

WOMEN AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Amarjeet Kumar Singh

MA. Med. Ph.D

B R A BIHAR UNIVERSITY, MUZAFFARPUR.

Abstract : Education is a basic requirement and a fundamental right for the citizens of a free nation. Education plays a catalytic role in a country's socio-economic development and is one of the principal means available for a deeper and harmonious form of human development reducing poverty, ignorance and exclusion. Higher Education, which is a training ground for a professional, research- based, career-oriented future, must be respected as a potential instrument for bringing about social transformation and ensuring the success of democracy. Higher Education of women plays a crucial role in releasing their energy and creativity and enabling them to meet the complex challenges of the present world. In acknowledging them as potential human resources, investment must be made in developing their capacity in terms of education, skill development, and technology transfers through technical training. Special emphasis needs to be given to Research and Development of appropriate scaled-down occupations engaging women in large proportions.

Key words: Education, Higher Education, socio-economic, career-oriented, democracy.

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OF WOMEN HIGHER EDUCATION MEDIEVAL PERIOD

In medieval education for girls and women was at best patchy and was controversial in the light of pronouncements of some religious authorities Shulamith Shahar writes, of the situation in the nobility, that Among girls there was an almost direct transition from childhood to marriage, with all it entails. Education was also seen as stratified in the way that society itself was: in authors such as Vincent of Beauvais, the emphasis is on educating the daughters of the nobility for their social position to come. Educational opportunities for women were poor. In some areas Girls were usually allowed to receive only elementary instruction from their mothers, while boys could go off to be tutored, go to church-run schools, or join a guild or burger school to learn an occupation Most schools for girls were associated with convents, but some aristocratic women were educated in palace schools during the age of chivalry in household duties, good manners music, and conversation. In medieval Frankish society, however, women were given a more equal education and the education of the average lay women was comparable to that of her husband.

The taonty of the most educated women in the Middle Ages were nuns. The nuns ran conveheschools, where they taught young girls chants and singing as well as reading and writting and domestic arts like cooking, weaving, and spinning wool. One of the most notable educated nuns of the Middle Ages was Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179).

Early modern period, humanist attitudes

In early modern the question of female education had become a standard commonplace one, in other words a literary topos for discussion. Around 1405 Leonardo Bruni wrote *De studies et letteris*, addressed to Baptista di Montefeltro, the daughter of Antonio II da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino; it commends the study of Latin, but warns against arithmetic, geometry, astrology and rhetoric. In discussing the classical scholar Isotta Nogarola, however, Lisa Jardine notes that (in the middle of the fifteenth century), 'Cultivation is in order for a noblewoman; formal competence is positively unbecoming Christine de Pisan's *Livre des Trois Vertus* is contemporary with Bruni's book, and sets down the things which a lady or baroness living on her estates ought to be able to do. Erasmus wrote at length about education in *De pueris instituendis* (1529, written two decades before); not mostly concerned with female education, in this work he does mention with approbation the trouble Thomas More took with teaching his whole family Catherine of Aragon "had been born and reared in one of the most brilliant and enlightened of European courts, where the cultural equality of men and women was normal". By her influence she made education for English women both popular and fashionable. In 1523 Juan Luis Vives, a follower of Erasmus, wrote in Latin his *De institutione foeminae Christianae*. This work was commissioned by Catherine, who had charge of the education of her daughter

for the future Queen Mary I of England; in translation it appeared as Education of a Christian Woman. It is in line with traditional didactic literature, taking a strongly religious direction. It also placed a strong emphasis on Latin literature.

Elizabeth I of England had a strong humanist education, and was praised by her tutor Roger Ascham. She fits the pattern of education for leadership, rather than for the generality of women. When Johannes Sturm published Latin correspondence with Ascham centred on the achievements in humanist study of Elizabeth and other high-ranking English persons in Konrad Heresbach's *Delaudibus Graecarum literarum oratio* (1551), the emphasis was on the nobility of those tackling the classics, rather than gender. Schooling for girls was rare; the assumption was still that education would be brought to the home environment. Comenius was an advocate of formal education for women. In fact his emphasis was on a type of universal education making no distinction between humans; with an important component allowed to parental input, he advocated in his *Pampaedia* schooling rather than other forms of tutoring, for all.

Modern period

The issue of female education in the large, as emancipatory and rational, is broached seriously in the Enlightenment. Mary Wollstonecraft, who worked as a teacher, governess, and school-owner, wrote of it in those terms. Her first book was *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, years before the publication 'A Vindication of the Rights of woman'.

In the late 19th century, in what was then the Russian province of Poland, in response to the lack of higher training for women, the so-called Flying University was organized, where women were taught covertly by Polish scholars and academics. Its most famous student was Maria Skodowska-Curie, better known as Marie Curie, who went on to win two Nobel Prizes.

Much education was channelled through religious establishments. Not all of these educated women only for marriage and motherhood; for example, Quaker views on women had allowed much equality from the foundation of the denomination in the mid 17 century. The abolitionist William Allen and his wife Grizell Hoare set up the Newington Academy for Girls in 1824, teaching an unusually wide range of subjects from languages to sciences.

Indian history

The history of women education in India has its roots in the British Regime. Women's employment and education was acknowledged in 1854 by the East India Company's Programme: Wood's Dispatch. Slowly, after that, there was progress in female education but it initially tended to be focused on the primary school level and was related to the richer sections of society. The overall literacy rate for women increased from 0.2% in 1882 to 6% in 1947. In 1878, the University of Calcutta became one of the first universities to admit female graduates to its academic degree programmes. After India attained independence in 1947, the University Education Commission was created to recommend suggestions to improve the quality of education. However, their

report spoke against female education, referring to it as: "Women's present education is entirely irrelevant to the life they have to lead. It is not only a waste but often a definite disability". However, the fact that the female literacy rate was at 8.9% post-Independence could not be ignored. Thus, in 1958, a national committee on women's education was appointed by the government, and most of its recommendations were accepted. The crux of its recommendations were to bring female education on the same footing as offered for boys.

First Women's College

Actual progress in institutional terms, for secular education of women, began in the West in the nineteenth century, with the founding of colleges offering single- sex education to young women. These appeared in the middle of the century. The Princess: A Medley, a narrative poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, is a satire of women's education, still a controversial subject in 1848, when Queen's College first opened in London. Emily Davies campaigned for women's education in the 1860s, and founded Girton College in 1869, as did Anne Clough found Newnham College in 1875. W. S. Gilbert parodied the poem and treated the themes of women's higher education and feminism in general with *The Princess* in *Princess* in (1870) and *Princess Ida* in 1883.

Once Women began to graduate from institutions of higher education, there steadily developed also a stronger academic stream of schooling, and the teacher training of women in larger numbers, principally to provide primary education. Women's access to traditionally all-male institutions took several generations to become complete.

The interrelated themes of barriers to education and employment continued to form the backbone of feminist thought in the nineteenth century, as described, for instance by Harriet Martineau in her 1859 article "Female Industry" in the *Edinburgh Journal*. Despite the changes in the economy, the position of women in society had not greatly improved and unlike Frances Power Cobbe, Martineau did not support the emerging call for the vote for practical reasons.

Slowly the efforts of women like Davies and the Langham group started to make inroads. Queen's College (1848) and Bedford College (1849) in London started to offer some education to women from 1848, and by 1862 Davies was establishing a committee to persuade the universities to allow women to sit for the recently established (1858) Local Examinations, with partial success (1865). A year later she published "The Higher Education of Women." She and Leigh Smith founded the first higher educational institution for women with 5 students, which became Girton College, Cambridge in 1873, followed by Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford in 1879. Bedford had started awarding degrees the previous year. Despite these measurable advances, few could take advantage of them and life for women students was very difficult.

Two other notable women at the forefront of this campaign were Miss Beale and Miss Buss, graduates of Queen's College. Miss Beale, originally a teacher at the Clergy Daughter's School in Casterton, rose to become head of the influential Cheltenham's Ladies College. Buss, head of the North London Collegiate School since 1850 testified to a government commission on the subject: 'I am sure girls can learn anything they are taught in an interesting manner and for which they have a motive to work'.

As part of the continuing dialogue between British and American feminists, Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman in the US to graduate in medicine (1849), lectured in Britain with Langham support. They also supported Elizabeth Garrett's attempts to assail the walls of British medical education against strong opposition; she eventually took her degree in France. Garrett's successful campaign to run for office on the London School Board in 1870 is another example of how a small band of determined women were starting to reach positions of influence at the level of local government and public bodies.

Higher Education Role in Individual Life

The change in mind-set necessary to achieve this vision is a sustained, long-term effort to transform education at all levels. Despite the efforts of many individuals and groups within the formal educational system, education for a just and sustainable world is not a high priority. Indeed, it is the people coming out of the world's best colleges and universities that are leading us down the current unhealthy, inequitable, and unsustainable path. Only few architecture schools have made sustainable design a foundation of education and practice. The same is true in the education of virtually every intellectual discipline and profession. The greatest evidence of the need to transform education is the state of the world and the tremendous effort being made by thousands of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and schools in environmental and sustainability education to "fix" the tattered educational system.

Importance of Women Education

Female education is a catch-all term for a complex of issues and debates surrounding education (primary education, secondary education, tertiary education and health education in particular) for females. It includes areas of gender equality and access to education and its connection to the alleviation of poverty. Also involved are the issues of single-sex education and religious education, in that the division of education along gender lines, and religious teachings on education, have been traditionally dominant, and are still highly relevant in contemporary discussion of female education as a global consideration. While the feminist movement has certainly promoted the importance of the issues attached to female education, discussion is wide-ranging and by no means confined to narrow terms of reference: it includes for example AIDS. Universal education, meaning state-provided primary and secondary education independent of gender, is not yet a global norm, even if it is assumed in most developed countries. In some Western countries, women have surpassed men at many levels of education. For example, in the United States in 2005/2006, women earned 62% of Associate's degrees, 58% of Bachelor's degrees, 60% of Master's degrees, and 50% of Doctorates. Improving

girls' educational levels has been demonstrated to have clear impacts on the health and economic future of young women which in turn improves the prospects of their entire community. In the poorest countries of the world, 50% of girls do not attend secondary school. Yet, research shows that every extra year of school for girls increases their lifetime income by 15%. Improving female education, and thus women's earning potential, improves the standard of living for their own children, as women invest more of their income in their families than men do. Yet, many barriers to education for girls remain. In some African countries, such as Burkina Faso, girls are unlikely to attend school for such basic reasons as a lack of private latrine facilities for girls.

Higher rates of high schools and university education among women, particularly in developing countries, have helped them make inroads to professional careers and better paying salaries and wages. Education increases a woman's (and her partner and the family's) level of health and health awareness. Furthering women's levels of education and advanced training also tends to lead to later ages of initiation of sexual activity and first intercourse, later age at first marriage, and later age at first childbirth, as well as an increased likelihood to remain single, have no children, or have no formal marriage and alternatively, have increasing levels of long-term partnerships. It can lead to higher rates of barrier and chemical contraceptive use (and a lower level of sexually transmitted infections among women and their partners and children), and can increase the level of resources available to women who divorce or are in a situation of domestic violence. It has been shown, in addition, to increase women's communication with their partners and their employers, and to improve rates of civic participation such as voting or the holding of office Potential Outcomes for Educated Women.

Research has shown that people who are more educated are more likely to following benefits receive the following benefits and more:

- ❖ Give birth to healthier babies
- ❖ Spend more time reading to their children
- ❖ Prepare children better academically for school
- ❖ Have children who participate in extracurricular activities
- ❖ Provide healthier lifestyles for their children
- ❖ Work higher paying, more flexible jobs
- ❖ Have more college-educated children who can better provide for self and families.

ADVANTAGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN HEALTH&WELLBEING

- ❖ Live longer lives (on average)
- ❖ Have an overall healthier lifestyle (exercise more, healthier diet, lower alcohol abuse, lower cholesterol levels, higher fiber intake, smoke less)
- ❖ Are less overweight or obese
- ❖ Have increased life satisfaction and overall happiness
- ❖ Are more resilient and less depressed (better mental health)
- ❖ Obtain more resources to pay for health insurance Taking an Active Role
- ❖ Help young women and those who influence them (e.g., parents, teachers, counselors, church leaders, relatives, and employers); understand the broad value of getting a college education
- ❖ Talk to girls, as young as possible, about going to college
- ❖ Discuss with girls and young women the importance of graduating from college and not just attending college. Use the word "graduation" in more conversations.
- ❖ Encourage young women to attend college directly out of high school.
- ❖ Ask K-12 teachers to integrate assignments that help students research why college is important; invite guest speakers to discuss the college experience.

Economic

- ❖ Earn more money
- ❖ Have better job opportunities
- ❖ Gain access to better health care and related benefits
- ❖ Have lower risk of unemployment
- ❖ Be better prepared to financially support self and family

Civic and Community Engagement

- ❖ Participate substantially more in civic and community activities (examples: voting, donating blood, filling leadership role)
- ❖ Be a more conscientious civic and community volunteer

Intellectant/Cognitive

- ❖ Better long learning skills
- ❖ More intelligence/knowledge (e.g., English, science, math, social sciences, reading)
- ❖ Stronger teamwork and interpersonal skills
- ❖ Increased ability to integrate ideas and concepts
- ❖ Stronger writing and verbal skills
- ❖ Higher critical and creative thinking, as well as decision making skills
- ❖ Enhanced quantitative and analysis skills

Self-Development

- ❖ Improved self-understanding
- ❖ Greater independence and feelings of control in life
- ❖ Superior leadership skills
- ❖ Higher ethical and moral standards and reasoning
- ❖ Stronger social skills
- ❖ Better self-concept/self-esteem
- ❖ Openness to diversity and racial understanding
- ❖ Greater ability to make reasoned, reflective judgments
- ❖ Stimulating occupations
- ❖ Increased quality of life

Need of Education for the 21st Century for men & women

What if higher education were to take a leadership role, as it did in the space race and the war on cancer, in preparing students and providing the information and knowledge to achieve a just and sustainable society? What would higher education look like? The education of all professionals would reflect a new approach to learning and practice. A college or university would operate as a fully integrated community that models social and biological sustainability itself and in its interdependence with the local, regional, and global communities. In many cases, we think of teaching, research, operations, and relations with local communities as separate activities; they are not. Because students learn from everything around them, these activities form a complex web of experience and learning.

Conclusion

Higher Education of women plays a crucial role in releasing their energy and creativity and enabling them to meet the complex challenges of the present world. In acknowledging them as potential human resources, investment must be made in developing their capacity in terms of education, skill development, and technology transfers through technical training. Special emphasis needs to be given to Research and Development of appropriate scaled-down occupations engaging women in large proportions. Illiteracy and cultural barriers need to be removed without any further delay. For women to make personal strides forward,

a synergy of effort, concentration, planning and cohesive functioning at the Higher Education level will create possibilities of a different future. By extending women's visibility and their self-sustaining ability, Higher Education must train them to become leaders with decision-making capacities to achieve the best for themselves and the country.

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