

Women Education and Empowerment in India

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ABSTRACT

Education is considered as one of the important tools for the sustainable development of any society and women are a pivotal and indispensable part of it. In India, women's education has become a major milestone for their empowerment as educated women can also play a very important role inside as well as outside towards the development of the country. Women's education is an educational initiative that has been embraced by our country. Today our nation is continuously empowering women to access quality education because women and girls' education is essential not only to promote gender equality but also to address the full spectrum of 21st century challenges. India has been developing women's education by implementing new policies, programs, schemes and recommendations in favour of women to facilitate quality education. Women have also been improving their education. However, it is not sufficient for the needs of the nation and it is not as equal as men's pace of development. But, in spite of having such new policies and programs, women of our country remain far behind from men in the field of education. This paper is conducted using meta-analysis of various studies, observation and by the method of literature reviews following a variety of recently published articles, researches, data related to education, government reports, women's rights and gender inequality to finding out a number of common challenges, issues, problems and barriers which are preventing women from accessing quality education. This paper also highlights some very simple and unique strategies, methods, techniques and solutions to provide quality education for women as an indicator of effective human rights.

Keywords: Education, Equality, Government schemes, Women's empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is not a new concept and its need was sensed much earlier, even before independence. Not only in India, but all over the world, women have faced atrocities and thus since the beginning of its history they have been challenging gender inequalities. The struggles for women empowerment have also been supported by many men who have been outraged at injustice against women in society. The renowned saint and philosopher Swami Vivekananda said, "There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly with only one wing." Accordingly, empowerment is central to the processes of maintaining the benefits of women at an individual, household, community and broader levels. It involves the action of boosting the status of women through literacy, education, training, and raising awareness. Hence, women's empowerment is all about allowing and equipping women to make life-determining choices across different issues in the country. In India, women have always been a victim of honour killings. They have been deprived of their basic rights for proper education and freedom for years. In this male-dominated and patriarchal society, they face violence, abuse and other ill-treatment from various sectors. The irony is that although India has acclaimed the status of the first Asian country to accomplish its Mars mission in its maiden attempt, it is positioned at the 29th rank in the world on the basis of gender inequality index. Although women in India have made a considerable progress in the seven-decade of Independence, yet the battle is only half won. They still have to fight against many social evils that are oppressing them and deteriorating the status. Still, there are people or groups that create hurdles and resist women's progress in India. One of the solutions to this injustice is to nurture entrepreneurship in young girls and disrupt patriarchy by reframing sexual violence from #Me Too to Time's up. (Ackerly, B. et al., 1995).

II. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on secondary sources of data. Relevant secondary data such as Census of India, Statistical Handbook, AISHE Reports etc. are collected and analyze accordingly to have a clear picture about the status of women education as well as challenges face by the women in India. Various mathematical tools and techniques are used to analyze the status and level of development in terms of women education in India.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Government Schemes

A. Sakshar Bharat Mission for female literacy:

Sakshar Bharat is a government of India initiative launched by Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh to create a literate society through a variety of teaching learning programs for non-literate and neo-literate of 15 years and above. It was launched on 8 September 2009 as a centrally sponsored scheme. It aims to recast India's National Literacy Mission to focus on literacy of women, which is expected to increase the literate population by 70 million adults, including 60 million women. It was launched for promoting adult education especially among women under which Lok Shiksha Kendras were set up.

B. SABLA-Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls:

The Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) SABLA is a centrally sponsored comprehensive scheme for the holistic development of adolescent girls launched in November, 2010 under Ministry of Women and Child Development. The program would cover adolescent girls 11–18 years old under all ICDS projects in selected 200 districts in all states/UTs in the country. The target group would be subdivided into 11-15 and 15–18 years. It aims to provide nutrition for growing adolescent girls by provision of food grains.

C. Right to Education:

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE) is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted on 4 August 2009, which describes the modalities of the importance of free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 in India under Article 21a of the Indian Constitution. India became one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child when the Act came into force on 1 April 2010. The Act makes education a fundamental right of every child between the ages of 6 and 14 and specifies minimum norms in elementary schools. It requires all private schools to reserve 25% of seats to children (to be reimbursed by the state as part of the public-private partnership plan). Kids are admitted in to private schools based on economic status or caste based reservations. It also prohibits all unrecognized schools from practice, and makes provisions for no donation or capitation fees and no interview of the child or parent for admission. The Act also provides that no child shall be held back, expelled, or required to pass a board examination until the completion of elementary education. There is also a provision for special training of school drop-outs to bring them up to par with students of the same age. The RTE Act requires surveys that will monitor all neighborhoods, identify children requiring education, and set up facilities for providing it. The World Bank education specialist for India, Sam Carlson, has observed: "The RTE Act is the first legislation in the world that puts the responsibility of ensuring enrolment, attendance and completion on the Government. It is the parents' responsibility to send the children to schools in the US and other countries." The Right to Education of persons with disabilities until 18 years of age is laid down under a separate legislation - the Persons with Disabilities Act. A number of other provisions regarding improvement of school infrastructure, teacher-student ratio and faculty are made in the Act Education in the Indian constitution is a concurrent issue and both centre and states can legislate on the issue. The Act lays down specific responsibilities for the centre, state and local bodies for its implementation. The states have been clamoring that they lack financial capacity to deliver education of appropriate standard in all the schools needed for universal education. Thus it was clear that the central government (which collects most of the revenue) will be required to subsidize the states. In the 1990s, the World Bank funded a number of measures to set up schools within easy reach of rural communities. This effort was consolidated in the Sarva Shiksh Abhiyan model in the 1990s. (Suguna,M. et al., 2016).

D. Kasturba BalikaVidyalaya:

The plan was introduced by the Government of India in August 2004. It was then integrated into the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan program, to provide educational facilities for girls belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, minority communities and families below the poverty line in Educationally Backward Blocks. Gender disparities still persist in rural areas and among disadvantaged communities. Looking at enrolment trends, there remain significant gaps in the enrollment of girls at the elementary level as compared to boys, especially at the upper primary levels. The objective of KGBV is to ensure that quality education is feasible and accessible to the girls of disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level.

E. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level:

The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) is a focused intervention of Government of India, to reach the "Hardest to Reach" girls, especially those not in school. Launched in July 2003, it is an important component of SSA, which provides additional support for enhancing girl's education over and above the

investments for girl’s education through normal SSA interventions. The programme provides for the development of a “model school” in every cluster with more intense community mobilization and supervision of girls enrolment in schools. Gender sensitization of teachers, development of gender-sensitive learning materials, and provision of need-based incentives like escorts, stationery, workbooks and uniforms are some of the endeavours under the programme.

The scheme is being implemented in educationally backward blocks (EBBs) where the level of rural female literacy is less than the national average and the gender gap is above the national average; in blocks of districts which are not covered under EBBs but are having at least 5% SC/ST population and where SC/ST female literacy is below 10%; and also in select urban slums.

The ‘National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)’ as a component of the scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA): The Government has approved a new programme called ‘National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)’ as an amendment to the scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) for providing additional components for the education of girls at the elementary level. The NPEGEL will form part of SSA and will be implemented under the umbrella of SSA but with a distinct identity.

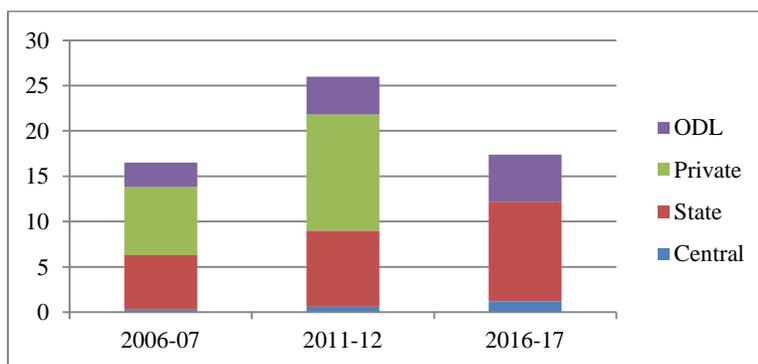
According to the 2001 census data (Census Report, 2001), national literacy rate stands at 64.84%. The following are the individual data percentages: Male literacy was noted as 75.26% and female literacy lags behind at 53.67%. A more recent government report on education statistics (2008), notes that the literacy rates for women in India has steadily increased from 8.9% in 1951 to around 57% in 2004. Although substantial progress has been achieved since India won its independence when less than 8% of females were literate, the gains have not been rapid enough to keep pace with population growth. (Bayeh, E.et al., 2016).

The dropout rates and enrolment in higher education imply that getting girls to enroll in schools is the first hurdle, once surmounted; girls are more likely than boys to stay on for primary education, but pose a challenge again at the secondary and higher level of education. Although it is well acknowledged that when you educate a woman you educate a nation, this often-quoted maxim has somehow been lost in translation as the reality of women's education in India seems to suggest. According to Duflo (2011) Women empowerment and economic development are closely related in one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women in the other direction, empowering women may benefit development. The study argues that the inter-relationships of the empowerment and development are probably too weak to be self-sustaining and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women as even today small numbers of women work and for the same work they earn less than men. (Muhammed, A.et al., (2019). International Convention in all forms of Discrimination against Women (ICDAW) in 1993 mentioned that education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence, necessary to participate fully in the development process. Educating women benefit the whole society. India is 3rd in enrolment in the world. In terms of GER (Gross Enrollment Ratio) India is 6th in the world as per 2014 as shown in figure 1. (Duflo, E., 2011).

Table.1: Enrolment of women in Higher Education in India (in Millions)

| No | Year | Central | State | Private | ODL |
|----|---------------------|---------|-------|---------|-----|
| 1. | 2006-2007 | 0.3 | 6.0 | 7.5 | 2.7 |
| 2. | 2011-2012 | 0.6 | 8.4 | 12.8 | 4.2 |
| 3. | 2016-2017 (Target) | 1.2 | 11.0 | 18.5 | 5.2 |

Source: AISHE 2018-19



Source: AISHE 2018-19

Figure.1: Enrolment of women in Higher Education in India

Table.2: Literacy Rate in India

| Year | Literacy Rate (in %) | | | Gap in Literacy |
|------|----------------------|----------|------------|-----------------|
| | Person (%) | Male (%) | Female (%) | |
| 2001 | 64.8 | 75.3 | 53.7 | 21.6 |
| 2006 | 70.2 | 73.6 | 62.2 | 11.4 |
| 2011 | 74.1 | 82. | 65.5 | 16.6 |

Source: Census of India, 2011

Gender gap narrows in higher education enrolment: AISHE (All India Survey on Higher Education) reports. Gender gap has been narrowing significantly in India in higher education with Uttar Pradesh for the first time registering more female enrolment, according to All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for 2018-19 released by the HRD ministry. (Shweta, S. et al., 2018). A year ago, there were 1.61 lakhs more males than females in colleges and universities of UP. Today, there are a little over 90,000 more girls than males enrolled for higher education in the state, says the AISHE report. In Karnataka too, the number of females is marginally higher (1,600) than males. The general trend itself indicates the narrowing of the gender gap with female enrolment improving from 47.6% in 2017-18 to 48.6% in 2018-19 as shown in figure 3. Women education is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. No single factor or cause can be held sole responsible for very low literacy rate of women in India. Subsequently it is associated with combination of many factors including social, economic, political, religious, cultural, educational, demographical, and administration. (Hassan, N. et al., 1974).

IV. CONCLUSION

One may ask why education of women is even important, or why the state ought to focus on it, beyond improving the numbers and statistics to reflect figures at par with the rest of the developed world. Is it a mere image building exercise in an attempt to stay on top of the numbers? Although that may be equally important, there are more to accrue for the individual, family unit and ultimately the nation, with investment in education of its women. Neglecting the education of women, who constitute nearly half of the population, does not auger well for the development of any nation. Beyond the obvious imbalance in the labour pool, education for women is an important determinant of their enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence, helping to build a positive image, developing their ability to think critically, fostering better decision making and helping them make more informed choices about health, employment and even the education of their children. Education will not only ensure more participation in developmental processes but also enhance awareness of rights and entitlements in society, so that women can enhance their participation in society on an equal footing with men. More importantly, the Government of India should nurture the spirit of entrepreneurship in young girls and provide them with a level playing platform to showcase their innovative and creative talents. (Tamilselvi, N. et al., 2020).

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