



Women education and empowerment in India

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Abstract

Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the prevailing masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. The rise of feminist ideas has, however, led to the tremendous improvement of women's condition throughout the world in recent times. India being a developing nation and having huge tussles among its political, religious and administrative organs resulting into blocked development and the worst effect of that we can witness into women condition. They do not have proper chance to learn and grow and access to education has been one of the most pressing demands of women's rights. Women education in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country.

Keywords: Ideology, India, Education

Introduction

History of Women Education in India

Although in the Vedic period women had access to education in India but as the time grew they lost this right to avail education and academic exposure. However, in the British period there was revival of interest in women's education in India due to Britisher's strong influence to the core Indian education system. During this period, various socio religious movements led by eminent persons like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar emphasized on women's education in India. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Baba Saheb Ambedkar were leaders of the lower castes in India who took various initiatives to make education available to the women of India. They also ensured about their participation in the social gatherings and events by introducing them into polity and administration at all levels. However women's education got a fillip after the country got independence in 1947 and the government has taken various measures to provide education to all Indian women. As a result women's literacy rate has grown over the three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 1971 only 22% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2001 54.16% female were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 14.87% as compared to 11.72 % of that of male literacy rate and is on growing path.

Government has taken a step forward by making education compulsory and free to girl child till the age of fourteen. They are getting reservations in public sector exams and private sectors like Banks, Transport Services, Hospitality and Tourism, Healthcare etc.

Importance of Women Education in India

Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. Educated women not

only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Moreover educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the nation.

Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. Its true that 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 shell and home but helps her to get status, positive self esteem, and self confidence. It imparts 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. For example 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.

Obstacles

To improve women education and condition in India various initiatives and corrective measures have been done but still a lot is expected to be accomplished.

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. Reliable sources indicate that more than 50 % of the Non-Starters (those who have never been to school) are girls. 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 and unimportant. Hence girl child is getting deprived of her basic and fundamental right of education and freedom.
- **Bonded Labor System:** This social evil is a quite discouraging phenomena which stand as barrier for girl's education in rural areas for the underprivileged families of washer men and agricultural labor, scheduled caste and scheduled tribes.
- **Caste 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. 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. We can witness this through the stories of various factories and farm houses in industrial cities of India. Media is also playing a crucial role here in promoting as well as resisting these mishaps.
- **Bane of Dowry:** 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 Labor Practice:** A large segment of child population in India is engaged in child labor practices. According to UN sources India is the most child labor 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.
- **Inferiority, 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. They are considered to be lesser important for getting knowledge of outside world and exposure to education and liberty.
- **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. Due to this wrong implementation of right policies also women of our country is getting severely affected.
- **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. In these frequent transition girl Childs and women are getting neglected, uncared and unheard.
- **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. The only think about their personal benefits and money making ignoring the welfare of the community for whom and by whom they have reached to that position. It is a very sad and disappointing aspect of India's democracy.

- **Gender discrimination:** It still persists in India. Male are still dominating and commanding the social structure of the nation and lot more needs to be done to improve women's participation in this regard e.g. women's education. The gap in the male-female literacy rate is just a simple indicator. While the male literacy rate is more than 75% according to the 2001 census, the female literacy rate is just 54.16%. Prevailing prejudices, low enrollment of girl child in the schools, engagements of girl children in domestic works and high drop out rate are major obstacles in the path of making all Indian women educated.
- **Poor Academia:** Another reason for poor quality of women education here is the poor quality of teachers in government schools. Government schools are unable to attract good quality teachers due to inadequate teaching facilities and low salaries. The government currently spends only 3% of its GDP on education which is inadequate and insufficient. To improve the quality of education, the government needs to spend more money from its coffers on education

Steps to improve their participation

- A significant development in recent years has been the mushrooming of community-based organizations and initiatives at the local level for women. Reports indicates that self-help programs, often in the form of savings and credit or micro credit schemes, have succeeded in changing the lives of poor women, enhancing incomes and generating positive externalities such as increased self-esteem.
- "Micro credit is about much more than access to money. It is about women gaining control over the means to make a living. It is about women lifting themselves out of poverty and vulnerability. It is about women achieving economic and political empowerment within their homes, their villages, their countries."
- In this whole paper we have discussed about women condition in India in terms of access to education, opportunity to learn and grow and problems in achieving the same and at last some of the measures to rectify the errors and making things happen.
- One more initiative taken by the government is the voucher system. Under the voucher system, parents are allowed to choose a school for their children and they get full or partial reimbursement for the expenses from the government. But however, the voucher system has also a draw back because it will further aggravate the problem of poor quality of education in government schools. Such a system will shift resources from government schools to private schools. This will worsen the situation of government schools which are already under-funded. Moreover, if the same amount given as vouchers can be used to build infrastructure in schools then the government can realize economies of scale.
- The government of India has also felt the need to put in place an appropriate institutional mechanism to look after the Education Rights of Women and thus instituted the formulation of All India Women's Conference, National

Women's Commission and State Women's Commission. At the same time government has approved special grants and allowances to NGO's working for the cause of women upliftment and social mobility. Self Help Groups have also been constituted at Panchayat level to provide a platform for the rural women to discuss issues such as family planning, child marriage, widow remarriage, Sati, domestic violence. Mother Teresa's Women University has greatly helped in the cause of women empowerment who received Noble Peace Prize for her genuine social work.

Conclusion

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the bad phases of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been on better track. In modern India, women have acquired high offices in India including that of the President, Prime minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Leader of Opposition, etc. The current President of India is a woman. There is no doubt about the fact that development of women has always been the central focus of planning since Independence. Empowerment is a major step in this direction but it has to be seen in a relational context. A clear vision is needed to remove the obstacles to the path of women's emancipation both from the government and women themselves. Efforts should be directed towards all round development of each and every section of Indian women by giving them their due share. The most common explanation of 'women's empowerment' is the ability to exercise full control over one's actions. The last decades have witnessed some basic changes in the status and role of women in our society. There has been shift in policy approaches from the concept of 'welfare' in the seventies to 'development' in the eighties and now to 'growth' in the nineties and now trumpet of 'empowerment'. This process has been further accelerated with some sections of women becoming increasingly self-conscious of their discrimination in several areas of family and public life. They are also in a position to mobilize themselves on issues that can affect their overall position.

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