

“Gender Inequality and Empowerment of Women through Education”**Dr. Mujahid Ali****Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology & Social Work****National Institute of Medical Science University****Shobha Nagar, Jaipur****Introduction**

Gender inequality persists in every aspect of performance and achievement not only in Indian society but all over the world. Most of the societies even in the globalising, liberalizing and privatizing world are male dominated. In this world of globalization, liberalization and privatization, inequalities persist in every country whether developed or developing. But the degree of gender inequality varies from one society to another. In this modern world of internet the people who are well educated can only facilitated with high tech facilities and the people who are illiterate and semi – literate have hardly space to survive. If we talk about Indian society it has about 25 percent population illiterate. They are surviving their life in traditional and customarily ways. Now we have realised that we can't survive without getting higher education in this world. Therefore most of the people now are paying their sincere attention towards getting education. It is very sad news that in our own society males and females are seen with two eyes. Females are discriminated in every sphere of life whether social, political or economic. In this modern era women are still suffering with patriarchal attitudes and other gender discriminatory socio – cultural norms and values in our loving Indian society. Because of illiteracy or semi – literacy women are not aware with their social and legal rights. Indian government is now making serious effort to raise the women's socio – economic, political and cultural status by using various perspectives like Welfarist, developmentalist and empowerment. Empowerment of women through education is one of the most powerful dimensions of empowering women. Empowerment can remove the discrimination against women in our society. It improves their status in the family, community and throughout the society. It ensures women's accessibility to modern development facilities and increases their participation in social, economic and political process and decision making.

Gender and Education

Education is the basic requirement and the fundamental right of the citizens of a nation. It is the most powerful instrument for bringing about a social change which is the only hope for this country but also for establishing a better social order all over the world. Education is one of the most powerful tools for determining the level of aspirations, technology, productivity and efficiency which are basic factors influencing the process of development. Gandhiji has stated long back that educating a man is educating an individual while educating a woman is educating a family; women education has been sadly neglected. It widens our mental horizon by imparting knowledge and developing the analytical skills. By increasing knowledge and skill education transforms human material into human capital. Education and knowledge not only hold strong position of women in home or society as a whole but also provide strength to retain that position against many critical conditions of life. According to Gunnar Myrdal (1969), education has an independent as well instrumental value that is the purpose of education must be to rationalize attitude as

well as to impart knowledge and skills. Education for national development should include education for self reliance, personal development, productive capacity, social integration and political understanding.

It is felt necessary here to quote Jawaharlal Nehru Quotation regarding women capability:

“In order to awaken the people, it is the woman who has to be awakened. Once she is on the move, the household moves, the village moves and the country moves; and through the women, its children are brought into the picture and given the opportunity of a healthier life and better training. Thus, through the children of today we build the India tomorrow”.

Gender inequality enshrined in our constitution, in its preamble, fundamental rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles. Various developmental Policies, Programmes, Plans are framed out by keeping in mind the concept of women’s advancement in different spheres. Indian Constitution assigns women the privilege of equal rights with men, the same facilities of education, the same opportunities of vocation and employment. Despite of these facilities provided to women in our constitution, a large number of Indian women are deprived from this boon of raised status. Such lack of education has its effect upon the whole social structure including the educated also. Education also creates inequality between the people who are literate and illiterate, between highly educated and less educated. Indian women face a number of problems like; they are tortured by their in – laws, lower facilities for the girls and women within the households, inequality of wages between female and male labour, the burden of domestic work resting upon women unshared by male members even when women are working outside all day long and so on. This is all happening because of lack of education among women. But on the other hand educated women in mostly cases have more value and status in the eyes of her husband, in – laws, her family and community. She makes her active participation in family decision making about how many children to have, how to make them healthy and bring them up, how to use contraceptives, how to spend money, how to organise domestic life and so and so for.

Education has always been emphasized as the most significant instrument for changing women’s subordinate position in society. As we know that Indian society is tradition ridden society where women face a number of problems to educate themselves. To educate themselves women have to face social, economic, cultural and religious restrictions in our society. People’s traditional attitudes and cultural environment are changing gradually in favour of women’s education. A total change in the status of women on national basis in all parts of country, in all the sections and classes and religions of the country can not expect suddenly to take place. But the changes are taking place gradually among educated women and because of their influence. Education is lightening machine which removes the darkness, superstitions, narrowness, discriminatory proverbs and wrong notions. Therefore to gain the ultimate end, every effort to enhance women’s education, must be geared up with all available resources and with the assistance of most accurate planning. Educated women contribute to make our nation strong by rearing up intellectual and ideal citizens. According to Rajkumari Chandrasekeran (1998) education not only helps women to gain knowledge but also provides the necessary courage and inner strength to face the challenges of life. It has enabled them to procure a job and supplement the income of the family and achieve social status. In modern world women are getting admission in large number to pursue professional courses like medical, Engineering, management and are exhibiting to the world that they can

play an equally important role as men in nation building. Thus there is no denying the fact that education empowers women.

Social attitudes towards education of women vary in context of rural and urban people. In urban areas, women's education gets more attention in comparison to rural areas because of the conservative attitude of rural people. Women's literacy rate also varies with regard of higher, middle and lower class families. In most of the high class families, equal attention is paid towards men and women's education. Now middle class families also supporting women's education strongly but in the case of lower class or the people who are below the subsistence level, girls are very much busy serving as unpaid workers within their families. Now women's education getting strong social support in our society. It is because of increasing demand of educated women in marriage market. Most of the educated men prefer to get marriage with the women having equal educational qualification. Thus we can say that education help to improve the girls marriage prospects. Now with the passing of time it is increasingly considered indispensable to find bride grooms with still higher education, low educational level of girls contributes to an increase in amount of dowry and the double expenditure acts as a deterrent to girl's education. Therefore most of the parents withdrawn their girls from Schools after the primary stage. It is an observed fact that now most of the parents gradually realising the importance of their daughter's education. Most of the people in urban areas are educating their girl's that they could become economically self – dependent. The demand for educated wives, the growing economic problems and the realization that education builds up personality and many other factors have encouraged the spread of women's education. Thus education develops the personality, rationality among individuals and makes them eligible to meet with most of the economic, political and cultural functions and in turn improves their socio – economic status to achieve desired goals.

Gender Inequality and Education

Gender inequality is one which has been publicly reverberating through society for decades. It exists at every level of education whether primary, secondary or higher. Women education never overstressed in our own society. The education system itself has been discriminatory against girls and women. It has always been in favour of boys and men. In schools boys and girls are treated differently. Gender stereotypes are stressed in school books. Curricular and extracurricular activities also reveal gender discrimination. It is not only in India but all over the world that women and girls always get less educational opportunities than men and boys. Boys have an advantage over girls in terms of access to education, retention and future use of their knowledge and training. At higher level of education boys go for prestigious professions while girls go for general education. At home parents give more importance to the education of sons and provide better facilities to them.

Gender inequality in education has been narrowed down slightly since last two decades but the situation is still miserable in context of women. Even after 68 years of independence, women are still one of the most powerless and marginalised sections of Indian society. Though the literacy rate among women has been improved from 39.29 percent in 1991 to 54.16 percent in 2001. Actually the increase in female literacy by 14.87 percent outnumbered that of male literacy (11.7 percent). Literacy gap between male and female has reduced from 24.84 percent in 1991 to 21.70 percent in 2001. Literacy rate still

higher among males in comparison to females. The literacy rate of male has improved and gone up to 75.85 percent that shows an improvement of 11.72 percent. But on the other hand the female literacy has increased at a faster rate of 14.87 percent. According to Census 2011 literacy rate of male was 82.14 percent and of females 65.46 percent. There are a number of factors that contribute to low literacy among females in comparison to males. Patriarchy is one of the major factors which function as a barrier in the way of women's education. Our socio – economic system badly influenced by patriarchal norms and values. High dropout rate among girls at the early stage of Schooling as compared to boys is a second major reason for the lack of education among women in India. A number of difficulties in the way of women's education still exist in our society. These are conservative attitude of parents, tradition ridden social customs, economic problems of the family, short age of women teachers, lack of Schools and hostel buildings, purposeless curricula and some out – dated text books, inadequate transportation. In our country conservative and tradition ridden ideologies are not permitting girls to go to the schools. That's why the enrolment ratio of girls is very much less in comparison to boys and their retention rate decreases as the level of education become higher. According to Ratna M. Sudarshan (2005) unequal educational status of men and women is both cause and consequence of a wider gender inequality. Education is not only one of the major indicators of gender bias but it is also a measure of gender discrimination. Nirmala Sharma (2006) has find out nine major factors which are hindrance in the way of women's education. These are: 1. Elder girls have to take care of their younger brother and sister in the absence of their mothers, 2. Early marriage of girls, 3. Lack of facilities in the form of School buildings, hostels and female teachers, 4. Social customs that are considered as barriers to female mobility after attaining the age of puberty, 5. Most of the girls have to work to increase family income, 6. School curriculum is not completely fitted to the girls, 7. The lack of separate institutions for girls, 8. The lack of women instructress, 9. The unattractive school environment, especially in mixed schools, lack of physical facilities for sitting in class and the discriminatory attitude of teachers towards girls.

Education and Empowerment of Women

Education is one of the most important sources of enhancing women's empowerment. Despite slight improvement, the dropout rate of girls at every level is higher in comparison to boys because of various reasons like poverty, early child marriage, patriarchal attitude, girl's child labour, general social attitude so and so for. According to Nirmala Sharma (2006), women's education is source for liberation not only for women but Indian society as a whole. So it is recognised that without education women can not make themselves liberated out of their problems and unless women are developed in a country the nation cannot develop as a whole with men alone. Among the various parameters education of women is considered on the top position to improve the status of women in our country. Rekha Wazir (2000) writes that education plays very important role in breaking the cycle of female disadvantage. Education provides meaningful skills, which enhance women's labour market capabilities and permit them to claim benefits from the development process. Education surely serves as a catalyst of emancipator struggles.

The progress in women's education is not satisfactory till now in Indian society. The movements for improving women's status throughout the world have given emphasis on the role of education. According to Sarina Paranjape (1989) there is relation between the empowerment of women and their

educational and economic status. If women are well educated they are economically independent and their decision power in the family is strong. At present, women are not sufficiently empowered in the social, economic and political sectors and in terms of education. Therefore, there is requirement to empower them socially, economically and politically through education, capacity – building, skill development and improving awareness regarding issues. According to Lakshmi Narayana and Rajesh (2002) education is one of the strategies for the empowerment of women which create a positive self – image and boosts self – confidence among them and develops their ability to think critically. Education is one of the tools to reduce ignorance and exploitation and empowering women to improve their lives. According to Sumitra Kumari (2006) by increasing participation of women in visible and paid activities, education enhances their status and decision making power within and outside the family which is a major step towards their equality. Low level of literacy among women leads to their unequal position in the labour market in relation to men by way of reduced earnings and unequal pay for equal work, lack of access to credit, which is barrier in attaining independence and widening choices, and in actions of economic independency, lack of status and power in the family. Literacy among women gives more and better economic opportunities and hence better income levels which in turn would lead to equality and empowerment of women. According to B.N. Singh (2006) both primary and secondary education produces high returns in terms of wage growth, whether for men or women. Female education promotes per capita income growth. Education not only just accompanies but also leads to economic growth. Women who are more educated have smaller, healthier and better educated families. As education opens up better opportunities for women to earn and as it changes women’s position in the family and society, couples tend to opt for smaller families and to invest more in the health and education of every child. Fertility declines among educated women for many reasons; they generally marry later; they have more opportunities available to them to earn income outside the home; they have more influence in family decisions; and they are better able to use contraceptives. D. Sunder Raj et. al. (2005), elaborates that equal access to resources like educational opportunities, credit and property is a major step in the process of empowerment. Creating awareness among women about the existing gender discrimination, gender inequality is most important in empowering them. Then, they should recognise that their root problems stem from inherent structural and institutional discrimination. Patriarchal norms, customs, traditions and social values imposed on women are great hindrance in the way of empowering women through various means particularly education. Equal participation of women in the decision making leads to their empowerment. It could be achieved through mobilization and organisation of women at all levels. Increasing consciousness and awareness building is the major component of the process of empowerment. To overcome from discrimination women must recognise the ideology that legitimizes domination and then understand how it perpetuates their oppression. They should make efforts to change the values and attitudes which are against women and which have been internalised by women since their childhood. Therefore, self consciousness and awareness must arise in each individual woman to empower themselves. But this self – consciousness and awareness does not come spontaneously, so is empowerment. Changing other women’s consciousness must extremely reduce it. Altering self image and beliefs about rights and capabilities could create consciousness among other women. Awareness of gender discrimination challenging the sense of inferiority, recognizing the value of their labour and their contribution to the society and conscientisation will empower women. Patriarchal norms, traditional

beliefs, economic system, political conditions make the task of empowering women more complicated. Since patriarchy is found to be very deeply entrenched both in men and women, empowering women has become an extremely complex task. Achieving gender equality and changing the present gender relations requires widespread changes in the thinking and structure of every institution of changes in the society. All these things can be changed only by the empowering women through education.

Thus education increases the economic, social and political opportunities available to women. It improves women's life style and management capacity. Educated women improve their decision making power and create opportunities and choices to improve their family members lives. Through education women can reduce the impact of oppressive norms, values, customs and traditions that have neglected the needs of girls and women. Besides providing knowledge, skills and income earning opportunities, education of women can reduce child and maternal mortality and fertility, improves family health and increase children's education particularly of girls. This in turn improves the status of women in the society. According to Mira Seth (2001) if a girl child's mother is illiterate then her future become more endangered or complicated. An educated mother gives more emphasis on education of her daughter in comparison to illiterate mother. Women's education influences capacities with regard to childcare and increases their knowledge on nutritious diet. Children of educated mothers have higher survival rates through infancy and childhood than illiterate mother.

In sum we can say that education is most powerful instrument to change the social status of women. It makes them known with their social and legal rights. Education makes women's social status high in all aspects of their life. Women are liberated through education to take every type of decisions in their children's life as well as in their own life. Educated women are free in most of the cases from most of the types of gender discrimination and they are more productive in market. Therefore they can handle all types of problems happening in their families. Education develops the personality, rationality among individuals, makes them eligible to meet with socio – economic and political functions and in turn improves their socio – economic status to achieve desired goals. Women who are well educated have smaller, healthier and better educated families. As education opens up better opportunities for women to earn and as it changes women's position in the family and society, couples tend to opt smaller families and to invest more in the health and education of every child.

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