

IMPACT OF HIGHER EDUCATION TOWARDS WOMEN IN INDIA-CHOICES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses about the developmental policies and programmes that do not address gender disparities miss critical developmental opportunities. Education of girls is vital not only on grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation. Promotion of gender equality in education is essential for human resource development. By educating a woman you educate the whole family. Given that a woman has the responsibility of the whole 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. It is evident that economic success everywhere is based on educational success. Literacy is the basic building block of education. It is a basic component of social cohesion and national identity. It leads to an improvement in the depth and quality of public opinion, as well as to more active participation of the marginalized in the democratic process. No society has ever liberated itself economically, politically, or socially without a sound base of educated women. Women education and empowerment are the indicators of development. Women education ensures the holistic and long development. It includes equitable and increased access to technical and vocational education and training, higher education and research with due attention to quality assurance. This communication has taken a look on women participation through women higher education institutes, women enrolment as compared with population. The trend has been found as increasing but slow.

Key Words: Women Population, Women Enrolment, Women Teachers.

INTRODUCTION

HIGHER EDUCATION- "A BOON TO WOMAN"

Knowledge is life of every Indian woman. It results with the experience that she gains from environment and the supporting world around her, which allow her to live as knowledgeable productive members of the society.

The homely environment with mother's love is the first source of learning for the child and an educated mother would create an environment, allowing her children to gather and analyse information, which helps in adapting to bigger society in future. Critical thinking and analysis will make the children better members of society. To educate someone is to deliberately teach them something new and higher education for women is most powerful means to evolve through/beyond current economical and social crisis in India and to teach her children the art of thinking and analysis before entering the school for education. Higher education leads a woman to "Complete living" with:

1. **Self-confidence**

Higher Education helps the women not only in gaining knowledge but also enables her to earn a living.

2. **Necessity of life**

Money is necessity in maintaining life and education helps in preserving life.

3. **Family welfare**

An educated woman plays an important role in a family, dealing with both Health care and financial support to the family.

4. **Involvement in Social and political activities**

Higher education helps women to have a better understanding of social and political processes beyond the home in far-reaching social structure and makes her a wise citizen with effective social and political action.

5. **Complete Living**

Complete living includes, being physically strong, earning a living, being a responsible parent and an earnest citizen.

All these are not sufficient for a complete living if a woman does not consider:

- a. Ethical Value
- b. Spiritual value

- c. Social Value
- d. Intellectual Values.

The higher education helps women to be mentally and emotionally stronger and to face challenges and overcome obstacles in life and to be a complete woman.

Higher education means education beyond the level of secondary education. It is often assumed that education imparted by colleges or universities is higher education. It has varied significantly in varied countries. Different arguments justify the value and necessity of education from the viewpoint of individuals as well as society. These views have changed from time to time according to the needs of the society and stages of its development. In India, considering both the sheer size of its population and the nature of its development potential, it is in its process of becoming exceptionally powerful forces for determining the social economic political dynamics of higher education. Higher education in India has witnessed tremendous growth in the last few decades. As per a report by University Grants Commission (UGC) published in 2012, from 1950 to 2011, there is an 18.8- fold increase in the number of colleges in India. The number of students enrolled in higher education has also increased exponentially during this period, 42.76 times. Despite its impressive growth in higher education, Indian education only maintains a small base of the quality institution at the top. There is a need to eradicate the gender disparities in higher education.

Developmental policies and programmers that do not address gender disparities miss critical developmental opportunities. Education of girls is vital not only on grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation. Promotion of gender equality in education is essential for human resource development. By educating a woman you educate the whole family. Given that a woman has the responsibility of the whole 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. It is evident that economic success everywhere is based on educational success. Literacy is the basic building block of education. It is a basic component of social cohesion and national identity. It leads to an improvement in the depth and quality of public opinion, as well as to more active participation of the marginalized in the democratic process. No society has ever liberated itself economically, politically, or socially without a sound base of educated women. Education has a direct impact on women empowerment as it creates in them awareness about their rights,

their capabilities and the choices and opportunities available to them. Studies have indicated that there is a strong correlation between female education and several developmental indicators such as increased economic productivity, improvement in health, delayed age at marriage, lower fertility, increased political participation, and effective investments in the next generation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

Education is recognized by UNESCO (2012) as —a fundamental human right – one that all individuals are entitled to enjoy whatever the circumstances in which they live – that also brings important benefits to human society as a whole (p. 8). To achieve faster these benefits, states De Mcpherson (1999), it is necessary the participation of men and women on an equal basis. In that sense, stresses the author, keeping women away in all aspects of the development process only by reason of *gender*, is a waste of valuable resources, even more when they constitute half of the population. The position of the UNESCO (1998a) in this regard is that women have the right to the same opportunities as their male counterparts; therefore, they also have to be seen as part of the essential human resource base of every nation.

The women's issue presented above has been clearly evidenced throughout history in the entire world. As stated by Vanderslice and Litsch (1998), women have had only a limited role in society with restricted opportunities. Even in this new era, this harsh reality somehow remains true, and gender inequalities continue to primarily disadvantage women, who suffer much more from the discrimination that occurs to both genders (ESU, 2008). The education sector, including its highest level in its ladder, meaning HE, has been also influenced by _the women's issue_, even though the academia has been perceived itself as progressive part of society (ESU, 2008).

INDIAN CONTEXT- POLICIES AND PROGRAMMERS

In India, providing education to all the citizens is a constitutional commitment. The principal of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian constitution, in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only guarantees equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women. Just after Independence, in 1951, literacy levels were very low (25% for men and 9% for women), In the next ten years there was not much progress in the literacy levels. It is only after the recommendations of the Indian education commission (1964) and the National policy of education (1968) that the education of girls was seen as a means of accelerating social

transformation. The policy placed special emphasis on initiating program to give equal educational opportunities to all the groups and both sexes. The constitution also gave primary responsibility for elementary education to the state governments, while the central government was given responsibility for technical and higher education. This situation changed in 1976 after the 42nd Amendment to the constitution was passed, making all education the joint responsibility of the central and state governments. One of the consequences of this was that the foreign assistance, so far restricted to technical and higher education, now began to flow into primary education as well. Between the mid-1960 and the early 1980s, the proportion of resources going into elementary education showed a steady increase. National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 and its Program of Action (POA) gave high priority to gender equality and committed the entire educational system to work for women's empowerment. The National Perspective Plan 1988-2000 reiterates this point of view and states that women themselves must overcome their handicaps. Thus, there has been a careful articulation of education for equality for women, which is reflected in the educational policy discourse. Central and State governments attached lot of significance to actually operationalising the NPE's Program of Action and in a series of regional meetings with the State Governments, a special review of gender issues in education was undertaken. At the same time it was emphasized to the States, that gender concerns must be built into all educational processes. Monitoring committees for women's/girls' education at the Ministry of Human Resource Development level and also state level were formed to monitor the indicators of gender concerns in all policies and projects. Emphasis was laid on enrolment and retention of the Forum on Public Policy.

DISCIPLINARY CHOICES FOR WOMEN

The relationship between availability of disciplinary choices and women's ability to access them are not directly related, nor are they dependent on women's academic achievement. The reasons cited for this are mainly due to social ethics. Large majority of women may be deprived of exercising free options in selecting subjects of their choice in school, as in case of girls, parents generally take the decision regarding the academic stream to be pursued. This decision is guided by the consideration that girls are not expected to work or earn before marriage and education is only an investment to fall back upon in case of the daughter becoming a widow or being deserted (Chanana 1998). The poor parents have another problem; even though they perceive the significance of education, many a times they are not able to finance it. Besides,

there is lack of role models and socialization support at home. Women from these social categories are the most affected by the stratification of disciplines, programs and institutions. Further, the social and economic disparities are reflected not only vis-à-vis caste and tribe but also at the regional level, i.e. in different provinces. Discipline boundaries not only limit choices but choices are further limited by future options of "life chances" of women. Higher Education is further denied to the disadvantaged groups and especially women from rural poor homes. Because of social and economic reasons, parents may be unwilling to spend on education as well as the dowries of their daughters. A perusal of the disciplinary choices depicts that the proportion of women in some of the masculine disciplines was miniscule soon after independence and remained so till 1980's. This is evident as the proportion of women in science decreased from 33.3 percent in 1950-51 to 28.8 percent 1980-81. This was the period when natural science was at a premium, especially physics and chemistry. Till the eighties they were the first choice for male students and while competing with men, women were pushed out. It is also possible that science was not, in any case, the first preference for young women whose parents perceived marriage as a priority over higher education. An undergraduate degree of any kind only helped in the marriage market by raising the social status. A science degree required a longer investment of time and other resources, therefore was not desirable. The young women were also socialized to perceive higher education from that view point. Forum on Public Policy 9 The proportion of women in 2002-03 in arts was 44.2 and has been increasingly steadily since 1970-71. The proportion of men, on the other hand, has decreased gradually during the same period from 83.9 percent to 54.6 percent. In teacher's education, another feminine discipline the proportion of women has gone up from 32.4 to 50.6 percent. Science, a masculine discipline, provides an interesting insight on disciplinary choices of young women and men. For example, in science the proportion of men which was around 80-90 percent till 1980-81, has come down to 59.8 percent in 2002-03. (Chanana 2004) Higher education for young women is taken for granted nowadays among the upper and middle strata in the cities but it is still not viewed as an immediate investment in their careers. Social role expectations affect the aspirations of women. For example, in the patriarchal social structure, parents are not expected to use the income of their daughters. Therefore, even educated daughters are not encouraged to work and if they do so, it is for a short period before marriage. After marriage It is the right of the groom's family to decide whether she will work or not. Therefore, for a majority of young women in the academia, higher

education is not linked to careers. This is the reason why women join arts and humanities as they are cheaper, softer, and shorter than the professional courses. But lately the number of those who are entering the professional subjects is growing.

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR INDIAN WOMEN OPTING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

- Encouragement by Government and Society
- Ability to combine studies and work with family life
- Decreasing discrimination against girls in families
- Higher preparation for higher education, (evidenced by the scores in secondary education)
- Higher aspirations to obtain tertiary degrees.
- The feminisation of the teaching profession and a learning environment more conducive to girls' social and cognitive dispositions.

CONCLUSION

Education is the only answer for women empowerment. Women down the ages have always had to demand equal status for themselves in society. The women enrolment in higher education is also increasing. However, the rate of increase is slow in almost all the states of India. The enrolment is dependent on women teachers. The establishment of higher educational institutes for women especially in rural areas are still in dearth and women enrolment is still low as compared men enrolment. The rate of disparity of male and female participation in Higher education can be attributed to various sociological, psychological and economic factors. To remove these hurdles, focus need to be given on the core issues concerning women education in a particular locality. To empower women in all spheres, efforts have to be taken to break the age-old myths about women's helplessness, lack of drive and motivation to reach the heights of glory. Hence it is important to provide women with nurturing support and guidance psychological security to enable them to become progressive.

The equal participation of women in higher education will help India make a vital contribution to sustainable development. Along with the provision of equal access to education, quality and affordability must also be emphasized.

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