

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

One of the obstacles to women's equality in India is the discrimination in the status of women and men which is a result of social, economic, political and cultural factors that have been justified on the basis of psychological differences. Looking after children and rearing them is also solely mother's responsibility and the psychological differences are not taken into consideration when it comes to domestic work. Women face discrimination in terms of denial of equal access to the power structure that controls society and determines development issues. Inequalities are also seen in employment and other socio-economic areas. Education plays a significant role in empowering women and achieving their rights. Often it is seen that education alone is unable to eliminate values held by society. So such values are to be transmitted into educational curricula and textbooks. This paper highlights methods of empowering women by means of formal, informal and non formal education.

Key words: Equality, Empowerment, Formal Education, Discrimination.

Introduction

A major change in the last few decades has been the recognition of the centrality of education in the struggle to achieve women's equality and empowerment. The overall picture of girls' and women's education and equality is one of limited opportunity and obstacles. The right of every individual to education is one of the first provisions of the universal declaration on Human Rights. Creating educational opportunities for girls and women is strongly emphasized in the work of UN. Supplementing the 1960 UNESCO Convention against discrimination, Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in 1979, outlined a comprehensive agenda for promoting gender equality in education.

Its provisions require that societies:

- Provide women access to the same curricula, examinations and quality teaching staff as boys;
- Eliminate any stereotyped concept of the roles of man and woman, by revising textbooks and school programmes and adopting teaching methods to the needs of girls.

One of the obstacles to women's equality is the discrimination and inequality in the status of women and men. Most women are unaware of their basic human rights. It is because of this ignorance that their and their children's well being is affected. Even when women acquire a degree of economic and political awareness, they often feel powerless to bring about the change necessary to eliminate gender inequality. The inequality of women in most countries is due to their poverty, illiteracy and backwardness. A wider cross-section of citizens have to be mobilized in support of the struggle for women to become literate. A number of concrete steps need to be taken collectively in order to empower them.

Major Challenges:

Mass mobilization of all sectors in society for quality education for all with a special focus on the girl child must be made.

Informal and Nonformal methods of education should be adopted to eliminate discrimination against women. The nonformal education serves the following priority tasks:

- Provide out of school education and training for the school drop-outs in the age of 9-14 and so ensure that all girls acquire the minimum learning skills.

-Provide functional literacy, learning for the illiterate adults, beginning with rural women doing field work, so that working women acquire uniform learning skills.

There are five salient features of non-formal education programme.

(i) The first feature common to all the programme is that they provide opportunities for learning to women of all age groups, literacy skill, farming, industrial trade, trade, management skill, commercial skill, health service, social welfare, teaching skill or sports etc.

(ii) Each programme will be organised by some agency, governmental or non-governmental, with learning programme in the form of curriculum.

(iii) All such programmes take place outside the formal education system. That is outside the school timetable, discipline outside the curriculum, examination certificates, diploma or degrees associated with the present formal education, in school, college and university, etc.

(iv) Every programme is motivated by the desire on the part of the participant to improve one's general or technical knowledge or qualification in order to augment or increase one's earning or employment prospectus.

(v) Programmes may cover the entire life-span of the individual covering all age groups including child and adolescent drop-outs and those of elder age.

-A well developed supplementary programme for women needs to be developed wherein their role as citizens, members of Panchayat, can be encouraged and supported.

-A creative new vision should be formulated by the media for women's literacy, equality and education.

-Access to education by itself is not enough to eliminate discriminatory values held by society. The values based on respect and equality of women should be included in formal education i.e. in curricula and textbooks.

The life of an average girl / woman in Indian society does not provide her with either the leisure or the environment that encourage her to continue to study, read or write. There is a need to create a 'learning environment' and propagate the concept of a lifelong learning society as part of post-literacy.

-Women should have greater political participation which can be facilitated by the right kind of education provided to her.

There are a large number of women's colleges and women's universities in India which can play a distinct gender sensitive role. There are women's study centres and cells in selected universities and colleges. These can play a big role at the societal level and commitment to gender issues to bring about gender equity and justice.

The University Grants Commission has set up 22 Centres in universities and cells for Women's Studies in selected colleges. The centres since 1986, have performed very well through research, training and extension. As these centres and cells have been very successful, there is a greater need to have similar arrangements in all colleges i.e. self-financing colleges as well. Such steps will help breaking prevalent gender bias and promoting understanding of women's needs and perspectives.

In India, Article 45 of the constitution provides free and compulsory education for boys and girls upto 14 years of age. Article 15 emphasizes women and children. The heart of the constitution is formed by two articles related to the fundamental rights of citizens that prohibit any type of discrimination towards women. There have been a series of commissions and committees that attempt to enforce the law. The education of women acts as social catalyst. Consequently the National Education Policy intervenes in favour of women's empowerment.

Empowerment of women is understood to mean the self-determination and self-confidence that allows women to play an active role in society. Involvement of women in public life is an element that transforms the status of women.

The government of India has continuously been formulating strategies and initiating processes for girls' and women's education, equality and empowerment. This can be translated into reality only when societal awareness is generated and consolidated.

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