

## A Role of Education for the Empowerment of Women in India: An Analysis

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**Abstract:** Education is a one of the most precious significant factor which can transform an illiterate and ignorant society to a literate and enlightened society, especially for women's. Promotion of women to a world outside their home is a result of education and modernization of culture and society at large. Education empowers women to take control of their lives and create opportunities and choices to better improve their condition as well as that of their family members. Besides providing knowledge and skills and income-earning opportunities, education of women can reduce child and maternal mortality and fertility, improve family health and increase children's education, specially for girls. This is turn will improve the status of women in the society, and facilitate a faster attainment of the Millenium Development Goals. Women's education is also an essential tool for achieving goals of equality, development and peace. But the rate of female illiteracy is alarmingly high, especially in rural areas and among weaker sections of society. There are several barriers for low levels of literacy among females in India. It is widely accepted fact that poverty has a strong correlation with education. It is thus necessary to do away with biased role perception of women and education must be the first priority areas for investment by the Governments.

**Key Words:** Education, enlightened, empowerment, poverty, attainment.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

The right to education comprises two main dimensions: entitlement and empowerment. In India, however, since times immemorial, education of women has been a matter of great debate with contradictory complexes. The social and cultural factor inhibits and retards the progress of women's education as there is a great possibility that education might divide girls from social values and traditions.

There is a general notion that women's occupation be nothing other than child bearers and rearers and care for husband, children and old in the household. Even the social reformers of 19<sup>th</sup> century aimed limitedly at women's education from perspective of fulfilling traditional roles as housewives and mothers for strengthening.

Bonds of traditions and family and not from perspective of socio-economic or political development. The traces of this aim and opinion still holds good in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Marriage and economic problems are other reasons that inhibits women's education forcing them to drop out further formal education and seek jobs. So also there is a general indifference when the question of girls education crops up.

The real and viable solution to this discrimination lies in education as it helps a person to grow cognitively, intellectually and emotionally and also enables to take right decisions on the basis of logic and reason. If women are to be empowered and their socio-economic and political rights are to be protected and promoted, it is must to concentrate on educating them. It is only through education that women can realize their capabilities in the true sense and contribute in national development. Education controls over one's life in more than just in economic sense as it is not merely a means for better employment opportunities for individuals and higher economic growth potential for their nations. It also leads to many social benefits viz. better health care, smaller family norms, improvement in standards of hygiene, reduction in infant and child mortality rates, decline in population growth rates, less economic inequality, greater reduction of absolute poverty, greater political participation and democratization, and an improved sense of national unity and integrity. Concerted efforts are being made after independence to advance the education of girls and women.

### 2. Women Education in India -Historical Background :

During the Vedic and Moghal periods, women were exploited. However, during the medieval and post second world war periods, women enjoyed greater freedom in the society and family. But in later days, they were gradually suppressed and finally neglected by the society as well as by the family members. Gradually, they were restricted from going out of the house and not permitted to attend any social functions, religious ceremonies, political meetings etc. They have been facing intolerable physiological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural and educational problems.

The position of women education in India revived with the invasion of the British in the country and with the advent of Bhakti Movement. The colonial period also introduced the institutional form of imparting learning. Women's education in colonial India witnessed an essential expansion. Various movements were launched to make women of the country literate. Furthermore, this progress was maintained for several years and influenced the modern education system. During this period, various socio-religious movements led by eminent persons like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidysagar 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.

### **3. Constitutional Safeguards :**

The preamble to the Constitution of India promises to secure, *inter alia*, "Justice-Social, Economic and Political" for the Citizens. The preamble embodies the goal which the state has to achieve in order to establish social justice and to make the masses free in the positive means. The securing of social justice has been specifically enjoined as an object of the State under Article 38 of the Constitution. The objective of the preamble cannot be achieved and shall remain on paper, unless the people of the country are educated. The three-pronged justice promised by the preamble is only a teasing illusion to the teeming millions who are illiterate. It is only a teasing illusion to the teeming millions who are illiterate. It is only education which equips the citizens to participate in achieving the objectives enshrined in the preamble. The preamble further provides 'equity of status and opportunity and assure the dignity of the individual. The constitution seeks to achieve these objectives by guaranteeing fundamental rights which are enforceable in the court of law.

The constitution of India recognized the right of women to employment and included a number of Articles to give direction to the state policy. Article 14 laid down the equality before law of all citizens of the country, and Article 15 prohibited discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion, race etc. Article 16 (1) and (2) emphasized equal opportunities for all in the matter of employment and prohibited discrimination in employment.

Article 15 (3) of the constitution empowers the state to make special provisions for women and children within the framework of the fundamental rights. Article 39 and 42 specially refer to women and children. They direct the state to secure health and strength of all workers, men, women and children and not to abuse children for economic gains. Humane and just conditions of work and maternity benefit are assured to women by Article 42.

Together with the Chapter-iii on Fundamental Rights, they concretise Constitutional vision of a new Indian socio-political order based on the principle of equality. The Constitution of India has granted women equal rights but, in practice or reality these rights are not sufficient because their voice is hardly given any weightage. The very vastness of the country, the scattered nature of women workers, their lack of education and legal literacy, the indifferent attitude of the Government bureaucracy and the general status of women in society caused vulnerability in women. This is true not only of rural unorganized women, but to an extent of the urban women workers also. It is to be remembered here, that nearly 80 percent or more women work in the unorganized sector and out of them nearly 60 percent are self-employed.

### **4. Policy and Programmes in the Context of Women Education :**

In 1948-1949 almost immediately after independence, the Government of India appointed a major commission focusing on higher education known as the University Education Commission. This Commission was headed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. The major contribution of the commission was that it recommended that the number of women's colleges in the country should be increased. There were less than a hundred women's colleges in the country when the commission submitted its report. Today there are more than twelve hundred.

In 1958-59 the Government of India appointed a National Commission for Women. The commission recommended hostels, colleges and scholarships for women. It recommended special syllabus for women and specified that these syllabus should focus on creating the right attitudes among them. The recommendations of the commission led to the establishment of a Comprehensive Department Plan for women to the allocation of special funds for women in the Central and State Ministries of Education and the establishment of separate units for the educational needs of women. It looked carefully into the needs for the occupation in which women were preferred and pointed out that qualified women were needed in large numbers to function as pre-primary school teachers, nurses, midwives, women doctors and social workers. On this basis it recommended the promotion of education for women in these fields.

Second Education Commission, 1964-66 (Khotari Commission) stressed on the education of women, that should be regarded as a major programme for some years to come and bold and determined efforts should be made to face the difficulties involved and to close the existing gap between the education of man and women in as short a time

as possible. Much emphasis was given to accelerate the women's education in the field of higher education by universities on a liberal scale and a suitable economical hostel accommodation for women students.

### **5. National Policy on Education :**

After around two decades of National Policy on Education of 1968, in 1986, Rajiv Gandhi announced a new education policy, the National Policy on Education (NPE), which was intended to prepare India for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The policy emphasized the need for change: 'Education in India stands at the crossroads today. Neither normal linear expansion nor the existing pace and nature of improvement can meet the needs of situation. According to the new policy, the 1968 policy goals had largely been achieved: more than 90 percent of the country's rural population was within a kilometer of schooling facilities and most states had adopted a common education structure. The prioritization of science and mathematics had also, been effective. However, change was required to increase financial and organizational support for the education system to tackle problems of access and quality. The 1986 policy was reviewed by a committee constituted in 1990 under the chairmanship of Acharya Ramamurti. On the basis of the recommendations of this committee, certain provisions of the 1986 policy were modified in 1992.

The parameters and strategies specially envisaged in the policy were-

- (1) Gearing the entire education system to play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women;
- (2) Encouraging educational institutions to take up active programmes to enhance women's status and further women's development in all sectors;
- (3) Widening women's access to vocational, technical and professional levels, breaking gender stereotypes.
- (4) Creation of dynamic management structure that would respond to challenges forced by the mandate on enhancing women's status.

The National Policy on Empowerment of women, 2001 commits to ensure equal access to education for women and girls. It affirms to take special steps to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a more gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrollment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to assist life-long learning as well as development of occupation, vocational, technical skills by women. It admits for reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education as a center area. It asserted for achieving sectional time targets in existing policies with a special focus on girls and women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. It declares for development of gender sensitive curricula at all levels of educational system in order to address sex stereotyping as one of the causes gender discrimination. Drawing upon the Constitution and other policy statements articulated in the years that followed, the Government of India in partnership with State Government designed different strategies, interventions, schemes and programmes with specific objectives that insist on girl's education.

### **6. Others Policies and Programmes for women empowerment (Education for All) :**

The following are few programmes that are designed to mobilize female literacy:

**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan-** This is an effort to universalize elementary education by community-ownership of the school system. One of the objectives of the scheme is to bridge all gender & social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 & upper primary by 2010. The scheme has special features focusing on education of girls, which include provision of free textbooks to all girls upto class VIII, separate toilets for girls, back to school camps for out-of-school girls, bridge courses for older girls, recruitment of 50% women teachers, early childhood care and education centers' in/near schools in convergence with ICDS programme, teacher's sensitization programmes to promote equitable learning opportunities, gender-sensitive teaching-learning materials including textbooks, intensive community mobilization efforts, innovation fund per district for need based interventions for ensuring girls attendance and retention..

**National Programme For Education Of Girls At Elementary Level -** The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level(NPEGEL) has been formulated for providing additional support for education of underprivileged/disadvantaged girls at elementary level. NPEGEL is a part of SSA and is implemented under its umbrella but as a distinct and separate gender component plan of SSA.

**National Literacy Mission 1988-** In 1988 National Literacy Mission launched by Government of India(GOI) for Eradication of Adult illiteracy of which women are victims.

**Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya -** This scheme is in continuation since 2004 for setting up upper primary residential schools for the girls belonging predominantly to the SCs, STs, OBCs and minority communities where the

rural female literacy below the national average and gender gap in literacy is more than the national average. The scheme will be coordinated with the existing schemes of Department of Elementary Education & Literacy viz. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), National programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Mahila Samakhya (MS). The objective of KGBV scheme focuses on Adolescent girls who are unable to go to regular schools. Out of school girls in the 10+ age group who are unable to complete primary school.

**Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women's Equality)** – In 1989 Mahila Samakhya programmes was started which designed to mobilize education for women through creation of environment for learning. It is fully Dutch assisted project.

## **7. Women's Empowerment through Five year Plans :**

Since Indian independence the Government of India adopted various strategies of planned development, specifically from 1951 under its Five Years Plans.

The concept of women's development in the First Five Year Plan (1951-1956) was mainly welfare oriented. In 1954, efforts were done to reach children and women in rural areas through 'balwadis' and 'mahilamandals'. However, a review at the end of the Five Year Plan revealed that about 70.3 percent of boys were enrolled in primary schools; the proportion of girls enrolled was only 32.4 percent. In the Second Five Year Plan (1956-61) women were organized into Mahila Mandals to act as focal points at the grass-root levels for the development of women. The Third, Fourth and other Interim Plans (1961-74) accorded high priority to education of women. All plans aimed at a social welfare of women and children, social education, community organization etc. to be taken care by private voluntary agencies. The focus of these plans was welfare centered. The Fifth Five Year plan (1974-79) represents major infrastructure development.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (1980-85) represents major water shed in development planning so far as women are concerned. The plan emphasized multi-pronged strategy of education, employment and health, which were seen to be inter-dependent but ultimately dependent on the total development process. The Plan was direct outcome of CSWI Report.

Universilization of elementary education, creation of Balwadis cum- Creches, appointment of women teachers especially in rural areas, strengthening of science teaching for girls, streamlining admission policies to promote greater access for girls including to professional course in higher education etc. were given special importance in the sixth Plan. 1992-97 the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. The Eighth Five Year Plan, promises to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors do not bypass women and special programmes will be implemented to complement the general development programmes. Women focused to function as equal partners and participants in the developmental process. This approach to the Eighth Plan marks a further shift from development to empowerment of women. The ninth Plan (1997-2002) made significant changes in the conceptual strategy of planning for women. Empowerment of women became one of the nine primary objectives of the Ninth Plan. Special vigil was advocated on the flow of the earmarked funds/ benefits through an effective mechanism to ensure that the proposed strategy brings forth a holistic approach towards empowering women. The Tenth Plan (2002-07), reinforced commitment to gender budgeting to establish its gender-differential impact and to translate gender commitments into budgetary commitments. Further, Tenth Plan adopted a new approach towards achieving the goal of universilization of elementary education by launching Sarva Siksha Abhiyan in 2000-02. This plan streamlined the immediate need to enhance the level of girls participation in education if the country has to achieve universal elementary education in the stipulated timeframe. The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12) termed as 'India's educational plan is laying special focus on education, as a central instrument for achieving rapid and inclusive growth. It presents a comprehensive strategy for strengthening the education sector covering all segments of the education pyramid. Education thus remained a core sector. The plan envisaged more comprehensive approach to women's development. Services for women under various programmes of employment, education, health care etc. was considered at grass root level. Similarly for vocational training, women are encouraged in new expanding areas of technical education like electronic, computer systems, bio-engineering, communications and media.

## **8. Higher Education and Technical Education :**

Various Centrally Sponsored Schemes strengthen school education and a large number of girls have been benefited from these schemes. In the higher education sector, the UGC has been implementing various schemes for promoting women's education in Universities and colleges. Some of these are (1) Scheme of Grants to Women Universities for Technical course (2) Scheme for Construction of Women's Hostels, and (3) Setting up of Women Study Centers in 72 Universities. Participation of women students in Polytechnics was one of the thrust areas under World Bank assisted Technical Education Project. The scheme of Community Polytechnic aims at bringing in communities

and encouraging rural development through Science and Technology apprenticeship and through skill oriented non-formal training focused on women, minorities, SCs , STs OBCs and other disadvantaged sections of the society. Currently 43% of the total beneficiaries are women. Access to higher education for girls has been expanding as also their enrolment in various courses. Their numbers in colleges, universities, professional institutions like engineering, medicine, etc. has increased from 3.81 million in 2002-03 to 4.04 million in 2004-05.

## 9. CONCLUSION :

Education is a one of the most precious significant factor which can transform an illiterate and ignorant society to a literate and enlightened one. Exposure of women to a world outside their home is a result of education and modernization of culture and society. It empowers women to take control of their lives and create opportunities and choices to improve their condition as well as that of their families. Besides providing knowledge and skills and income-earning opportunities, education of women can reduce child and maternal mortality and fertility, improve family health and increase children's education, particularly of girls. This in turn will improve the status of women in the society, and facilitate a faster attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Women's education is also an essential tool for achieving goals of equality, development and peace. As per Beijing Platform for Action, "investment in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women with its exceptionally high social and economic return has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable".

But the rate of female illiteracy is alarmingly high, especially in rural areas and among weaker sections of society. There has thus been a gender gap in education. The barriers in female education are experienced more in rural, tribal backward areas and in developing countries. So also, in a country like India, girls and young women are required to shoulder education and domestic responsibilities together thus resulting in poor scholastic performance and early dropouts from educational system.

There are several barriers for low levels of literacy among females in India. It is widely accepted fact that poverty has a strong correlation with education. Poor families more likely keep girls at home, to do the household works and to care for younger siblings. Negative parental attitude towards educating daughters is also a barrier to girl's education. It is thus necessary to do away with biased role perception of women and education must be the first priority areas for investment by the Governments.

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