conceded values. Bierstedt, R. (1963) <sup>[6]</sup>. Hence it becomes difficult for a law to function without the due support of informal agencies of social control. Women cannot take strategic decisions as they are in capable, reason is that even strategic decisions requires basic level of education (J Devika M. S., 2006) <sup>[14]</sup> Education in this sense can work as one of the catalyst for evolving informal social norms by creating a linkage between formal and informal social norms. Such change in the value system will create ripple effect in creating an ambiance for sustainable functioning of legislations.

### **Green sprouts in the village of Kadera**

Observations in the village of Kadera show green sprouts. The willingness amongst parents including the father to send their girl child not only to school but a private English medium school in the nearby tehsil, which he assumes to be more qualitative than government schools. This brings attention to another irony of education level in the government schools. The laws can be imposed but they only grow and prosper provided they have adequate sunlight and water, in this case efficient infrastructure and spirit.

### **There were 3 striking observations which were noted**

1. Lack of school teachers
2. Inefficient faculty
3. Inadequate infrastructure
4. Absence technology and commerce as subject options.
5. Qualitative education
6. English medium school
7. Absence technology and commerce as subject options.

During a subtle interrogation with the teachers of the government school it was ironical to find out how they couldn't answer basic quest of general knowledge. They fumbled when asked about the state head's name. Most of them didn't know what reservation meant though few of them only knew the word from a distance. These teachers carry a burden of responsibility analogous to that of a farmer who yield crops. Inefficient and lackluster teachers should be given due training and needs to be sensitized on the kind of responsibility they have. Again such a change in mindset need not mean increase in pay

scale but again working upon mores and norms. The father sending his daughter to nearly private English medium school should bring forth mixed feelings. The village needs to have better public school to cater the most basic requirement.

The only computer that the village school owned was stolen on a starry night. Without technology one cannot talk about inclusivity. Technology plays an important role in relegating social inequalities. It doesn't discriminate between young or old, male or female, wealthy or destitute. Education essentially needs to encompass technology as one of its prominent agent. We live in a world of communication - everyone gets information about everyone else. There is universal comparison and you don't just compare yourself with the people next door, you compare yourself to people all over the world and with what is being presented as the decent, proper and dignified life. Bauman, Z. (2004). Technology in this sense can help women explore plethora of new dimensions, where they stand, where they should stand. This in true sense would mean empowerment.

People need to be educated about digital literacy in a fashion which brings them convenience, confidence and consciousness. Technology can uplift the status of rural women, it can be used to spread awareness, it can lead to economic development of women and hence increase the overall bargaining power of women.

### **Conclusion**

The women are almost in same number in the world as men. But yet their mobilization has always been a problem. In case of India the women elite usually fights for strategic interest of women at the grass root level. Women at that level are often unable to identify themselves with the movement or they feel incapable of joining in the movement. This incapability and inability to feel associated often has to do with the problems that they face at the micro level on the day to day basis which usually is the cause of the strategic problems which women elite fight for. Hence this can only be solved by rediscovering the meaning of education. Education for women should be translated into empowerment for women

The face of rural India is evolving with every city having folk features and every village having urban desires, the girls and women in the villages are highly optimistic. When asked Neetu, a young Turk who is in class tenth about her future plans in a curious voice firmly she replied, "Dancer and Police officer", following such an undaunted answer was my next question," are your parents going to allow you in doing so", to which Neetu wittily replied," it's not them but me who has to do this". This answer was so empowering per se that, it defined what empowerment could really mean. This also brings forth steps that need to be taken at infrastructure end and about the change required in the discourse of education. In order to make qualitative participation of women in political and social sphere it is imperative to ensure qualitative education. While interviewing women of Kadera village, Mumal a 25 year old woman who had completed her BA and was married and had a daughter

Mumal had urban dreams in her eyes. I asked her, what do you want your daughter to be at your age? To which she replied with undaunted optimism, "I want her to be capable of deciding herself what is that she wants to do at whichever age she is in". The answer leaves all of us to question the kind of society we want. The education which not only serves well on economic front but also on cultural, social front giving women capabilities to realize their capacity and sense of ownership on means. It should be the one gives them strength to question those holding dominant positions in the rigid structure of social hierarchy. Empowerment cannot be seen as something which is in binary opposition to household chores or staying in the and believing in institutions made my society such as marriage, family, religion. Empowerment would mean freedom to choose between things. So even a woman who chooses to work in kitchen without any outside force is as empowered as a woman who works in a bank.

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