EDUCATION: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF FEMALE DISADVANTAGE

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Abstract

As well said by, Lucretia Mott “The world has never yet seen a truly great and virtuous nation because in the degradation of woman the very fountains of life are poisoned at their source”. The paper capitalize on the current existing situation of women in India, need for her empowerment, realization of her powers & her contribution in nation building. It’s a high time to think of that ICT can still wait but not our women welfare. Paper has emphasized on various programs launched by the Government for HER’S welfare and has also made an attempt to assess their success in reference to Human Development Index by the report released by UNDP in 2010, after 20 years.

Keywords: education, women, gender equity, women education

Introduction

The role of education in development has been recognized ever since the days of Plato. Education, Plato believed, is indispensable to the prosperous health of a good society, for education makes citizens 'reasonable men’. So, the progress of any country depends upon the quality of education offered and its practices. Reflecting on Indian education, it was well known for its Gurukul system of education in the Vedic age. Education in India has undergone various phases and stages of development starting Vedic age to post-independence period. At all stages of development there was a concern for bringing in the quality education reflecting on the practical aspects in education. The great Indian thinkers also emphasized on developing inner potentials of individual by reflecting on unique potential of individual. Education for all is important for three reasons. First, education is a right. Second, education enhances individual freedom. Third, education yields important development benefits.”Also emphasizing on brain power to be developed through education, Prof. Amitabh Mattoo, (2009) quoted, “Brain power” determines a nation’s place in the world. Brain power should of course be reflected in a country’s progressive competitiveness. More importantly it should be reflected in, “human capabilities” and the investment has to be in human capital formation. The ability of a nation to make best use of its brain power will shape its place in the world in the present century. The capability created by knowledge is the foundation upon which country’s future is to be built. However, no development agenda is complete unless concerns of disparity and inclusion are
addressed. Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities.

**Women’s status in Indian Society:**

India is a patriarchal society where males are assumed to be in charge and official heads. The descent and inheritance are traced through the male line, known as a *patrilineal* system. The fight for women’s empowerment is not a fight between men and women. It is a fight between two ideologies, one of which believes that men are superior while the other believes that women are equal. If we peep into the history we observe, there are men and women, who do and do not subscribe to patriarchal thinking; who do not are like Prophet Mohammed who fought for women’s equality 15,000 years ago in the Middle East where women were badly discriminated. Gandhi Ji also stood in favor of women’s equality. He quoted, “Wives should not be dolls and objects of indulgence but should be treated as honored comrades in common service. The educationally ill-disposed should be educated by their husbands. Women are gifted with equal mental capacities and therefore she has equal rights. Women must not suffer any legal disability which is not suffered by men. Both are perfectly equal (Young India, 17th October, 1929).”

Girls are raised to believe that a life of domestic work is their destined occupation and they are needed to assist their mothers at home. When we talk of their contribution to the society we are left with no words, anything to count of …… ... . Women work, but their work is not visible in statistics. However it is now acknowledged that women’s work – especially in the home, farm and in a range of informal sector home based work – is invisible. As a result their contribution does not show up in national statistics. The work burden of women in poor households influences the time and resources they have to take care of children. Most girls who drop out of school are working in homes and fields of their parental or marital families. Women’s work is undervalued and unrecognized and women generally earn a far lower wage than men in spite of doing identical work. The deeply ingrained system of patriarchy describes women’s identity and role through her (subordinated) relationship to men. She is, therefore, cast in a clearly defined mould with expected roles / functions, even before she is born. Even as a fetus in a womb, it is assessed whether she should be accepted or not! After birth, she is seen as a mini-woman who has to be reared as a “temporary” member of the family, who has finally to be groomed for marriage and be sent to another family, involving much social and economic strain on her parental family. Where is her childhood? Is there never to be a time to play, to learn, and to be developed in as a self? Breaking the cycle of female disadvantage entails new forms of realization and mobilization of not merely resources, but communities too. For this, there have to be major attitude shifts in society, facilitated by policy and reinforced by freshly designed development indicators to break out of a culture of patriarchy. This would require facilitation and ongoing support for re-negotiation of women’s roles within the family and community. All serious attempts to initiate and support gender equality would have to help women understand the importance of change and to break out of a mode of dependence and realize their self-worth. There is a dire need to improve the existing status of women and that can be achieved through the only means ‘—education.
Need to Educate Women:

Well quoted by Kofi Annan “When women thrive, all of society benefits, and succeeding generations are given a better start in life.” A higher women literacy rate improves the quality of life both at home and other contributing places by encouraging, motivating and promoting her children, inculcating in them the values of morality and gender equality. Several studies have shown that a higher level of women literacy rates results in lower levels of fertility and infant mortality, poorer nutrition, higher earning potential and the ability to make decisions within a household. Women’s lower educational levels are also shown to adversely affect the health and living conditions of children. At the same time, countries that improve the status of women tend to have lower poverty incidence and stronger economic growth. As a result, governments can no longer afford the cost of inaction. Gender equality needs to be seen as a determinant of development effectiveness and should have significant implications for the design of anti-poverty interventions and pro-poor growth strategies. More than 100 countries over three decades finds that an increase of 1 percentage point in the share of adult women with secondary education implies an increase in per capita income growth of up to 0.3 percentage points (Dollar and Gatti 1999). Several studies show that better-educated women contribute to the welfare of the next generation by reducing infant and child mortality, lowering fertility, and improving the nutritional status of children. Women with more control over household resources tend to allocate more resources to food and to children’s health and education.

Today, India stands at cross roads of history. Recent significant advancements in country’s economy have taken the country to the centre stage of world attention. Much of this progress is intrinsically linked to the development of human resources. While on one side, growth of population has been a cause for concern, the youth, the educated and the employed are being seen as demographic dividends; especially in times when world population is ageing. However with increasing disparities, the challenge for the decade to come would be to focus on the millennium development goals (MDGs) and the sections of society that remain less privileged in education, health and employment; failing which the dividend may well turn into a demographic liability. It has been recognized that the “Human Development Index” (HDI) developed by UN is a measure of the overall development of the country. One of the three components used in the calculation of HDI is “Literacy” as it is a cumulative measure of several factors that contribute to human development. As per UN Development Report, 2000, India’s ranking in HDI is 128, with education index registering a low .55 due to a low adult literacy rate of 55.7 and combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment of 54. In the 'Human Development Report 2010' by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which assumes importance as it’s come 20 years after the first Human Development Report released by UNDP covering 169 countries and territories, India’s position is way below China (89th spot) and Sri Lanka (91).

There have been a number of theoretical and empirical studies finding that improving the status of women, improves the economic growth of a country. The main arguments from the literature, which are discussed in detail in Klasen (1999, 2002, and 2006 ), are briefly summarized below. The theoretical literature suggests as a first argument that such gender inequality reduces the average amount of human capital in a society and thus harms economic performance. It does so as by artificially restricting the pool of talent from which to draw for education and thereby excluding highly qualified girls (and taking less qualified boys instead, e.g. Dollar and Gatti, 1999). Moreover, if there are declining marginal returns to education, restricting the education of
girls to lower levels while taking the education of boys to higher levels means that the marginal return to educating girls is higher than that of boys and thus would boost overall economic performance (World Bank 2001; Knowles et al. 2002). A second argument relates to externalities of female education. Promoting female education is known to reduce fertility levels, reduce child mortality levels, and promote the education of the next generation. Each factor in turn has a positive impact on economic growth. Thus gender gaps in education reduce the benefits to society of high female education (e.g. Galor and Weil 1996; Lagerlöf 1999; World Bank 2001; King, Klasen, and Porter 2008).

Gender Equity:

Gender inequality in access leads to gender inequality in the opportunity to improve one’s lifetime earnings. Persistent inequalities of gender, class, race, caste and ethnicity are evident in education systems worldwide, whether at the stage of enrolment and attendance, in outcomes and achievement, or in terms of the consequent opportunities to which education is expected to give rise. This was evident in the debates at the EFA Forum in Dakar, Senegal (2000), where governments and donor agencies renewed their commitment to equal opportunities in access to education and to ensuring that all learners have access to quality learning. In India, the concept of “equality” was completely alien until liberally exposed Western-educated Indians introduced it in the early nineteenth century. However, the term did not gain meaning or becomes an operational principle in Indian life until the country gained independence in 1947 and adopted a democratic government. The Constitution of India (1951) not only grants equality to women and forbids any discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, but also empowers the state to practice protective discrimination in favor of women. In 1974, the report of the Committee on Status of Women in India”Towards Equality”, studied the status of women and recommended changes to improve their situation. CSWI document also highlighted that despite constitutional guarantees and rights, participation of women in all spheres of life were limited. The early attempts at integrating women in development took the form of ‘Women in Development’ (WID) approaches. It was based on the assumption that gender relations would change once women become full partners in development (Rathgeber 1990, Kabeer 1994, Razavi and Miller 1995). The Gender and Development (GAD) approach emerged in the 1980s as an alternative to WID focus. The approach does not just lead to the design of interventions and affirmative action strategies to ensure that women are better integrated and they benefit from ongoing development efforts; it also calls for fundamental re-examination of social structures and institutions which promote and sustain gender-based inequality (Young 1993, Kabeer 1999).

The sixth Five-Year Plan initiated in 1980 even declares women as “partners in development." The effort in NPE 1986 document also attempts not only to provide equality of educational opportunity, but to transform the entire content and process of education for achieving gender equality and a realignment of gender roles, to make them more equitable and harmonious.

Now the talk of the time, “The Millennium Development Goals” eight international development goals that all 192 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. India is also committed towards millennium development goals and special efforts have been taken by Government to attain these goals. Government has introduced a number of programs and initiatives for 360 degree societal
and economic development of Indian women along with the minority classes the promotion of
gender equality and empowering of women is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals
to which India is a signatory. The pairing of the two concepts of women’s empowerment and
gender equality into one MDG implicitly recognizes that gender equality and women’s
empowerment are two sides of the same coin: progress toward gender equality requires women’s
empowerment and women’s empowerment requires increases in gender equality.

When United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), provided an assessment report in
2010, with just five years left for the finishing line for the eight globally-agreed Millennium
Development Goals, the findings revealed - Gender parity in primary and secondary education is
likely to be achieved, though not in tertiary education. With just five years to the 2015 deadline
for achieving the MDGs the country as a whole will not be on track for a majority of the targets
related to poverty, hunger, health, gender equality and environmental sustainability unless
concerted national efforts are made by government and all sections of civil-society working in
tandem. India’s march towards the MDGs is however, hampered by persistent inequalities,
particularly gender inequality. When inequality - especially in education and healthcare - is
factored in, India's HDI value would see a 30 per cent loss, according to the report. In the gender
inequality index, India is at the poor 122nd position, among 138 countries. Bangladesh and
Pakistan are ranked at 116th and 112nd positions, respectively, indicating that these nations are
better in gender equality than India, when it comes to gender inequities India fares worse than
Pakistan. So while Pakistan may be in the news for its treatment of women and might have
become a hot bed for international women's activism, it certainly seems to know how to take care
of its mothers better. Equity in education by gender, caste and socioeconomic groups and
reduction in regional disparities in education development should be some of the important
objectives of educational planning in India.

GENDER-RELATED PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION

Educational inequality is a major infringement of the rights of women and girls and an important
barrier to social and economic development. The global struggle for universal education is nearly
61 years old. It was recognized as a right in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights
(UDHR), which states that “everybody has the right to education.” The UDHR also declared that
elementary education should be free and compulsory, and that the higher levels of education
should be accessible to all on the basis of merit. This provision was followed up by the UNESCO
Convention against Discrimination in Education, adopted in 1960, which placed the right to
education in a binding treaty for the first time. Under article 4 of the UNESCO Convention the
right to free and compulsory education is guaranteed, and States parties “undertake … to
formulate, develop and apply a national policy, which … will tend to promote equality of
opportunity and of treatment in the matter of education”.

Though we cannot speak of gender-related problems in education in terms of access, students’
enrolment or performance in the Universities, there are still some areas where gender balance
should be encouraged, like the representation of girls and women in science and mathematics;
and to ensure that those already in scientific and research careers find their careers, prospects and
rewards sufficiently satisfactory to keep them there. Gender (in) equalities in higher education
and research has become an issue of growing policy concern since the late 1990s. Statistics and research have shown that gender equality has not been achieved in higher education quantitatively or qualitatively. This is so despite the fact that women have made great gains in higher education during the last decades. In the beginning of the 21st Century, women account for more than half of graduates in higher education throughout the world. Despite this great potential for job creation and development, only those who can afford the new technologies, and have the skills to use them, will benefit, while the poor risk being marginalized. Given that women make up the large majority of the poor worldwide, any strategy to increase their participation in the digital economy would increase national capacity and help raise the national standard of living. The large majority of women in developing countries are “employed” by the informal economy (street vendors or women working at home on, for example handicrafts and sewing). Reaching these women will be the major challenge for policy makers trying to bridge the digital – and particularly the gender digital – divide. Among the key barriers faced by women are access to education, skills and training, access to the technologies themselves (both hardware and connectivity) and other constraints such as those related to knowledge of foreign languages (i.e. access to Internet content) or lack of financial resources to acquire access.

**Efforts made by Government for women welfare:**

Efforts have always been made by our Government for women welfare through various programs. Now, if one looks at the constitutional guarantees, a strong affirmation of non-discrimination is clearly on record. 1975 was declared as “International Women’s Year” by United Nations and 1976-1985 as the “Decade for Women” so as to reflect on the need and importance of women welfare and women empowerment. In 1986 the National Policy on Education, emphasized that education is necessary for democracy, and central to the improvement of women’s condition. Emphasis was placed on expanding girls’ occupational centers and primary education; secondary and higher education; and rural and urban institutions. NPE 1986 quoted” Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. Major emphasis will be laid on women’s participation in vocational technical and professional education at different levels. The policy non-discrimination will be pursued vigorously to eliminate sex stereotyping in vocational and professional courses and promote women’s participation in non-traditional occupations, as well as in existing and emerging technologies”. The Shikshakarmi Project document (1986) noted that “a major problem in the universalization of education is the enrolment of girls. To encourage enrolment of girls and to develop awareness among women, it is imperative that women are trained as Shikshakarmis in as large number as possible. In most rural areas, particularly in remote and hard places, such women workers are not at all available. In a State where segregation of men and women is strictly practiced and purdah enforced, one of the major constraints identified in low enrolment of girls in schools has been the absence of women teachers in schools located in remote areas. For this The Mahila Prasikshan Kendra were established as an intervention for increasing the number of women teachers and through them, affecting an increase in the enrollment of girls in the project schools. Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development in 1989, initiated Mahila Samakhya (MS) program to translate the goals of the National Policy on Education into a concrete program for the education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly those from socially and economically marginalized groups. The Mahila Samakhya
Programme has succeeded in achieving its objectives relating to women’s empowerment through education and providing space to women to “plan and monitor their own education, to reach out to a new body of knowledge”. In early nineties, for addressing the learning needs of rural (oppressed) women and girls who have not been able to access education, two freshly designed innovative programs have been initiated. They are the Women’s Residential Institute for Training and Education (WRITE) and Residential Camps for Adolescent Girls. WRITE was established with the objective of providing necessary training and education up to class VIII to young women coming from difficult situations. Its purpose was to create activist cadres for bringing about social change and to increase availability of trained women workers. Residential Camps for Adolescent Girls (Balika Shikshan Shivir) are short term residential camps for adolescent girls, many of whom are married and have missed the opportunity of schooling at the normal age of school entry, due to lack of access and family compulsions. At present, there are large gender and social equity gaps in the secondary education sector. The State Government is providing incentives to bridge these equity gaps. Free bicycles are being provided to the girls who enroll in Class 9 in the government schools located in other villages. Besides the scholarships and incentives on joining class 9 to SC and ST students, free text books are given to the students belonging to the SC, ST & Below Poverty Line families. The State government accords high priority to socio-economic development of women so that they become equal partners in development process. To promote educational and socio-economic status of the girl child, the government has introduced a new scheme called Ladli Laxmi Yojana in 2008. For this Rs. 30,000/- will be deposited in five equal installments of Rs. 6,000/- each in NSCs or any other similar instrument in the name of a girl child. After completion of 21 years of age, a lump sum amount of about Rs. one lac will be paid to the girl child provided she appears in 12th class examination and gets married after 18 years of age. Certain amount will also be paid to her when she takes admission in 6th, 9th and 11th class. Approximately Rs. 600 crore will be spent under the scheme during 11th five year plan. Lok Jumbish (people's movement) founded in 1992 on the principles of autonomy, decentralization and gender sensitivity is also one step towards equality. For Lok Jumbish (LJ), every single child in the village is important; and the ones who have been marginalized for centuries are the first priority. Girls of deprived groups, therefore, emerge centre-stage in a clear focus. LJ has created a forum ‘Samvadika’ for ensuring focus on girls, women’s participation and making informed decisions on operational issues of the project with gender sensitivity. This perspective clearly accepts that education has a central role to play in breaking the cycle of female disadvantage. Education must provide skills to enhance capabilities and education must also serve as a catalyst for emancipator struggles. It should simultaneously prepare boys to accept girls as equals.

Conclusion:

Gender equality and gender development are the key issues for the planners and policy makers. Every issue of gender development viz., Education, health and nutrition, growth and physical development should be given due care. Gender equality and gender development’s question moves around the ‘power’ women held. The thing women have yet to learn is nobody gives you power. You just take it. Unless women recognize her ‘power’ and fight for her existence, no policy, no program, no right can lead to her upliftment. It is believed that empowerment would increase women’s visibility, give more bargaining power to them within the household and,
thereby, basically reformulate girls’ candidature for accessing education. It would also throw up new role models for girls and boys, paving the way for a more humane society. The change in thinking must begin in the minds of Indian women themselves. When women begin to see themselves as powerful, change will begin. When India makes improvements in human development issues like health, education, and gender equality, the majority of people in India will begin to realize the benefits of an improved economy. Imagine the growth that would be seen if every citizen in the country was given the dream, the chance, and the right, to fully participate in the economy. Then India might truly become an economic superpower. As well said by, Lucretia Mott “The world has never yet seen a truly great and virtuous nation because in the degradation of woman the very fountains of life are poisoned at their source”. Come; let’s join our hands to build up that truly virtuous nation.

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