



Critical Overview on Empowering Women Education of India: Its Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Women are not considered as bodily entities but an active and dynamic creator and contributor of society. It is realized that without educating women, sustainable development of a country is not at all possible. Though, its sounds cliché, but the truth is that if we want to educate a family then we must start by educating the women of the family and the rest is history. Now women play a vital role in the socio-economic growth of any country. Whether they are the socially influencer, the teacher, the care giver or homemaker they done it all with utmost priority and dedication. So, to give the women their appropriate respect, status and position in the society, several movements, commissions, committees and policies have been listed and implemented.

During the British rule several steps were taken in the education field. Most significantly the British tried to change the age-old mindset of the Indians about education and specially women education. Commissions and committees were constructed for the development of education. 'Wood's Despatch' in 1854, recommended that to complete the education ladder inclusion of women education was mandatory. 'Hunter Commission' in 1882 had made several suggestions and recommendations that bring certain changes in the educational field and women education was also a part of it. After completing 75th years of Indian Independence and after taking numerous measures for empowering women through education, the greater picture of women education is still not very enthusiastic in India. There are several problems and issues which still exist in the field of women education in India and making the path little bit difficult.

Keywords: *women education, sustainable development, suggestions and recommendations, cliché, dynamic creator*



INTRODUCTION

Women is considered as the most important and sizeable chunk of inhabitant of any region according to the statistical study of population. Though, it is globally perceived that the overall stature of women folk is far more reprehensible in comparison to their men folk. In the era of neoliberalism, women are the most suffered and vulnerable lot in many senses. The pre- dominant perception of women in Indian society creates the chief barrier in the development of women and in their education. Women of India had to bear the baggage of conservative patriarchal rigidity in every aspect in their life whether it is socio-economic or cultural which subdue their lives.

Since, India has travelled across a very long path; the role of the women had changed in quite a few senses. Presently, women are not considered as bodily entities but an active and dynamic creator and contributor of society. It is realized that without educating women, sustainable development of a country is not at all possible. Though, it sounds cliché, but the truth is that if we want to educate a family then we must start by educating the women of the family and the rest is history. Now women play a vital role in the socio-economic growth of any country. Whether they are the socially influencer, the teacher, the care giver or homemaker they done it all with utmost priority and dedication. So, to give the women their appropriate respect, status and position in the society, several movements, commissions, committees and policies have been listed and implemented.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The prime objectives of the paper are as follows:

- 1) To discuss about the Women Education of India from vedic age to modern age.
- 2) Try to know the role of different commissions committee, and policy in implementing Women Education of India.
- 3) To point out the main challenging issues regarding the Women Education in India.
- 4) To provide some further suggestions for uplifting Women Education in India

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Primarily the secondary data sources are being considered and used for the building up the paper. From the below mentioned data sources the writers of the paper have taken help for getting the broader view of Women Education in India from vedic age to modern age.

The secondary data sources are: book chapters, journals, research articles, and historical documents, reports of various commissions and committees, M.phil and Ph.d theses

MAIN DISCUSSION

Education: A key component for any progressive society

Education is elementary for all human beings of any civilized society. It helps to implant several values and duties, suitable approaches and behavior to perform fittingly as a societal entity. Education helps the people of the society in the manifestation of their imagination, knowledge and talent to the modern world. In short, it is an indispensable part of national development. Though in India in the field of education, it is considered that men superior in



comparison to their women counterpart. The age - old orthodox approach and the patriarchy systems of Indian societies creates the stumbling blocks in women education in India.

Women Education: during Vedic age and Mughal Era

In the ancient period of India, women are considered as the bond slave to men. Gender disparity and the institution of patriarchy always were an integral issue in the society. Though in the ancient period of India, Gargi, Moitreyi, Lopamudra, Biswabara, Opala were the women scholars and philosophers of Vedic period and some of them got vast knowledge in the field of Vedic literature. These are some of very few instances of women in the field of education in the ancient Vedic age. During the Mughal era, the women got their learning experiences in their homes or in the home of the teacher who lived close to their house. However, royal arrangements were made for the education of the women of royal household. In general, the women education in Mughal was not very fruitful for the ordinary people. To be honest, the overall picture of women education was not at all promising. The Indian society was patriarchal in general. The mindset of the people in India is conservative. They believe that women in the society are needed for reproduction, households, parenting, martial etc. and to perform this kind of jobs, women do not require a good educational qualification. That is the notion of our society. Even at the present time, in some sphere the perception of women and their education have changed a lot but not in all parts and regions of the country.

Women Educational development under British Rule

During the British rule several steps were taken in the education field. Most significantly the British tried to change the age-old mindset of the Indians about education and specially women education. Commissions and committees were constructed for the development of education. 'Wood's Despatch' in 1854, recommended that to complete the education ladder inclusion of women education was mandatory. 'Hunter Commission' in 1882 had made several suggestions and recommendations that bring certain changes in the educational field and women education was also a part of it. Lord Curzon in 1904 gave emphasis on the quality of education over the quantity of schools. In 1917, Sadler Commission recommended a special board of women's education and to construct a special curriculum for them according to their need in the field of education. Christian Missionaries play an influential role in the field of women education. First ever girl's school was established in Bombay in 1824 under the supervision of Missionaries. Missionary pioneers like Robert May, Dr. J. Marshman, Dr. W. Carry, Captain J. Stuart took several steps in promoting women education in all over India. They were very keen to establish schools for the girls. Initiatives were taken to provide printed material to them for their studies. Though the primary objective of the Christian Missionaries was to spread the Christianity among the Indian but some of them took interest in the eradication of illiteracy, special preference was given to women education.

Social Reformers and their contribution in women education of India

Some of Indian social reformers contributed immensely to the development of women and in their education. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar realized the problem of women in Indian society. Opened my Balika Vidyalaya in Bengal at his own expense and written several books for the



people of Bengal. Barnoparichay, Kathamala are some of them. Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1856 because of his initiative and saved so many little girls from the rigidity of society. Raja Ram Mohan Roy also advocated for women and for their education and he believed that a country's prosperity depends on the education of women. Sati Abolition Act was passed in 1829 with the help of Ram Mohan Roy. Numerous lives of women were saved by this act. Jyotirao Govindrao Phule, worked towards the betterment of women from the lower class of society. He gave them the opportunity for their education. Phule and his wife established so many schools for the women. Chandramukhi Bose, Kadambini Ganguly, Anandi Gopal Joshi are some of very educated and successful women of our Country. Even Kadambini Ganguly and Anandi Gopal Joshi one of the first two Indian doctors of our country and Chandramukhi Bose was the first woman who completed her post-graduation from the University of Calcutta and later became the first principal of Bethune college.

Education in Post - Independence Era of India: Developmental history under the commissions and committees

Since independence of India, several commission and constitutional provisions were taken by the Indian Government for the upliftment of women education. Commissions like Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-1949), Mudaliar Commission (1952-1953) realized the necessity of women education in India. They considered that the overall development of a girl is as much vital like any other human being of society. They also mentioned that focus should give to the higher level of women education for their upliftment. To raise the standard of women education in India, 'National Council for Women Education' was constructed in 1959 under the chairmanship of Durgabhai Desmukh, to figure out the problems regarding women education in India. A survey was conducted followed by some valuable recommendations. The committee further reconstructed in 1964 by the Indian Central Education Ministry for the betterment in the field of women education. To scrutinize the importance of separate curriculum for boys and girls, under the leadership of Smt. Hansa Mehta a committee was appointed in 1962, named 'Hansa Mehta Committee' by the National Council for Women Education. A common curriculum had been suggested by the committee for girls and boys at the primary and secondary levels. In 1963, a small committee named Bhaktavatsalam was appointed under the supervision of Shri M. Bhaktavatsalam, the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. The committee was constituted to make out the reason behind the scarcity of public support towards women education specifically in rural areas. The committee suggested various ways of acquiring considerable progress in the field of women education. In 1964-66, under the leadership of Daulat Singh Kothari, the chairman of Kothari Commission, the commission was established by the Government of India. Very vital and noted information was given by the commission that women education showed favourable result in decreasing the birth rate. The commission suggested that to bridge the gap between men's and women's education, some bold steps need to be taken. They also gave emphasis in the expansion of women education and look after the difficulties that create disturbance in the path of providing women education. Recommendations of Kothari Commission create new avenues for women's development through education in all over the nation. Further in 1970, to review the progress in the field of women education in India, 'National Committee on Women Education' was constructed. The purpose of this committee was not only to review the progress of women



education but also the recommendation for further development in that educational field. After 43 years of Indian Independence in 1990 by the act of Parliament, first 'National Commission of Women' was established in 1992 to protect the right and valid prerogatives of women in India. The chairperson of this very first commission was Mrs. Jayanti Pathak. Apart from safeguarding the rights of women in India, it gives voice to the problems and needs of women of India. Thus, with time period the educational progress of women in India takes small steps towards their destination with recommendations of various commissions and committees.

Five Year Plans with Several Schemes of Indian Government and Women Education

Post -Independence period of India, several five- year plans were taken by the Indian government. It was the fifth five- year plan which was taken from 1974-78 from where the issue of women education acknowledged as a central issue. It was lately realized that women education is the most essential tool for the empowerment of women. Even if from this five-year plan importance was given over the necessity of training for women so that they will be able to take part in the national income of the country. During seventh five-year plan between 1985- 1990 emphasis was given on the employment of women and youth. In this phase, strategies was organised for women's active participation in socio-economic activities and for the enhancement of their overall social stature. In this time period 'The National Literacy Mission (NLM)' was launched by the central government of India in 1988. Abolishment of adult illiteracy was the prime focus of this National Literacy Mission. By cutting down the dropout rate, the NLM tried to initiate mass literacy and also wanted to involve the community in educating women. In the eighth five-year plan from 1992-1997, the paradigm shifted from development of women to empowerment of women which saves the women of India from further marginalisation. Adaptation of "National Policy for Empowerment of Women" was one of the major strategies of eighth five-year plan. 'The National Women Commission' was the outcome of this and so the ninth five-year plan taken from 1997-2002. It viewed women as the agents of social change and development. During the ninth five-year plan, numerous initiatives were taken for the upliftment of women education. Inclusion of article 21(A) in 2002 by the 86th constitutional amendment and brought a remarkable change in the field of education. Through this inclusion, government of India announced that children between the age 6-14 years gets free and compulsory education from the government. 'Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act' assented to 26th August, 2009 and came into force from 1st April, 2010 all over the India except Jammu and Kashmir.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) which was introduced in 2001 and the main purpose of this Abhiyan was to bridge the distance between boys and girls in the sector of primary and secondary education. The SSA tries to provide quality education to all children ages 6-14 years by 2010. Though the time limit has been pushed forward endlessly. During the tenth five- year plan between 2002-2007, government adopt an area specific 3fold plan for the empowerment of women. The 3 fold are empowerment of in the socio-economic field and gender justice which not only eradicated all types of gender biasness but also gives all kinds of fundamental rights and freedom to women in all sectors of society like any other social being. The age-old rigidity and dogmas of Indian society which creates the barriers in the progress of women education now gained the momentum in the positive direction. National Programme for Education of Girls at



Elementary Level (NPEGEL) was also come into action in July, 2003. The initiative was considered as a very vital component of SSA. 'NPEGEL' was taken to reach out for those girls who were not able to take the advantages of SSA or any other policies of government of India. The SSA named them 'Hardest to Reach' girls, especially those who not in school. The 'NPEGEL' established model schools for the girls to provide them better opportunities in life. 24 states of India got the privilege of this very special scheme. 'Saakshar Bharat' was also one of the major schemes of Indian government which was introduced during the eleventh five-year plan (2007-2012), by the Ex. Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh in 2009. This very scheme aimed to create a society with zero illiteracy and for this various initiative was taken for none and neo-literate ages 15 years and above. Increasing women's literacy in India was the main agenda of this centrally sponsored scheme. The twelfth five-year plan which was taken by government of India (2012-2017) special preference was given to single women. An announcement was made for reserving a certain percentage of jobs for them under centrally sponsored scheme. This very plan entitled as 'Faster, Sustainable and More Inclusive growth'.

National Education Policies of India and educational progress of women over the period

In the resolution of National Education Policy 1968, emphasis was given on women education as it not only helps in the acceleration process of social transformation. Whereas in National Education Policy 1986, the women equality was the main highlighted issue in the sphere of women education. The issue was addressed by the policy makers of India. The NEP 1986, wanted to remove the disparities which exists in the society and equal educational benefits for all, specifically for the women of India. Several schools were established with the help of Central government of India, Kendriya Vidyalays, previously known as Central Schools started by the MHRD in 1963. Jawahar Navodayas which established in each and every district of India are the result of NEP, 1986. This initiative was taken by former Prime Minister of India, Shree Rajiv Gandhi. Navodayas open the door for the talented learners for achieving the quality education also in rural areas.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya was initiated by the Indian government in 2004. It dismissed gender biasness and encouraged the high literacy rate of the girls especially for the weaker section. Special mention needed for 'National Curriculum Framework' (NCF) 2005. An inclusive environment without any gender biasness was the main concern of NCF. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, another scheme of central government which was introduced in 2015 by present our Prime Minister. The main objective of this very scheme is to protect and educate the girl child. In the present scenario numerous initiatives were taken like Open Distance Learning (ODL), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for the expansion of learning. Samagra Shiksha which has implemented successfully by the Education Ministry, came into force from 2018-2019, whose outreach extends to girl children. National Education Policy 2020 anticipates unbiased and inclusive education for all and special preference was given on girls, children and youth. It also ensures the safety and security of the girl students both in the school and outside. This is surely a positive initiative by the government of India to the empowerment of women through education.



Statistical Data Regarding the Literacy Rate of Women in the Field of Education

A survey was conducted to find out the literacy rate of women in India showed that in 1951 out of 18.3 percent of total population, 27.2% were male and 8.9% female. In 1961, the percentage of total population increased to 28.3% to 40.4% was male and 15.4 female. 34.5% was the total population in 1971 and percentage of male and female was 46% and 22% respectively. In the year 1981, total population was 43.6% out of which 56.4% was male and 29.8% female. In 1990, the statistics recorded- out of 52.2% of total population, 64.1% was male and 39.8 % female. 2001 documented the total population was 64.8% and the percentage of male was 75.3 and female 53.7. The year 2011 confirmed 80.9% was male and 64.6% female out of 74% total population. The statistics revealed that women education in India is gaining popularity slowly but steadily. We are hopeful enough that in the coming years, the women literacy rate will progress more if we take proper measures in the field of education.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

After Independence various plans and policies were taken by the Government of India for the education of women. Education acts as a powerful tool in empowering women with knowledge, understanding, skills and locomoted them from feebleness to a powerful position. For achieving sustainable development, it is necessary for each and every country to make investment in the field of women education and make their upcoming years safe and secured. It is perhaps the best investment for the world economy.

After completing 75th years of Indian Independence and after taking numerous measures for empowering women through education, the greater picture of women education is still not very enthusiastic in India. There are several problems and issues which still exist in the field of women education in India and making the path little bit difficult. These issues need to be addressed.

- 1) **Impression of Women in Society:** One of the main difficulties to women education in India is the age-old impression of women in the society which is inevitably persisted till date. Though in urban and semi-urban areas of India are tried to fight it out but the remote areas of the country are still facing the narrow-mindedness of the society. The patriarchal dominance of the society creates the barrier to women education in India.
- 2) **Negative Attitude of Parents:** Previous studies showed that negative parental attitude of the parents toward educating their girl child is one of major challenge of women education. Most of the cases parents of needy families choose their son for educating instead of their daughter because of their economic condition. They keep their daughter at home for the domestic purposes. Even if, there are some instances which showed that gender disparity is also visible in each and every layer of society whether the parents are poor or rich. They considered that their future is safe and secure only in the hands of their sons. This is one of the hardest challenges of women education and need to be solved.
- 3) **Financial Difficulties:** Financial restrictions of the family are one of the valid contributing factors to women education. Report of World Bank showed that if a family not able to afford



the financial burdens of schools then the drop out chances of a girl student is much higher compare to a boy student from the school.

- 4) **Social Factors:** Another very important and perhaps scary issue is early marriage and pregnancy of women. It creates significant gender gap in educational field. As per UNICEF report, approx. 39,000 girls got married each an every day before they turn 18 years. This shocking fact is one of the chief reasons that girls have facing in continuing their studies. Most of them are not get the permission from their in- laws to go to school. Sooner, they get pregnant and became mother of a child. It not only put the full stop to their studies but also has unfavorable consequences on the health of both baby and mother.
- 5) **Lack of School Facilities:** Shortage of necessary school facilities is another important challenge of women education in India. Inadequate classrooms, classrooms without basic necessities are some of the biggest issues. In continuation, lack of separate washroom for boys and girls creates a major disturbance for the teenager girls. They often absent their school due to hygiene related issues and in many cases this became one of the main reasons of their dropout. Apart from sanitary issue, lack of drinking water, shortage of water for necessary usage is another challenge which needs to be take care. Above all, lack of proper environment, lack of inclusive approach hampered the quality of learning.
- 6) **Transportation Issue:** Distance of school from home is another problem which leads to creates barrier to women education. Children had to walk a long distance or in some times they had to take public transport to attend the school. Walking or travelling these journeys from home to school can be very dangerous and unsafe. During travel or walking, girls were often faced harassment and physical assault. This is one of the darkest area due to which guardians hesitate to send their girls to school.
- 7) **Scarcity of female teacher:** Another potential barrier to women education is scarcity of female faculties. Researchers showed that girls have more favorable attitude towards the school and they also have higher academic achievement if they have got the guidance under the lady teachers. This fact is more relevant in highly gender differentiated societies and Indian societies are one of them. But the percentage of lady teachers is much lowers in eachat every level of educational structure in comparison to male teachers. This is one of the issues which need to be look after.
- 8) **Female teachers and their unwillingness to work in remote areas:** Another obstacle to women education is the mindset of female teachers and their unwillingness to serve in remote areas. As discussed earlier, girl students showed better academic achievement in education if they have lady faculties. But many of the female teachers find it very difficult to stay in remote areas far away from their loved ones. Even those who bound to do so are eagerly waited for their transfer. This is also a big size problem to women education. Girls are feels protected under female teacher but female teachers are not feeling comfortable in working remote areas.



- 9) **Women Trafficking:** Human trafficking is one of the burning issues in modern world. Specially, women trafficking victim ratio all over the world reported in 2016 is 23 percent among all kinds of trafficking. Traffickers exploits the women in different ways such as bonded labour, forced illegal activities, even if forced marriage but the most cases they are compelled into sexual exploitation. They have to face mental and physical torture to an excessive level which negatively impact into their mental and physical health. This sort of activities put full stops on their educational live and they get stuck in the circle of deprivation and slavery.
- 10) **High rate of drop out in Women Education:** Though from 1990s, enrolment of girls in school has taken a sharp rise but till now there is a considerable gap in upper primary and secondary level. High dropout rates are one of the chief reasons behind this. Due to several problems, many of the female students failed to continue their studies and as a result girls have a higher rate of drop out in India compared to boys. This is one of the significant challenges which Government of India needs to be sought out.
- 11) **Gender disparity in Curriculum:** In many lessons of educational book of school curriculum men folk and women folk are depicted in gender stereotype character. Men were portrayed as strong, sharp-minded, held high position or rank, always the saviour and always play the prime role in most of the lessons. On the other side women were represented as needy, fragile, sufferer and as a victim of torture. It is evident in this lessons that women were need support from men in each an every step of their life. The age-old gender biasness in curriculum is another issue which need to be addressed.
- 12) **Lack of Social awareness amidst the women:** A major barrier of women education is lack of consciousness among the women about the importance of education, their ignorance about their legal rights, about the Government of India's educational policies. Eventually, majority of the women in India are forced to believe that marriages are the ultimate destination for them. This pre-dominant mindset of women creates barrier to their own education.

FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above discussion we may draw some further recommendations regarding women education in India.

There are various problems in women education in India, form vedic age to present times. There we had great women in the arena of educational field but still now they are through a lot of problems. Those problems need to be resolved.

- 1) We must discriminate between males and females in respect of Education. We all are equal and must get equal opportunities.
- 2) Women must show respect and they need to motivate themselves to educate and when they themselves literate than the nation will grow.
- 3) Lots of Indian education commissions and committees emphasized only on women education still we are lacking behind, so government must look into this matter.



- 4) Only women can learn these types of institutions must set up in abundance.
- 5) Side by side co-education must be encouraged it will develop each other to learn in a friendly atmosphere.
- 6) Reading habits in women must be cultivated and books must be provided free of cost to them.
- 7) Central and state government both jointly come forward to uplift the women education.
- 8) Beside male teaches, women teachers need to build and a envious number of women teachers need to produce in India.

Lots of problems are there, it is our prime duty to eradicate those problems.

CONCLUSION

It is crucial to note that the attitude of people towards women's education will go a long way in explaining the extent to which the people want their nation to develop. Like the saying goes that to educate a woman is to educate the society as whole. Education is considered as a keyinstrument for the women empowerment. It changes their lifestyle, improves their chances of employment, facilitates their participation in public life and also increased their status in the society. Even though considerable progress has been made with regard to literacy and education, the overall structure still remains unfavourable to women. Society will march forward if only the women get educated. Nation will rejuvenate if the women get educated and help others to educate. Being the member of the nation we have a common responsibility to help woman in educating themselves and others.

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