

WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Education is considered as a significant instrument in improving the status of women. The policy makers have recognized that, apart from the corrective legislations lucrative employment, political rights, access to education for women is a crucial step in the direction of establishing gender equality. Education is a major instrument of social change because former leads us towards development. Here, development in the political, economic, social, educational, cultural and other dismentions of human life. Women's development should not only be viewed as an issue in social development. The improvement of the status of the women requires a change in the attitudes and roles of both men and women.

Education is the only tool which aims at making human beings honourable citizens than merely a avirtuous and learned person. It is here the necessity for educating the women is felt, for no society, irrespective of geographical barriers, could afford the luxury of keeping them away from acquiring knowledge. To leave women uneducation is to leave one-half of the society perfectly paralyzed and weaken the other half too, by allowing the unsound portitiion to hand aupon it and hereby distract its movements. As such, if not for any other reason, atleast on this score women should be educated.

Importance of Women's Education

It is believed that when you educate a man, you educate an individual, when you educate a woman, you educate a whole family. According to Veellaiyan (1975), "*It was Mahatma Gandhi who understood the spirit behind the above proverb and drawing out women into the main stream of the struggle for India's indepence, made a commendable*

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contribution to the emancipation of women. Later, there was a great social revolutionary, Maharshi Karve who devoted all his energies for the cause of women's education in India. After the darkness of night, there is light and with the dawn of independence, the position of women started changing."

Socially, education of girls in the upper and middle classes is almost as highly advanced as that of boys. However, in the lower income groups, the gap still continues to be wide partly because of traditional prejudice and conditions of sustained poverty. The general poverty of the people, the gap between the number of boys and girls enrolled at elementary level in rural areas is by far the largest of all groups. Perhaps the educational backwardness of adult women in the rural areas has been the cause of low enrolment of girls and wastage and stagnation for all children.

Equality of opportunity is a fundamental right of every Indian regardless of caste, class, class, creed, sex and religion under the Constitution of India. Article 15 assures that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of sex and says that nothing shall prevent the state from making any special provisions for women. India's social legislation, aimed at the eradication of social evils, has been plentiful. Enactments for the protection of social evils, has been plentiful. Enactments for the protection and emancipation of women, such as those on marriage, divorce, adoption, succession, dowry and moral protection came into force during the first phase of post-independence period. After the International Women's Year 1975, quite a number of legislations have been passed by the Parliament such as Equal Remuneration Act 1976, Criminal Law Amendment Act 1983, Dowry prohibition Amendment Act 1984, Family Courts act 1984 etc. Above all an exclusive Department of Women and Child Welfare was setup for the first time to impart a national dimension and a sense of urgency to various welfare measures for the upliftment of women folk in the country. Empowerment of women for development is considered as the surest way of ensuring socio-economic progress.

In 1966, an important event in the history of education in India, took place and it was the publication of the report of the Education Commission (1964-66) popularly known as the Kothari Commission. The National Policy on Education (1968) was hailed as an important '*mile stone*' in the progress towards improving the quality and content of education in the country. The National Policy on Education (1986) has laid special emphasis on the removal of disparities and to equalize educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far.

Education for Women's Equality

The National Policy on Education (1986) is perhaps the most revolutionary statement of the times and envisages the role of education as an instrument of raising the status of women in India and empower them. The following points have been clearly emphasized in the NPE, 1986: -

1. Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women;

2. It will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women;
3. Women's studies will be promoted as a part of various courses besides which educational institutions will be encouraged to take up active programmes to women's development;
4. The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to and retention in, elementary education will receive over-riding priority, through provision of special support service, setting of time targets and effective monitoring
5. Major emphasis will be laid on women's participation at all levels.

According to a report of the Secretary General of the United Nations, women constitute half of the world's population, perform 2/3 of the world's work, receive 1/10 of the income and own less than 1/100 of its property.

Women constitute half of the population in India as in majority of the countries in the world. Yet they are a voiceless body of people, their role in the nation's economy is ignored and their personal development is neglected. Women constitute largest number among illiterates, they are least paid and the most exploited. The fruits of development and technological advancement have by passed them and their development. The development of any society is not only an economic activity but it is also a process of human growth.

Education is a major catalyst of social change is sadly lacking for most rural people, more so to the rural people, more so to the rural women as compared to their urban counterparts. As a result, the per capita income of rural women in general is negligible. Their nutritional levels are very low, proper health and medical facilities are not readily available for them; hence suffer from many contagious diseases. Their literacy rate as mentioned earlier is very much lower and the rural women folk are the victims of number of social evils such as early marriage, dowry etc. Education of women is critical input for improving nutritional levels, rising the age of marriage, acceptance of family planning, improvement in self image and their empowerment. These factors would help the women to improve their status in the society.

In order to improve the educational levels of women, several provisions have to be made, such as: -

1. The curricula at the school and college level should be revised to remove sex bias. To create a sense of equality between men and women.
2. The distance between school and home should be reduced in order to see that girls are permitted to go to schools.
3. School curricula and timings should be revised in accordance with the local conditions.
4. At the elementary and middle school level short term courses along with job orientation should be organized for women who could not go to school.

5. Vocational and technical education for women in formal and non-formal methods should be a part of education at the rural level.
6. Support services such as crèche and Balwadies should be provided near the schools which help young girls to go to school at a time when they are expected to take care of the younger ones at home, while mothers go out to work either in the farm or otherwise. Such facilities also help nursing mothers to attend to vocational courses and non-formal education programmes.
7. Mass media should be widely used in order to create better awareness for women's education and to highlight the role that the educated women can play in economic and political development of the nation.

Reference

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