

THE RECENT ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENTS IN ARTS, SCIENCE AND EDUCATION (A Multidisciplinary Approach)

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AN EXTENSIVE ANALYSIS ON WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION FOR FUTURE PROSPERITY IN INDIA

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Introduction

Women in India constitute 50 per cent of the country's human resources and their contributions are vital for the nation's progress. Women's development is regarded as an important approach to raise the levels of productivity and to break the vicious circle of poverty, for which better health and education forms important. These factors not only improve the physical well being of the individuals directly, but also enhance their productivity and ability to contribute to the 'National Income'. In any society education is a reasonably good indicator of development. Spread and diffusion of literacy is generally associated with essential trait of today's civilization such as modernization, urbanization, industrialization, communication and commerce.

Therefore to acquire a better quality of life, education is highly essential. The word 'education' implies the characteristics of both the types of knowledge, material as well as spiritual. Mahatma Gandhi said that "education is a means for an all round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of the education or even the beginning. It is one of the means where man and woman can be educated". Thus Gandhiji's concept of education stands for the balanced and harmonious development of all the aspects of human personality. Moreover, the 'Human Rights' concept also tells that each human being has right to live with human dignity (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Articles 14-26). The Constitution of India also confers on women, equal rights and opportunities in all fields - political, social, economic and legal.

The Government of India, has endorsed the same through its Plans, Policies and Programmes launched at different points of time. The article 15 of the Constitution of India prohibits any discrimination on grounds of sex (Constitution of India Article 15(1)(3)). In spite of these, women have not been able to take full advantage of their rights and opportunities in practice for various reasons.

The magnitude of illiteracy among women in India is very high. Only 54.16 per cent of women are literates as per 2011 census. It reflects that India is not utilizing the potential workers in a proper way there is either unutilisation or under utilization of women's capacities and skills. Therefore in this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the

International as well as National responses towards women's education. At the end of the article some measures are suggested to overcome the problem of illiteracy among women and to foster their journey towards a dignified and decent life.

Methodology

The data for the present study have been gleaned from various sources which have been duly acknowledged. Information on women's enrolment at different levels of University and professional colleges was obtained through the reports of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi and The Report on Selected Educational Statistics, Published by the Statistics Division, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi 2007.

Observation and Data Analysis

Women's Right to Education: It is nearly six decades since the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of Human Rights on 10th December 1948. This declaration listed 30 Articles. Out of which:

The Article 26 states that:

- Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms it shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial, religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
- Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.
- Every one has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

The reality exposed: In Independent India, education acquired special significance and has been supported by the Government from time to time through its policies and programmes. Therefore in recent years the education system expanded rapidly. But the gender gap in literacy rate remains conspicuous by its presence. The analysed facts and figures throw light on the gravity of the problem which is a reality and the seriousness of the task ahead.

Statistics Division, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi 2007 reveals the percentages of literacy rates as per 2001 census among males and females in India. The gap which was 18.30 per cent in 1951 increased to 25.05 per cent in 1961 and 26.62 per cent in 1981. After that there was a slow decrease in the gap as the literary rate among women

started gradually increasing after 1991 (54.16% in 2011) due to the interventions taken by the government (Census of India, 2011). But still nearly 46 per cent of women are illiterates.

Kerala state is highest with 87.86 per cent and among Union Territories, Lakshadweep occupies first place with 81.56 per cent. In Uttar Pradesh only 42.98 per cent women are literate followed Arunachal Pradesh with 44.24 per cent. Among the six Union Territories except in Dadra and Nagar Haveli (42.99 per cent) in all the other UTs the female literacy rate is more than 70 per cent (Primary Census Abstract, 2011).

The participation of girls at all stages of education has been increasing steadily thought the years as may be seen from statistical data.

Since 1950-51 girls participation has increased many folds in Primary, Middle, Sec./Sr.Sec. stages and Hr. Education levels from 28.1% to 46.7% from 16.1% to 44.4% from 13.3% to 41.5% and from 10.0% to 38.9% respectively. However, the girls participation is still below fifty per cent at all stages of education. (Selected Educational Statistics, MHRD, India, 2007).

Factors Responsible for Low Literacy Rates among Women

The literacy rate in the country has increased from 18.33 per cent in 1951 to 65.38 per cent in 2001 census. The female literacy rate has also increased from 8.86% to (in1951) to 54.16% (in 2011). It is noticed that female literacy during the period 1991-2001 has increased by 14.87% where as male literacy has rose by 11.72%.

Though there is an increase in female literacy rate, still 46% of women are illiterates in India (Statistics on Women, 2007). In spite of a number of National and International Programmes are in implementation to eradicate illiteracy from our country, especially among women, the gap between male and female literacy still persists. In this context, the factors responsible for low female literacy rate in India are identified and listed below:

- Gender based inequality.
- Social discrimination and economic exploitation
- Occupation of girls child in domestic chores
- Low enrolment of girls in schools
- Low retention rate and high dropout rate.
- Deprived of access to information and alienated from decision-making processes.
- Absence of female teachers in schools.
- Schools established in faraway places etc.

As a result of these factors, women are caught in a vicious self perpetuating cycle and their inability to pursue education again reinforces the stereotype of jobs, among women.

Women's Education-The International and National Initiatives International Initiative

India has ratified various International Conventions and Human Rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) in 1993. CEDAW was adopted by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in December 1979, and there are more than 150 states parties to the convention.

CEDAW-1979: This Convention calls for equal rights for women regardless their married status in all fields – political, economic, social, cultural and civil. It appeals for a national legislature to ban discrimination; recommends temporary special measures to spread equality between men and women and actions to modify social and cultural pattern that perpetuates discrimination (CEDAW-1979).

UNICEF, Report in 1992 Conference on Education for All Girls

Programmes of Women's Studies have attempted to dismantle stereotypes and build up women's esteem. Special studies reveal both the extent to which women have been deprived and oppressed and elements in the tradition of all civilization that promote positive images to and ease the conflicts experienced by many women in pursuit of their advancement and new roles in society.

The GC's programme for promoting Women's Studies envisages assistance to Universities for setting up centers and cells for Women's Studies. The centers and cells are required to undertake research, develop curricula and organize training and extension work in the areas of gender equality, economic, self reliance of women, girl's education, population issues, issues of human rights and social exploration (VinaMazumdar, 2003).

Beijing Conference: Platform for Action 1995: The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform of Action (1995) and the outcome Document adopted by the UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) Session on "Gender Equality and Development and Peace for the 21st century", titled Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform of action have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up.

Beijing Conference adopted a Declaration and Platform of Action on the concluding day. The Platform of Action is addressing the unequal access to and inadequate educational opportunities to women suggested the following strategies to be adopted by the Governments.

Strategic objective 1: Ensure equal access to education

Strategic objective 2: Eradicate illiteracy among women

Strategic objective 3: Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology and continuing education

Strategic objective 4: Develop non-discriminate education and training

Strategic objective 5: Promote lifelong education and training for girls and women (Beijing Platform of Action-Five Years After 2002).

Education for All: The World Conference on Education for All, sponsored by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and the UNDP, held in 1990 took stock of the persistence and dimensions of the gender gap. Its final Declaration stated that drawing attention to poor environments experienced by hundreds of millions of girls, it calls for ensuring that all learners receive the nutrition, health care and general physical and emotional support they need.

National Response: The development strategy in Independent India in the 1950s depended heavily on planning. Therefore the development plans prepared for Five years are referred as the Five Year Plans. The first two plans referred to the problems of women's education and occupation. The Report of the Committee on the 'Education of Women' 1959, made extensive recommendations which led to a more focused thrust in the subsequent plans. But disparities in the literacy rates between men and women continued.

These were amply substantiated by the Report of Committee on the 'Status of Women, 1974'. This led to a broader perspective and the Sixth Plan linked education to the participation of women in the development process (Status of Women, 1974).

The National Policy on Education (NPE) - 1986 revised in 1992 took an even broader view in underscoring the role of education in empowering women in order to overcome inequalities and disparities. It has been regarded as a land mark in the approach to women's education and also attempted for the first time to address itself to the basic issues of women's equality.

Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortion of the past, there will be a well conceived edge in favour of women. The National education system will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values, through redesigned curricula, text books, training and orientation of teachers, decision makes and administrators.

The NPE also provided detailed information about the recommendations of the Rammurthy Committee and Education for All by 2000 AD. This has presented an over view on the status of women's education in India since 1995 in all its aspects, particularly empowering women through 'MahilaSamakya programmes'. These programmes are directed to create a learning environment where women can collectively affirm their aim, the strength to demand information and knowledge and move forward towards attaining a quality life (New Education Policy, 1986, 1992).

The Eighth Five Year Plan marked the adoption of two National Plans for Action in 1992. One for children and the other one exclusively for the girl child (VIII Five Year Plan, 1992-97). In the Ninth Plan the thrust was on strengthening the early joyful period of play

and learning in the young child's life to ensure a harmonious transition from the family environment to the primary school. Towards this, special efforts were made to develop linkages between ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) and primary education. Their operational linkage aimed at reinforcing coordination of timings and location based on community appraisal and micro planning at grass root level. Girl's education was viewed as a major intervention for breaking the vicious inter-generational cycle of gender and socio-economic disadvantages. The effective expansion of day care services, linkages of child care services and primary schools was a major input to promote developmental opportunities for the girl child for participation in primary education and supportive services for women (IX Five Year Plan, 1997-2002). During X Five Year Plan a programme called 'SarvaSikshaAbiyan, was launched with an objective - that all the children in the school going age (below 14 years) in India, must be in schools and should complete five years of schooling by 2007 (X Five Year Plan, 2002-07).

Dr. Manmohan Singh, prime Minister of India has termed the XI Five Year Plan as India's Educational Plan. The NDC (National Development Council) in December 2007, places the highest priority on education as a central instrument for achieving rapid and inclusive growth. It aims at:

1. Increase literary rate for persons of age 7 years or more to 85%.
2. Lowering gender gap in literacy to 10 percentage points.
3. Reduction of dropout rate of children from elementary school from 52.2% to 20% by 2011-12.
4. Developing minimum standards of education attainment in effectiveness of education to ensure quality (XI Five Year Plan, 2007-12).

Education for All (EPA) - Indian Context: Education for all, means extending educational opportunities to all, regardless of race, colour, creed, sex or ability. In the Indian context, EPA implies the following:

- Universalisation of Elementary Education - UEE.
- Expansion of Early Childhood Care and Education - ECCE.
- Equalization of Educational opportunities for women.
- Removal of regional and gender disparities
- A systematic programme for Non-Formal Education
- Imparting basic education

Providing Vocational Training etc.

Gender Sensitization: Government attaches greater importance to those efforts which trigger changes in social attitudes towards women. The women's development division of the National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, New Delhi organizes training programmes with a focus on gender issues. These programmes include para-legal

training, training of elected women representatives of panchayats, leadership and organization, training of voluntary agencies reaching women awareness and gender sensitization programmes, incorporation of gender issues in development programmes etc.

In addition to this the Women's Studies Centers established in various Institutions and Universities have been imparting training on Gender Sensitization to different target groups (students, officials, administrators, police personnel, Panchayat Raj functionaries etc.)

The programme of education for prevention of atrocities against women was started in 1982. Based upon the recommendations made in the National Perspective Plan (1988), and the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) the proposal for setting up 'National Resource Center's for women is now at an advanced stage.

Expenditure by level of Education in India:Table-4, reveals that the total expenditure on all sectors (Elementary, Secondary/Higher Secondary, Adult and University level education has been increased from Rs. 1,46,711.53 to 8,19,231.90 lakh crores during the period from 1990-91 to 2004-05. The Govt. of India has been investing mainly on Primary Education followed by Secondary, Adult and Higher Education. The percentage of education in total expenditure on all sectors is also gradually increasing except during the years 2001 – 02 to 2004-05.

Strategies adopted by the Government for increasing female literacy in the country

The main strategies adopted by the Government for increasing female literacy in the country include (National Literacy Mission, 1988):

1. National Literacy Mission for imparting Functional Literacy.
2. Universalisation of Elementary Education.
3. Non-Formal Education.

Contribution of Literacy Campaigns to Female Literacy:The provjion of educational opportunities for women has been an important part of the national endeavour in the field of education since India's Independence. Though these endeavours did yield significant results, gender disparity persists with uncompromising tenacity, more so in the rural areas and among the disadvantaged communities. This is not only a matter of national anxiety and concern but also a matter of national conscience. It is with this concern that the Government of India launched the National Literacy Mission in 1988 for eradication of adult literacy. Since women account for an overwhelming percentage of illiterates, the National Literacy Mission - Mission of imparting functional literacy to women was launched in 1988. The total Literacy Campaigns launched since 1988 under the aegis of the National emphasis are making efforts to:

- Create an environment where women demand knowledge and information, empowering themselves to change their lives.

- Inculcate in women the confidence that change is possible, if women work collectively.
- Spread the message that education of women is a precondition for fighting against their oppression.
- Highlight the plight of the girl child and stress the need for Universalisation of Elementary Education as a way of addressing the issue.

Some of the significant ways in which the literacy campaigns have contributed to the promotion of female literacy and women's empowerment are as follows:

- Heightened social awareness among women
- Increased school enrolment rate of girls.
- Increased self-confidence and personality development
- Promoted genders equity and women's empowerment
- Improved the status of women in the family
- Educational equity - Gender gap in literacy levels have gradually reduced
- Encouraged Women to take up entrepreneurship.
- Increased household savings and access to credit
- Provided awareness about health and hygiene

In addition to the above, the following are the some strategies recommended to encourage girls/women's education in India.

- Involving women's groups like DWCRA and Self Help Groups in promoting women's literacy
- Providing free and compulsory education for all girls up to 20 years.
- Establishment out changes in the attitudes of parents and in the society.
- Bringing out changes in the attitudes of parents and in the society.
- Inclusion of Literacy programmes in all governmental schemes.
- Effective implementation of follow up programme.
- Removal of gender bias in the school curriculum
- Establishment of more number of NFE (Non-Formal Education) schools to enroll girls and women of different age groups.
- Widening the scope of Distance Education Programme to cover all categories of people especially rural women.

Conclusion

The right of every individual to education is one of the first provisions of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. But education is often neglected in societies struggling to meet the many needs of their people. Recently education has received greater priority as Planners and Policy makers finally recognized it as a key factor in determining the pace of development. Creating educational opportunities for girls and women is strongly emphasized in the work of the UN. CEDEW suggests 'encouraging co-education' as one way of eliminating the stereotyping of women. Education, being the most powerful instrument for empowering women assumes special priority in the recent plans and programmes of National and International action.

Concerted efforts are also made to bring more women into the purview of education. In spite of these many provisions, still there is a wide gap between male and female literacy levels in India. Keeping this in view the programme of action for future has to be formulated so as to reduce the gender gap as well as illiteracy rate among girls and women.

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