

EDUCATED WOMEN AND SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Education is generally understood as a variable upon which the entire contour of social progress hinges. Education of women folk not only leads to economic empowerment but also results in their political, psychological, cultural and emotional empowerment which makes them more powerful and confident members of society. Poverty has been universally affirmed as the key obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights, and it has a visible gender profile. The main reason for this is the fact that poverty results from violations of human rights, including the right to education, which disproportionately affect girls and women. Various grounds of discrimination combine, trapping girls in a vicious downward circle of denied rights. Educated women can play a pivotal role in eradicating poverty and accelerating development process. They can take active part in all the spheres of life. Educated mother can take care of the education of their children. The children in turn improve their capabilities and thereby enlarge their choices, enjoying long and healthy life, educated environment having access to the resources because of their better educational qualifications.

Introduction:

Education is generally understood as a variable upon which the entire contour of social progress hinges. Education of women folk not only leads to economic empowerment but also results in their political, psychological, cultural and emotional empowerment which makes them more powerful and confident members of society. Poverty has been universally affirmed as the key obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights, and it has a visible gender profile. The main reason for this is the fact that poverty results from violations of human rights, including the right to education, which disproportionately affect girls and women. Various grounds of discrimination combine, trapping girls in a vicious downward circle of denied rights. Educated women can play a pivotal role in eradicating poverty and accelerating development process. They can take active part in all the spheres of life. Educated mother can take care of the education of their children. The children in turn improve their capabilities and thereby enlarge their choices, enjoying long and healthy life, educated environment having access to the resources because of their better educational qualifications. Thus peace, prosperity and stability of a family depend on the females who formulate the household budget in a manner that it builds up the healthy family environment. A literate and working woman can not only minimize the wasteful expenditure on marriages, evil customs but can try to build a utopia on earth too. Educated women are likely to have jobs, marry later and have small and healthy family. Education empowers women to make decision about themselves, their families and their communities at large. Mother's education is more influential as she is the primary source of influence on children during early years of socialization. The role of women in our society is not insignificant. They have achieved reputations as active politicians, efficient administrators and so on. Their contribution to scientific research and armed forces is also note-worthy. Educated women have naturally the upper hand in creative activities. Their contribution to the growth and development of literature is unmistakable. Women can play a major role in the conservation and restoration of the environment.

Educated women can change society: Kiran Bedi

Aneesa's School, Kharar, conducted a seminar on education and women empowerment in which more than 22 schools participated. Retired IPS officer, Kiran Bedi, was the chief guest and Paramjit Kaur Landran, a member of women commission, the guest of honour. The seminar began after the lighting of the ceremonial lamp by the guests.

Bedi, while applauding the efforts of Chairman Aneet Goyal for providing quality and modern education, said such efforts are seen only in metro cities. She added, "The lifestyle of middle class is undergoing continuous change. But the condition of women and education in the lower section of society and villages continues to be worse. Educating women is very important because an educated woman can change not only the destiny of the family, but of the entire society. And in order to be a super power, women have to step forward into politics, economics and other social sectors."

Aneet Goyal announced scholarships to 20 girls belonging to EWS families and also took the responsibility of education of 10 students from Bedi's NGO, Nav Jyoti. A cultural programme was also performed by the students of the school. From the region, president, municipal council, Gurprem Singh Romana and CA Narinder Kumar Gurg, among others, were honoured for their contribution to the region.

Source:- TNN | May 14, 2013, 12.35AM IST, Times of India

Basic education provides girls and women with an understanding of basic health, nutrition and family planning, giving those choices and the power to decide over their own lives and bodies. Women's education leads directly to better reproductive health, improved family health, economic growth, for the family and for society, as well as lower rates of child mortality and malnutrition. It is also a key to fight against the spread of HIV & AIDS.

But the general plight of women in the society is a saga of bias and disregard. Though they make half of the world population, women have remained as an oppressed group from the beginning of the history. Though some societies regard women as superior in the family and community, most of societies of the world have been treating women as second class citizens. Because of religious and cultural values and physical structure, women are forced to remain as dominated group around the globe, especially in the least developed nations. Traditionally women have been compelled to play the second fiddle in every sphere. Cultural and traditional values stand between girls and their prospects for education. The achievement of girls' right to education can address some of societies' deeply rooted inequalities, which condemn millions of girls to a life without quality education- and, therefore, also all too often to a life of missed opportunities. Education is also seen in some societies as a fear of change and now with globalization. The fear becomes even greater- fear to lose the cultural identity,

fear of moving towards the unknown or the unwanted, and fear of dissolving in the many others. Women continue to face discrimination at all levels of education, a fact which poses tremendous obstacles to the social development. Despite widespread agreement that all people have the fundamental human right to education, 100 million children, at least 60% of them girls, do not have access to primary education. 960 million adults in the world are illiterate, and more than two-third of them are women. The 2011 Census report of India indicates that literacy among women is only 65 percent. It is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women India is even much lower to national average i.e. 74.04 .The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, 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 65% against 82% of men as per 2011 Census.

Table 1: Census report of the year 2011

Census year	Total %	Male %	Female %
1901	5.35	9.83	0.60
1911	5.92	10.56	1.05
1921	7.16	12.21	1.81
1931	9.5	15.59	2.93
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.67	24.95	9.45
1961	24.02	34.44	12.95
1971	29.45	39.45	18.69
1981	36.23	46.89	24.82
1991	42.84	52.74	32.17
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Census Report, 2011

In spite of the forceful intervention by a bastion of female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programmes over the last 65 years and

above all, the United Nation's enormous pressure with regard to the uplift of the plight of women in terms of education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons. According to the Table-1 during the pre-Independence period literacy rate for women had a very poor spurt in comparison to literacy rate of men. This is witnessed from the fact that literacy rate of women has risen from 0.6 % to 7.3 % whereas the literacy rate of men has risen from 9.8 % to 24.9 % during these four decades. During the post-independence period literacy rates have shown a substantial increase in general. However the literacy rate of male has almost tripled over the period e.g. 25% in 1951 and 82% in 2011. Surprisingly the female literacy rate has increased at a faster pace than the male literacy during the decade 1981-2011. The growth is almost 7 times e.g. 9.45 % in 1951 and 65% in 2011. From this analysis one can infer that the female literacy rate is lower than male literacy rate. The rate of school drop outs is also found to be comparatively higher in case of women. This higher rate of illiteracy of women is undoubtedly attributing for women dependence on men and to play a subordinate role. The lack of education is the root cause for women's exploitation and negligence. Only literacy can help women to understand the Indian's constitutional and legislative provisions that are made to strengthen them. Thus promoting education among women is of great important in empowering them to accomplish their goals in different spheres of life.

Human Rights are inherent to all human being. These rights are necessary to ensure the dignity of life of every individual irrespective of his race, religion, nationality, language, sex or any other factor. By virtue of his birth he gets inalienable rights to live with dignity which must not be intruded by others. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) recognized education as the birth of every individual. The right to free and compulsory education, without discrimination, has been reaffirmed in all major international human rights conventions. It is because education is the only instrument that helps in socio-economic development of a nation. Education ensures development in all spheres of a society. Women constitute the vulnerable section of the society. They are considered as the integral part of a society. There cannot be an educated nation without educated women. We cannot think of any development without educating this almost half of the total population of the world. According to encyclopedia of human rights and women's development "women make up almost 50% of the human resource of every society". They can be even greater instrument in

the development of human resources than men. Trained and educated women can be an asset in accelerating economic growth and in ensuring social change in desired directions as education develops basic skills and abilities and fosters a value system conducive to national development. Education unlocks women's potential and is accompanied by improvement in their families, neighbours as well as society as a whole. The present paper is an attempt to focus on the importance of women education in the development of society and on the obstacles that are confronting the natural progress of the same.

Factors responsible for women's illiteracy:

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.

Low 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. 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.

Negligence of girls' education: 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, cooking and so on. 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 to school as it becomes secondary. This social evil is a quite discouraging phenomenon which stands as barrier for girl's education in rural areas for the underprivileged families of washer men and agricultural labour, scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. 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 labourers in the farms or factories.

Evil social practices: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: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 labourers indulged in carpet making, bricks, mining, quarrying, glass, bangles, match and fireworks, gem polishing, handloom works, embroidery, coir industry, domestic works, construction etc. In most of these industries girl children are preferred for high productivity and low cost.

Defective school environment: 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 outdated, 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.

Early 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. 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: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. Indian constitution and various legislations pertaining to education to children assure free and compulsory education to all children of this nation. But unfortunately the enforcement machinery fails to discharge its duties and responsibilities to the satisfaction of the public interest and welfare of women.

Miscellaneous: The high population growth rate, rapid urbanization, migration etc. also attribute immensely for the poor literacy level of women and girls in India.

Strategies for ensuring girls' education:

Since the prevailing situation of poor or less enrolment of girls in schools closes the doors for development and prosperity of future generation of women, concerted efforts must be initiated jointly by the government, parents and civil society to achieve universal enrolment for girls without any compromise. The enrolment can be made even mandatory for every girl by the government in the realm of compulsory education. . The Ministry of Education both at Centre and State level should work out strategic steps to stop firmly the ongoing high drop-outs among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas with the serious involvement of voluntary organizations in every locality to realize zero drop-out among girls. The poverty stricken families can be identified through proper research and necessary poverty alleviation services can be provided to strengthen the income thereby to enable the families to send their children to schools and colleges without much financial difficulties. Child labour practices must be abolished with strict administrative measures and the relieved children from bondage should be integrated into schools with suitable defence social mechanism. Appropriate steps should be taken by the educational authorities with the participation of communities in order to bring the girl children to the main stream of education and development at every level including family and community. The female child in every Indian family irrespective of socio-economic status should be moulded to overcome the challenges of inferiority; subservience and domesticity which place sever limitations on her education and development. Every family irrespective of its socio-cultural and economic background can take it as a challenge to bring up their girl children as dignified human being with empowerment in physical, mental, economic and social dimensions of life. The Midday meal scheme and other educational supportive services like free text books, Note books, Free uniforms, Free Bicycles, Free bus, scholarships and so on as done in the state of Tamil Nadu

can be provided in all states and union territories to lift up the literacy level among girls. As social evils like dowry, child marriage, caste system and other practices deprive rights of education for children belonging to poor and underprivileged families and communities, they should be eliminated through well-designed packages of mass awareness programmes and social welfare measures with full support of public, political parties, NGOs and government agencies. The electronic and print media can play significant role in building a good and positive image about girls and women in general in the society by giving no focus for such advertisements and news fetching commercial gain at the cost of depicting women as an object. This would help in changing the society's attitudes towards girls and their roles to treat every girl or woman as human being with self-respect and dignity. Government, voluntary sector and philanthropic organizations and individuals should come forward to provide free education for poor girls and provide free hostel facilities for girls studying in schools and colleges in every state of India. This will certainly encourage children of poor families to pursue good and higher education without much impediments. The schools of social work, departments of women studies, Women Universities and other educational institutions in hand with NGOs and social service organizations such as Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, etc. can work together to improve the educational status of the womenfolk in this country on mutual respect and understanding. The parents of children belonging to poor, underprivileged families must be specially educated with proper social formula to help them to understand the significance of education for their girl children as foundation for empowerment. Government, NGOs and public should work hand in hand to implement the minimum age at marriage (21 and above). The law enforcing machinery should be made really effective with efficient monitoring vigilant system to implement the constitutional and legislative provisions and administrative measures to assure free and compulsory education for all children of this nation without any gender discrimination.

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's 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, politechniques, 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.

Conclusion:

The Government of India had ushered in the new millennium by declaring the year 2001 as 'Women's Empowerment Year' to focus on a vision where women are equal partners like men. 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 'empowerment' in the nineties. 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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