Education: A Potent Tool in Emancipation and Empowerment of Indian Women

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Abstract- The word development is very broad and may be understood in diverse ways by different individuals. It is a global process of societal change that is planned cooperatively by government and international organizations with the full and informed participation of the inhabitants of the area to be developed. In fact the growth of any society mainly depends on the effectiveness of its educational system and the finest educational system is one which provides equal opportunities to all its members. Female literacy plays an extremely important and vital role in the development of nation especially in the economic progress of a country.

Throughout Indian history, we have long known, although undoubtedly underestimated, the role that women play as caretakers of the family. In the recent two decades there has been a growing realization that the role women play is not restricted to the family only that educated women contribute notably to the world’s economy, as well. The supreme sole reason which can exceedingly perk up the status of women in any society is education. It is indispensable that education enable women not only to achieve more awareness about the world outside of her hearth and home but facilitates her to obtain position, positive self esteem, and self confidence, dynamism, necessary guts and inner vigor to confront challenges in life.

The present paper indicates the progress made by Indian Educated Women in Industrialization and emphasizes on the requirement to build up gender–specific pedagogy and offer facilitations in the system of education, in which women could fulfill their aspirations, overcoming their domestic obligations Women are prepared to take challenges in order to use mainly their talents and are holding very responsible positions such as Chairperson, Vice-President, Managing Directors, General Managers, Marketing and Research executives, Administrators, Directors and Managing Partners. Moreover educated women can play an equally important role as men in nation building.

Keywords- Education, Empowerment, Literacy, Women

I. INTRODUCTION

Before commencing any discussion dealing female education as a development policy or mechanism of economic growth, it is essential to identify the intrinsic significance of education. Literacy and numeric gives girls and women entrance to the world’s enormous store of knowledge. The procedure of learning develops thought capacity and enhances creativeness, awakening women to the value of their own humanity and enabling them to strive for distinction denied by patriarchal cultural norms and backwards traditions. Given that a woman has the responsibility of the whole

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family on herself, an educated woman is better capable of taking care of the health, nutrition and education of her children and more so be an active agent in the social and economic development of the country.

II. WHAT IS EMPOWERMENT AND WHAT EMPOWERS WOMEN?

Empowerment is not both a process and a result, that can neither be measured nor can it be taken by some individual or institution/organization and given to some body else. A woman can only empower herself; organizations (through logistic support) and, governments (through their gender just policies) can play a role in supporting the journey and providing an enabling environment. Women are empowered when they become aware of the unfair power relations they face and are able to take the challenge to overcome inequality. Empowerment enables women to take control over their lives and builds self-confidence and self-reliance. In order to build self-confidence and to evolve a female agenda, besides education, formation of coalitions to have a united strong voice is equally important.

III. HISTORY OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN INDIA

Although in the Vedic period women had access to education in India, they had gradually lost this right. However, in the British period there was revival of interest in women's education in India. 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. 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.

IV. TRENDS IN FEMALE LITERACY RATES IN INDIA

Literacy represents a measure of educational status of any community. Literacy rate in estimated as the percentage of people educated to the respective total population. Though literacy is very important for both males and females, these exists a wide gap between both the sexes in India.

The total literacy rate in India during the year 1981 was 43.56 per cent which increased steadily and reached to 65.38 per cent by 2001. Though there is an increase in the literacy rate, it provides us a clue that there is still scope for further developing the literacy levels as the maximum achievable limit is 100. When we looked at the literacy rate by male and female separately, interesting observations could be made. In all the years, male literacy rates were higher than that of female literacy rates. In the year 1981, the male literacy rate was 56 per cent while the same for female was only 29.75 per cent.

In the year 2001, the male literacy rate has reached to 76 per cent and female literacy rate to 54 per cent. The divergences in the literacy rates between sexes indicate the difference in the growth rate of literacy levels between males and females over a period of time. In our analysis, the divergence in the literacy rates between the sexes showed a declining trend from 26.62 to 21.69 between 1981 and 2001, indicating the reduction in the gap between literacy rates between male and females over time. This can be attributed to the faster growth of female literacy rate compared to that of males during the period of reference.
Another area of concern is to reduce the gap between the rural and urban female literacy rate. Table 2 provides the trends in female literacy rates in India by rural and urban regions since independence.

**TABLE 2**  
TREND IN FEMALE LITERACY RATES IN INDIA BY REGIONS: 1951-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Female Literacy Rate</th>
<th>Index Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>34.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>22.46</td>
<td>54.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>27.89</td>
<td>60.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>36.09</td>
<td>67.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>44.69</td>
<td>73.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>59.40</td>
<td>80.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Computed from various issues of Census of India

It indicates that there is a steady growth of female literacy rates in both rural and urban regions in India. In the year 1951, the rural female literacy was 12 per cent and urban female literacy was 34.59 per cent. This situation had remarkably improved with in fifty years and reached to higher levels of 59 and 80 percent in rural and urban regions respectively.
V. REFLECTION OF INDIAN WOMEN IN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL WORLD

The role of Indian women has changed from that of a deity to that of a devdasi, from being pure to being vulgar from being supreme to being downtrodden and also as innumerable manifestations of virtue or vice. The role of Indian women has undergone dramatic and drastic changes from era to era while within the eras themselves there have existed simultaneous contradictions. This in itself has created problems for contemporary women in experiencing a continuity of their identity within the society. With a woman growing up in Indian society interjects is perhaps a collage and a flux of attitudes, perceptions, roles and locations, of their identity. It seems to be difficult to take a logical look at all this. To every “yes” there is “no” and to every “no” there is “yes”. The interjected collage does not; therefore make it easy for women to define their role and take leadership roles to and to enunciate directions and goals for themselves.

Then came a time when the order of the world changed. A new form and a new structure emerged. This took thousands of years and tears of million who with courage moved the mountain of debris beliefs and freed themselves from the chains and shackles of centuries. What was this change?

VI. CONTEXT OF CHANGE

a) Increasing Globalization
b) Impact of Education and Technology
c) Impact of Media and Impact of other cultures
d) Impact of political, social and economic cross currents of the world.

e) Unforeseen and unanticipated events across the world.

VII. WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

This Is the Century of telecom, IT and financial institutions. Women’s expertise in all these industries is beginning to emerge and women are emerging as a force to reckon with.

Many of these new industries are headed and guided by women who are seen as pioneers and mavericks. The transition to the new millennium is where the women will create new paradigms of being a daughter who takes the responsibility of her parents, is a wife who wishes to create a home and family, and a other who takes charge of the children to make them the children of the new millennium. She is also the entrepreneur who builds the enterprise and discovers her relevance and meaning of her life in herself. She accepts the uniqueness of her identity and is willing to share the space. Simultaneously with all dreams of togetherness she searches for mutuality, dignity and respect.

A. Some Corporate Divas Of 21st Century

Akhila Srinivasan, Managing Director of Shriram Investments is a very successful Indian businesswoman. Lalita Gupte and Kalpana Morparia Joint Managing Directors of ICICI Bank are made immense contribution to the banking sector in India. The Fortune Magazine has ranked the owner of Jumbo group, Dubai based $1.5 billion business conglomerate, Vidya Manohar as the 38th most powerful women of the world. The list of Indian businesswomen cannot be complete without the mention of Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, the owner of Biocon, the largest biopharmaceutical firm in India. She is the first female master brewer and the richest woman in India. Another powerful Indian businesswoman is Sulajja Firodia Motwani who is the Managing Director of Kinetic and Kinetic Finance. Ekta Kapoor who is popularly known as the ‘soap queen’, the Creative Director of Balaji Telefilms is credited for bringing about a revolution in
the Indian small screen industry. She is a rare combination of beauty with brains and a great inspiration for budding entrepreneurs. Naina Lal Kidwai, deputy CEO of HSBC, Priya Paul, Chairman of Apeejay Park Hotels, Ritu Kumar, fashion designer are among the many other Indian women who have left their mark in Indian business. Strong-willed, with an acute acumen for financial strategizing, Nooyi is the CFO and President of PepsiCo. Her strong acumen for business has helped the company garner as much as 30 billion dollars worth of crucial deals within the last couple of years. With a Masters Degree in Public Management from Yale University and Masters in Finance and Marketing from IIM, Kolkata, Nooyi held several senior positions at Motorola and Asea Brown Boveri before joining PepsiCo.

B. Work Participation Rates

Exact change in work participation rate for women is rather difficult to gauge because of frequent changes in the definition of ‘worker’ used in the Population Censuses – which give the most reliable and exhaustive country-wide data. The changes in the definition affect the count of workers in agriculture and unorganized industrial sectors where the large majority of women work. The data from 1971 Censuses are more comparable, however. The data show that FWPR has almost doubled during 1971-2001 (from 13.9 to 25.7%); the WPR of the males, however, has remained almost unchanged (around 52%). The rate for rural women is much higher than for the urban women. The main reason for increase in the rate of rural women has been increasing use of scientific methods of counting ‘workers’. The increase in the rate of urban women, in whose case the definitional change is not important, reflects the entry of growing number of educated and skilled women becoming workers due to change in social norms and greater availability of suitable. Women’s capacity to work at lower wages also seems to have contributed to the increase in the urban FWPR. But large decline in WPR of rural women, due to increase in literacy levels noticed by researchers in the early 60’s is not corroborated by increase in rural female work participation rate in subsequent decades.

C. Distribution of female workers by sectors:

Large majority of women worked in the unorganized sectors where their proportion is almost unchanged (during 1971-1991). The major addition has been in women working in the ‘Other services’ where most of the educated women are concentrated. There has been phenomenal increase of 684%, during the period in the number of women employed in the quascentral and state services but only doubling of their numbers in the private sector large establishments. In public sector and large establishments women constitute 17% of the total workers in 2001 (11% in 1971). In the small establishments of the private sector, however, women constitute almost 30% of the total workers.

VIII. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

Provision of educational opportunities for women has been an important part of the national endeavor in the field of education since independence.

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) as revised in 1992 was a landmark in the field of policy on women’s education in that it recognized the need to redress traditional gender imbalances in educational access and achievement. The NPE also recognized that enhancing infrastructure alone will not redress the problem. New guidelines for policy makers and educationists were charted.

The Programme of Action (POA, 1992) which translates the above guidelines into an action strategy, in the section “Education for Women’s Equality (Chapter-XII, pages - 105- 107), focuses on
empowerment of women as the critical precondition for their participation in the education process.

A. Mahila Samakhya Project.

The Mahila Samakhya Programme was initiated in 1989 to translate the goals of NPE and POA into a concrete programme for the education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly of women from socially and economically marginalized groups.

Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women’s Equality) was launched as a pilot project in 10 districts of Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh in 1989 with Dutch assistance. The project was extended to Andhra Pradesh at the end of 1992 and to Kerala in 1998-99. In 2002, after the bifurcation of Uttar Pradesh, a separate Programme was located in Uttarakhand.

B. Mahila Sanghas

The Mahila Samakhya programme works in tandem, and has organic linkages with educational schemes aimed at universalisation of elementary education, such as DPEP and SSA. Women’s collectives under the MS scheme, called Mahila Sanghas, play an active role in working towards removal of barriers to the participation of girls and women in education at the community level and play an active role in school management/running of alternate schooling facilities where needed.

C. Strengthening Non-Formal Education

Women and girls are the primary target of non-formal education programmes in India. The ability of non-formal education to be innovative, empowering, flexible and responsive to girls’ and women’s needs is well documented in micro projects.

In Nepal, non-formal education is proving more effective than formal education in promoting adult literacy. By contrast, in India non-formal education is only touching its potential. Less than 0.5% of rural girls aged 10-19 participates in non-formal or adult education. Rural participation rates in non-formal and adult education are very low and even lower for women than men. Sample surveys indicate that not more than two to four women per thousand participate.

D. Launching Innovative Programmes for Girls and Women

Power-sharing in education has always been and will remain contentious. India’s Shiksha Karmi project is a compromise attempt to bridge the contention and government sensitivity to creating autonomous, parallel structures for education delivery.

The Swedish-funded Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi project, set up in 1986/87, launched the government-sponsored NGO model that has subsequently been widely used for the Total Literacy Campaign and special project delivery. Shiksha Karmi is registered as a traditional NGO but with one significant difference: the Education Secretary of the state is the ex-officio NGO head.

India is also pioneering a more multi-sectoral approach to girls’ and women’s education than in the past. The District Primary Education Programme was designed to counteract social injury caused by India’s structural adjustment programme. Multi-dimensional inputs into the same geographic areas are used to collectively generate the conditions for more girls and women to get an education. Bridging the gender gap is subsumed in the equity agenda, alongside social and economic distress.

IX. HIGHER EDUCATION FOR GIRLS IN INDIA

Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world. It consists of colleges, universities, institutions of national
importance and autonomous institutions with the status of deemed universities. In 2002-03, there were 300 universities; of which 183 were provincial, 18 federal, 71 deemed universities, and 5 were established through central and state legislation and 13 institutes of national importance. The enrolment was 9,227,833 (about 7.8% of the relevant age group). There were 436,000 teachers in 2002-03 as against 457,000 in 2000-01. Of these nearly 83% are in the affiliated colleges and 17% in the universities. Gender wise data is not provided by the UGC. However, the 2001-02, MHRD (2001-02) provides information on the women teachers in the 12 open universities which is 18.4% and 21.5% in the institutions offering correspondence courses. There has been phenomenal expansion of educational opportunities for women in the field of higher education both general and technical.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Reinforce girls’ and women’s education as a tool of empowerment and of poverty mitigation. Both dimensions warrant full commitment and resourcing. It is especially critical not to lose this vision during budget-cutting periods, introduction of compulsory education, privatizing basic education delivery, and at junctures where there could be a shift in the community-government sharing of education costs.

B. Foster horizontal communication between ministries to create new mechanisms, or maximize the potential of existing mechanisms, to foster a cohesive gender-responsive approach by government to education. Close linkage between the women’s and education ministries is especially strategic.

C. Ensure there is a stable team of gender-aware expertise, concurrent program budget for girls’ and women’s education, and mentors to assist government managers in creating gender-responsive planning, implementing and monitoring processes.

D. Ensure a synergistic partnership between formal and non-formal education that features: responsive internal and external communications; information feedback loops with all delivery agents (public, private and civil society); multiple cross-over and entry points for students; merit-linked recognition for advancing girls’ and women’s education.

E. Adopt participatory methods in formal and non-formal education. Develop a holistic package for assisting teachers to gain the confident competence to sustain participatory teaching: high-quality training, supervised practice teaching, mentoring, refresher training, and achievement-based recognition.

F. Instigate methodical observation and evaluation of girls’ and women’s learning outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation systems need to be considerably deepened to expose the needs, successes and failures of girls and women’s education. Provide the training and support needed to women in gender-test roles (i.e. Village Education Committees) so they have the tools to fully participate as change.

XI. CONCLUSION

Yet, the better picture is of a gargantuan gap between fact and paper fiction, policies and ground-level realities. Government, NGO’s, Women’s groups and new feminists still have to carve a long path and have to formulate strategies to sharpen this education-as-emancipating and empowering tool. They haven’t figured out what is appropriate education for the girl child; what kind of learning will critically shape the consciousness of millions of girls across the country. Surely, the women's movement needs to take a hard look at the gaps on the ground, if the women of tomorrow are to find 'international women's day' anything more than a meaningless farce.

Since the 21st century the status of women in India has been changing as a result to growing industrialization and
urbanization, spasmodic mobility and social legislation. In sum, where humanism fails, economics makes a strong case for educating women. The contribution of an educated woman stretches far beyond bolstering her own capabilities and improving her own life and hence of her offspring. This, in turn, will raise productivity, realign social priorities and go a long way to bringing societies out of poverty.

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Footnotes:
3The 1966 Education Commission report notes a significant number of administrators, opinion leaders and commentators argued that provision of a second-best alternative in the form of non-formal education was morally indefensible.
4Examples include Mahila Shikshan Vihar and Mahila Shikshan Kendra