

## ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PROMOTING EQUALITY AMONG WOMEN

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The very first article of Indian Constitution proclaims that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward each other in a spirit of brotherhood." The 26<sup>th</sup> article in its first part says that "everyone has the right to education. Education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be free, at least in the elementary and preliminary 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 second part of the same says that "education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." The article 15(3) of the Constitution of India empowers the state to make special provision for the advancement of women and children. This clause indicates that it is not sufficient to give equal treatment to women as is given to men. It is beyond any doubt that the right to equality and all other human rights are applicable to men and women equally.

Thus it is evident that women should be treated equally as men. Education can play an important role in this context. Before discussing the role of education, the significance as well as relevance of education in promoting equality among women the word 'education' must be discussed first. Education can be defined as "the act or process of imparting or acquiring knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment and preparing self or others intellectually for mature life." In the other words education helps in taking reasonable decisions as well as judgment on one hand while inculcating mental maturity among human beings on the other. As far as the significance of education for women is concerned the statement of our first Prime Minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru can be quoted here who has rightly said that "if you educate a man you educate an individual, however if you educate a woman you educate a family." This very statement is a proof in itself that how an educated women can change the atmosphere of her family.

Regarding the significance of education for women we can say that education enables the women to respond to the challenges, to confront in their traditional role and change their life. Education helps women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. Thus it can be said that education has the ability to change the personality and living style of human beings. It also has the capacity to change the status of women as far as equality is concerned. Now the

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question arises that what is equality and what dimensions of equality should be considered as far as the status of women is concerned? Also how is education helpful in promoting equality? Let us first discuss the notion of equality.

Equality implies same status, opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life for all the people. The preamble of Indian Constitution grants equality of status and opportunity to all the citizens of India. As far as various dimensions of equality are concerned there may be equality of social status, equality in employment opportunities, equality in access to education, equality in distribution of power and resources, equality in wages and hours of work etc.

On reviewing the above mentioned dimensions of equality the picture emerges like this:

- Women are far less likely than men to be victims of domestic violence.
- Heinous crimes of female foeticide and infanticide are still in practice.
- Sexual harassment for women is on the rise.
- They are far less likely than men to be politically active, (19.7% worldwide, 2012). In India their representation in the two houses of the Parliament is 11% in Lok Sabha (2012) and 11.5% in Rajya Sabha (2013).
- Either by law or by tradition, women still lack rights to own land and to inherit property or to obtain access to credit.
- Prejudices regarding women's efficiency, productivity, capacity for skills and suitability still debar them from employment in many areas. This is leading to wage discrimination.
- According to a time use survey in India, 55% of the work-time was contributed by women and only 45% by men.
- While average working hours is 55 hrs for men it is 68 hrs for women.
- Only 25.5% of women are employed (2011 census).
- 91.3% of the employed women are in unorganized sector. Only 8.7% are in organized sector.
- Women earn 62 % of men's salary for equal work.
- Gender inequality is reinforced in education which is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for women is only 65.46% against 82.14% of men and 74.04% as the national average (2011 Census).

Regarding the opportunity of being head of various institutions/ organizations the world wide scenario as well as the Indian scenario is quite frustrating. This is quite clear from the following data:

- India's rank in gender inequality index is 132<sup>nd</sup> out of 187 countries.
- The overall sex ratio according to 2011 census is 940/1000.
- In the year of 2005, women Heads of States or Elected Government were only 4.2%.

- 858 Ministerial Portfolios were held by women in 2005 in 183 countries.

Though besides the Constitutional safeguards, various acts/ amendments were passed to provide equality through the medium of justice but unfortunately most of the women do not have awareness regarding the same. Consequently their victimization still persists and here comes the role of education. As it has already been mentioned that education can be used as an effective tool in providing enough maturity to make a woman aware of her rights on one hand and how to achieve those rights in order to make oneself equal with the second half population of the Universe on the other. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self confidence necessary to participate fully in the developmental process. (ICPD Programme of Action, Paragraph 4.2).

Before peeping into the charismatic role of education in bringing equality among women let us have a look on the present status of women:

- There are more than 900 million illiterate adults in the world, two thirds of whom are females.
- Places in schools are limited and girls are at a particular disadvantage.
- School dropout rate is much higher among girls than boys.
- Only two-thirds of girls and three-fourths of boys aged 6-17 years are attending schools. The sex ratio of children attending school is 889 girls per 1000 boys.
- Gender disparity in literacy is much greater in rural areas than in urban areas.
- Women aged 15-19 are about half as likely as men in the same age group to be employed: 43% Vs 87%
- Most employed women work in agriculture; only 7 percent work in professional, technical or managerial occupations.
- Among those who have earnings, more women (1 in 5) than men (1 in 18) do not have a major say in how their own earnings are used.
- Prevalence of spousal violence is higher for women who are employed than women who are not.
- Girls are less likely to be fully immunized than boys.

The above mentioned facts can act as an eye opener regarding the status of women. Despite the fact that government and non-governmental organizations are there for providing justice to women the policy makers are thinking very seriously about the upliftment of women. It is quite evident from the fact that in the recent years the judiciary has played a commendable job to make the women confident as well as secure by enacting various bills, acts and laws etc. to save the women socially, economically and emotionally. Similarly policy makers, educationists and NGOs have also taken various steps in attracting girl child towards the school. Resultantly during the last two decades Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has done a

great job by launching National Programme of Education for girls at Elementary levels (NPEGEL). Along with this various model girl child friendly schools have been opened at the cluster level with having incentive to provide uniforms, free text books, bridge courses, remedial teaching etc. Similarly Mahila Samakhya or Education for equality among women is also a very ambitious scheme for providing education to women to make them self confident and self reliant. At the same time in the Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) special emphasis have been given to the empowerment of women.

In order to uplift the women/girls belonging to deprived section of society Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalayas have been opened. It is visualized that these schools would encourage preferentially backward class and scheduled caste girls to be in school. The 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act has made elementary education a Fundamental Right for all children in the age group of 6-14 years. This amendment has resulted in the form of Right to Education Act 2009 (implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2010). This Act is a milestone in the path of providing good quality education to children in the age group of 6-14 years. This act is definitely a great help in increasing the enrolment of girls in the schools. As far as the world perspective and planning regarding girl/women education is concerned, special emphasis is given to their education in the projects like Millennium Development Goals, Education for All, the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD, 2003 - 2012), The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014) etc. In all these above mentioned projects education, independence, development and equality of girls/women have been taken into special consideration. In this way women are getting empowered by availing various facilities provided by the government, NGOs and other agencies. This change can be seen even in various State Board results where girls are exceeding boys both in terms of pass percentage and merit. Along with this, women also prefer to enter into those professions which were earlier said to be meant for men only. Similarly they are actively participating in politics as well as holding senior positions in various sectors. Participation of women in panchayats and municipal boards is also a step ahead in the path of equality. This change has not been visible only in India but can be sensed all over the world. Let us have a look on the recent worldwide efforts which are being made for ensuring the equality of women.

- UN women have been formed in the year 2010 by the UN General Assembly to deal with advancement of women under a single umbrella.
- Software Company Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has tied up with Saudi Aramco and General Electric (GE) to set up the first all female BPO centre in Saudi Arabia.
- Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani School girl is being honoured by several international awards for campaigning in favour of women's education.
- The Church of England is under more pressure to appoint female Bishops

after Anglicans in Wales voted to allow women to be ordained in the most senior posts there.

- UNESCO has been attempting to work with its member states in increasing access to women and girls to non-traditional and remunerative areas of study.

Though there is a paradigm shift viewed all over the world including India as far as the attitudinal change regarding women is concerned yet the steps taken for the equality of women are not sufficient. The findings of various studies regarding the status of women state that there is yet a long way to go for meeting the goals of equality in its social, economical, political, emotional and educational dimensions.

The findings of the study conducted by Rastogi (2013) suggest that the position of women in the society can be significantly improved by raising their educational and employment status. In order to improve employability of women provision of skill training opportunities assumes vital importance. The cruelty and violence against women from husbands may be sufficiently reduced if females are educated and made economically independent. Ram (2003) while studying the causes of violence against women found that the tendencies for committing violence, atrocities and injustice against women are also rooted in greed for money, lack of trust, habit of drinking and gambling, criminal or unsound mind and a false sense of superiority of man over a woman. Roy and Niranjana (2004) while studying "Indicators of women empowerment in India" found that in Indian Society girls' education is adversely affected because they are required to assist their mothers in daily household chores. The boys on the other hand are free from such responsibilities and are sent to schools. Along with these findings there is one more alarming fact which is a great barrier in achieving the goal of equality in the recent decisions of village panchayats (Khaaps) regarding the honour killing and women's right to inheritance. In Jhajjar (Haryana) to have a daughter claiming her share in property is being seen as a slur on the family name. The consequences of waging a war against the family are that the girl is banned from visiting her parental village (Dogra, 2013). Thus the incident of atrocities against women, gangrapes, honour killing and other exploitations are the examples that are enough proofs to accept that providing facilities of education is not enough to get equality in the real sense. It seems that crime against women is directly proportional to education and employment. In other words the positive side of education is that an educated woman has touched a new horizon of self respect, economic independence and social status whereas the negative side of this scenario is that now she has to face the complexes of her male counterpart at her workplace, home, neighbourhood, roads etc. The question arises here if education is the remedy for removing inequality then why today's woman is suffering from all the evils of society and family without having any helping hand to provide her emotional and social

security?

The answer may lie in the fact that the present education system for women is not helping in the development of their overall personality. In the past they had been exploited by the family and society in the name of tradition because they were not economically independent. Now they are again being exploited in the name of modernity, so called independence and their self imposed over self confidence. Their soaring ambition, choosing short cuts to achieve the goal, modernization in the way they project themselves as decorative piece can be seen in the name of freedom everywhere. The actual role of education in providing equality among women should be that the education of women must be planned in such a manner that it can overhaul the whole personality of a woman. It should be imparted in such a way that it can develop the personality of a woman as 'a woman'. It should not make a woman 'an object' which is anxious about her saleability. In other words, education should have the capacity to convert a girl child into a self reliant, confident, emotionally intelligent woman who knows very well how to achieve the goal of life in a righteous manner, who knows about the thin lining between freedom and uncontrolled behavior, who can control her emotions and can be able to manage her emotional strength as well as use the same in the right direction, who has clear self concept and has full self esteem to achieve the desired goal, who clearly knows that she is the representative of half of the citizens of her beloved nation and should prove herself as an efficient, responsible and positive citizen of the country, who along with having the qualities of a real woman can accept the challenges when and wherever it is needed, who knows that self respect is more important than running in the rat race of so called achievements, who knows the difference between self achieved success and the success achieved through shortcuts or paying the cost which her conscience does not allow.

Thus the role of education should be to enlighten women in such a manner that they can unfold and fully utilize their potential. It should make them capable of developing their personality so as to enhance their inner strength. This will help them to accept themselves at least as a good human being. The education should be planned for them in a manner that they develop a balanced personality and become emotionally intelligent which will definitely help in making them strong enough to achieve equality which is their birth right.

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