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THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EDUCATION IN SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Introduction

"In order to awaken people, it is the woman who has to be awakened. Once she is on the move, the household moves, the village moves and the country moves; and through women, their children are brought into the picture and given the opportunity of a healthier life and better training. Thus through the children of today we build the India tomorrow."- Pt. Nehru

Though education is important for every individual living on this earth, it is more significant for women. Educating women is not only important because it gives them an opportunity to earn but also because they are the one who develop the whole family. Women's education is an instrument for liberation not only of women but also of the Indian society as whole. According to the ICPD program of action (paragraph 4.2) : "Education is one of the most importance means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process."

The concept of women empowerment was introduced during a woman conference at Nairobi in 1985. In this conference five components of women empowerment were defined, each showing how women can be empowered and what is the significance doing so. Empowering women through education means using education as a tool to bring women face their identities, giving them a sense to choose between right and wrong, empowering them with the skills to take advantage of the opportunities and embedding confidence in them to meet the challenges of life.

Thus educating a woman is actually providing her with a weapon to live up her customary part, fight with the challenges and bring positive change in her life. It is said that no nation can be a great nation unless and until they have educated and healthy mothers. Therefore it is utmost important to educate a woman because being a mother she is the one who will decide how the future generations will be. The future of a nation is dependent on well groomed mothers. If a mother is not aware of the technological advancements and new terminologies etc., she won't be able to guide her kids properly. Thus education of a woman opens up the new horizons, broadens her thinking, develops new ideas and hopes, enhances knowledge and skills, provides the courage to meet the challenges of life and give freedom of expression.

In order to understand the structure of the cultural and social development of any nation, the level of women education or women literacy is the only measurement. Education means development of understanding. To get education is women's birth right. Education gives women their own 'identity' and 'self value'. Education opens gate of opportunity and choice. With it women can get knowledge and skill of their choice. Education is the only value or asset that women have through out their lives. Women's education is extremely important intrinsically as it is their human right and required for the flourishing of many of their capacities. Woman's educational status itself is a step from inequality to equality. Education empowers women socially, economically, emotionally, legally and so on.

The Role and responsibilities of Education in Social Empowerment of Women:

Social status of women in ancient times: The history of mankind reveals that there was a time when it was not essential for every one to learn, or to read and write. The life was so simple and the activities of a person were confined to his small village community and that of women were limited to their respective families only. The social status of women is pre decided from ancient times. It is said that: 'a woman has to take care of her father in her childhood, her brother in her youth and her son in her

old age. She does not have her own freedom.' Women of rural areas were completely deprived of getting fruits of development. Our Indian society was completely male-dominated and women were exploited, oppressed and deprived in every sphere of life whether socially, economically, politically or culturally.

Social status of women in present times: But if we read the history of social change in India, we will observe that the position of women is not as equal as with the position of women in ancient period it was. Once it was time when the position of women in our society was very high, especially in vedic period the educational status of women were almost equal to men. For example, we can say about Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra etc. Even if we go back little more we learn that once it was time when women were the heads of the families. But in course of time women became the prisoners of four walls in the little home among their family members, especially to serve the men. But society can not stand forever in a particular place. So, again women are coming out of their small cottages to serve themselves for the greater interest of the society. Best examples of women empowerment can be seen in today's world as we see many women in top positions working side by side with their male colleagues. Though this used to be a male dominant society, from a few years a clear rise in women participation in workplace is noticed. We can now find women in sports, politics, education, army; they are engineers, doctors, pilots and involved in so many other professions. Thus, women should be encouraged to learn and should be provided with opportunity to gain education to groom them as well as to educate the nation.

With the passage of time, the complexity of life also increased. Now activity of people is no more confined to the boundaries of their communities/families but has tremendously grown in the recent century. The scientific knowledge and technology have entered the sphere of our day-to-day life and culture. During the last three decades, planning of the socially, educationally and economically disadvantaged groups has been accelerated in India. It is only in the last decade beginning with the international women's year in 1975 followed by the attention of planners in India has been specially focused on women.

Issues related to social empowerment of women:

When we talk of social empowerment of women then we are actually addressing issues which might be applicable to different parts of the world for improving the overall status of women.

Steps taken and the improved social status:

To reach the above mentioned aims and objectives, sufficient steps have been taken in the field of education such as human resource (who will work for them?), planning and management (how will work?), need based curriculum (what kind of content areas should be covered?), sufficient teaching and learning materials, appropriate methodology, proper training, monitoring and evaluation.

After independence, a lot of efforts have been made to solve the problems of women. In addition, the fundamental principles of Indian constitution also gave equal rights to both men and women. Following is a list of a few schemes and programs implemented for the upliftment of women through education.

Kanya Vidya Dhan Yojna: This program was started by UP government in 2004 to promote higher education among girls. Under this scheme cash composite amount of Rs. 20,000/- are given to all those girls who secure more than 60% marks at intermediate level. Now all girls living below poverty line are given this scholarship after passing intermediate whatsoever may be their percentage of marks in the exam.

Hostel facilities: 102 hostels were constructed for 8000 working women in the ninth plan in order to provide them cheap residence away from home.

National women's fund: This fund was created 1993 in order to provide loans at cheaper rate of interest. Once their economic condition is improved, they will go for education of their children.

National women's commission: It was established in 1992 in order to protect the rights of women in general.

Kasturba Gandhi education plan: This program was started on August 15, 1997. The purpose of this plan is to establish educational institutions in those areas where women's literacy rate is very low.

Balika samridhi yojna: This plan was started in 1997. Under this plan Rs. 500/- are given to the family at the birth of a daughter. When that daughter goes to school, a scholarship of Rs. 300/- per year is given to the child up to class viii. This amount is raised to Rs. 1000/- per annum in class ix and x. This plan is basically for girls living below poverty line.

Maulana Azad national scholarship scheme: This scheme was started on August 1, 2003. The purpose of this scheme is to identify talented girls among minorities and to provide them special scholarship facilities for their education.

Mid day meal scheme: It was started in 1995-96 in primary schools to provide free lunch to school going children.

Girl's empowerment scheme: The purpose of this scheme is to accelerate authority and self knowledge among unmarried girls. Under the scheme, drop out girls living below poverty line are put in aanganwadi centers for six months where they get education and vocational training both and become self dependent and empowered before marriage.

Sarva shiksha abhiyan: This scheme was started just before tenth five year plan. The purpose of this scheme is to provide primary education free of cost for children in the age group of 6-14 years. This scheme also aims at improving primary education through community participation in order to impart quality education to children. Girls, belonging to SCs and STs are especially targeted under the scheme.

In addition to this, NPE (New education policy) (1986) also promotes education for women's equality and plays a positive and interventional role in the empowerment of women.

After independence there has been a lot of change in woman's social status. She has started gaining equality and freedom in her family. A simulation study proves that education and family planning has great relations. An educated woman is a kind of property as she is solely responsible for the positive health of children. From various fields of 95% of the population of about 72 developing countries, it is found that an educated mother becomes successful mother by the use of the information regarding hygiene, sanitation and healthcare. Woman's right to get education moreover affects her social status or her social empowerment. Following are a few issues that show her improved social status in society.

- If a working woman wants to be single, the hostility of society is gradually decreasing.
- Efforts have been made for a remarriage of a young widow by her father or father-in-law.
- In separate and educated families, the relations of husband and wife have become more free, generous, mutual and equal. Generally, man himself now opposes the insisted rules and rituals on women by the society.
- In present times women are free to attain economic independence. It means they are free to earn on their own and they have started playing their professional roles in their respective families.
- Because of economic independence women are free to live their lives with dignity.
- Widows, divorcees, spinsters or deserted women are getting their respected status in society because of their professional roles.
- Education has given her an opportunity to develop fully in each and every phase of life. She has developed her own personality and she is found playing each and every role from pilot to rickshaw driver in society. She has proved herself best in all the fields equal to man.
- Her cognitive consciousness has made her think about all her rights as a human being and she is much more conscious about her existence as a woman.
- Education is the means of social mobility. It has made her passionate for her social status and as a result she has achieved her membership in politics, club, women organization, mahila mandal etc.
- Educated women are conscious of their social, economic, political, legal and professional rights and because of their consciousness they are getting protection from exploitation.
- Now days the thoughts, ideas and decisions of an educated woman are taking into consideration in most of the families.

- Because of education the age limit of marriage is upgraded. A woman is free to choose her life partner and her criterion about her life partner is also changed.
- When an educated woman feels that she can not adjust with her husband as they have individual differences, instead of enduring they get separated voluntarily. Not only this, but she has also started believing in remarriage.
- Educated women has started taking participation in all kinds of social, cultural and political affairs and because of active participation, her public contacts have also increased. She has got an opportunity to express her thoughts, skills, abilities and efficiency. It seems she has molded her personality in a new fashion.
- Because of provision of reservation seats, many women have started taking participation in politics also.
- Education has cultivated modern values like equality, liberalization, secularism, ambition for high quality of life, social mobility, scientific attitude, reasoning etc. in women.
- Educated women have become an inspiration for illiterate women.

More steps to be taken to strengthen the social status:

Well, all the above mentioned improvements are quite noticing but a very few number of women are getting the benefits of development and the rest major portion is out of it. Gender inequality is a worldwide phenomenon that reflects very poor situation in almost all the major countries of the world. Sex ratio is against women in Asia and it has not improved the overall status of women in much of the world. Same is the case with fertility rates which have declined in some regions including Asia but the positive impact of this change on women around the world is not as much as that was desired. The figures of female literacy rates are not at all encouraging in the developing world. Now the question arises- What are the obstacles in the way of women's lives to get education for coming out of their problems? Various factors are responsible for low educational development of women. These factors can be grouped under the categories namely economic, social, emotional and others. But more steps can be taken to strengthen her social status. Among them the prominent issues are education of women, health for women, environment and the connection with women, participation of women in the field of science and technology, care for women in difficult situation, fighting the violence against women and right of the girl child.

Education of Women: We need to accept the fact that gender inequality and discrimination has been the norm of the society and in this regard it touches all aspects of a women's life. Education and training for women is one of the major goals of social empowerment of women. This will definitely enhance the awareness in women which in turn will increase her confidence. But on the other hand we have to accept the fact that women and girls never had equal access to education as men and boys have. Illiteracy is the highest among the female of the population. Women are far behind in terms of having gainful occupation or vocation because of lack of skills and education. Moreover religious and caste equations have made things worse in many parts of the world. The educational systems need to be made more accessible to women at grass root levels and they need to be revamped to include gender sensitive educational system which prevents sex stereotyping and discrimination. Social organizations can play a major role in universalizing education at the basic ground level. This can be achieved through increasing the enrollment and retention rates of girl child in the primary schools and offering quality education and skills to them so that they can stand up on their feet and live a dignified life.

Healthcare of Women: Coming to the health of women we need to understand that women are facing very difficult times at all stages of their life cycle. It is sad to note that a section of our society is highly prejudiced against the girl child and in fact can be labeled as criminals of the highest order as they practice the heinous crime of female feticide. Then we have the problem of high infant mortality and maternal mortality and one of the major reasons for this being the early child marriages and lack of education. Women's right to informed choice regarding her reproductive rights is another area which needs attention. Talking of reproductive rights women even don't have affordable choice of family planning methods. Education and awareness in this regard is nonexistent and absent.

Women and environment conservation: Social empowerment of women and environment is closely linked. Women can play a major role in conservation and restoration of the environment. Rural women use unconventional and nature friendly source of energy in the form of animal dung, crop waste and fuel wood. Using of solar energy, biogas, and smokeless stoves can really help the rural women as they can act as environmental friendly tools.

Participation of women in development of science and technology: Women's empowerment cannot be considered complete without their equitable participation in science and technology. They can bring a wave of creative and generative energy in the field of science and technology. Today their participation is restricted and limited to very less numbers because of widespread discrimination at the basic education levels and lack of opportunities for pursuing higher studies. Reducing drudgery with the help of science and technology is another major area of importance for freeing women from the never ending domestic chores and making her contribute to the mainstream of the society.

Fighting against violence and discrimination: Violence against women is heinous crime against humanity. Violence can be both physical and psychological. Sexual harassment at work, dowry related violence and trafficking of women and girls are different types of violence against women. Girl child discrimination is the most prevalent form of harassment seen from the early age of a child. Parental sex selection, female feticide, female infanticide, child marriage, child abuse including sexual and psychological abuse and child prostitution are the many kinds of violence and discrimination against the girl child that is seen within the home as well as the society. Special awareness and education programmes needs to be formulated and implemented at every level to fight the violence against women. Strict laws need to be formulated to fight the crime of violence against women. This is necessary for any meaningful social empowerment of women.

Conclusion:

According to the country report of the government of India, "empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power." Education of women is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. Education also brings reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. When we talk of social empowerment of women then we are actually addressing various issues which might be applicable to different parts of the world for improving the overall status of women. The change can be only possible through social empowerment of women at the grass root level with education and awareness. When you train a woman, it will help the whole family, village and nation. Empowerment of women is an important program in development efforts. There is an urgent need to give top priority to women's education in the coming years to ensure development with social justice in the country. Our society should have a fair outlook to the fair sex. The problem of women's development, therefore, calls for sincere, dedicated all-out efforts from the whole of society, from planners, administrators, philanthropists and social and educational workers. A movement for women's education in India will have to strike at the very root of the parasitic system of social inequalities in the country. Empowering women is a huge resource for social change and the broader fight against global poverty. Our goal is to cause policy, institutional and individual changes that will improve the lives of women and girls everywhere.

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