



Constitutional Provisions and National Policies for Women Empowerment through Education in India

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Abstract

In India, women have been facing continued inequality in all sectors. The discrimination and exploitation of women is well known. This discrimination that women have been facing has its roots in the socially constructed gender biases. In order to fight against these biases, women have to be empowered and empowerment will come only from education. Thus, women education in India has been the need of the hour, as education is a foundation stone for the empowerment and development of women. It enables them to face the challenges, tackle their problems, confront their traditional role and develop their position in the society. In this regard, the Government of India has initiated various provisions and policies to provide education to women and empower them. Thus, this paper discusses the barriers to women education as well as the constitutional provisions laid down for the improvement of the same.

Keywords: Education, Empowerment, Women, Constitutional Provisions and Policies

Introduction

“If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women Empowered means Mother India Empowered” - Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru

Education is considered as an important step towards women empowerment because it enables them to face the challenges, confront their traditional role and thereby improve their socio-economic and political status in the society. Education of women promotes development of both individual and society. When women are deprived of education, both family as well as society suffers. When women are adequately educated, everyone benefits. But in reality, since centuries women have been discriminated in this regard due to the patriarchal ideology of the society.

The hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in all sectors. The rise of various feminist movements has, however, led to the tremendous improvement of women's condition throughout the world in recent times. Girl's access to formal education has been one of the most pressing demands of these feminist movements. Development and progress of civilization creates and requires more educated women and hence education of women has become the need of the hour. Thus, women education has become a major concern for both the government and civil society in the contemporary times.

Necessity of Women Education

Women education in India plays a very important role in the development of the human resources. It improves the quality of life, both at home and outside. Socially, economically and psychologically, education develops and strengthens women's self-confidence, assures independence and makes them aware of the self and of the external world. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl child, but can also provide better guidance to their children. If women are provided formal education, they also help in reducing the infant mortality rate, improve the sex ratio and control population growth. Educated women are less likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth. Increased education of girls also leads to more female health care providers who assist other women with prenatal medical care, labor and delivery and follow-up care. If education is provided to more number of women it will be helpful in avoiding child marriage. It is believed that educated girls are well aware of the consequences of early marriage. Educated women tend to have fewer babies. They are more likely to participate and represent in political discussions, meetings, and decision-making, which in turn promote a more representative, and effective government. Educated girls and women are less likely to be victims of domestic and sexual violence. They have greater chances of leading more healthier and productive lives, thereby raising the standard of living for their children, families, and communities.

Challenges to Women Education

A changing society and a developing economy cannot progress if women are denied education. There are certain specific reasons which are major obstacles towards women education in India. These are as follows:

- 1. Poverty:** In rural areas, a substantial number of girls are engaged in contributing to the family income by getting into various forms of labour. So, they remain deprived from education. Another factor is poverty syndrome. Demand for female education is low in rural areas, where most of the poor families live and communications are difficult and there may be no access to a local school.
- 2. Biased attitude towards girl's education:** Many people still regard girls as private property. They consider girls education to be useless. Instead boys should be educated because their education will be useful to raise the family income. Though education is a major force in redefining women's role and status, yet women are deprived of formal education.

3. **More House-work:** It is believed that girls are meant only for doing household chores such as washing, cooking, child-care and other household labour. So, formal education is not much essential for them as compared to boys.
4. **Distance of school from home:** In many cases, the distance of school from home also stand as a barrier for girls. They are reluctant to travel far distances to attend schools.
5. **Lack of facilities:** Schools which lack the basic facilities such as toilets, drinking water, building, blackboards, etc. fail to attract girl students.
6. **Lack of female teachers:** There is lack of sufficient number of female teachers who could help in overcoming the biased attitude of sending girls to schools.
7. **Lack of segregated schools:** Problem of co-education is a major obstacle in urban area and also in girl's education. Many people like to send their daughters in segregated schools. If they are not available then they do not send their daughters to schools.
8. **Child Marriage:** Child marriage is very much prevalent in rural areas nowadays. It is the main cause of dropping out of girls from schools.
9. **Lack of Parental Involvement:** There is lack of parental involvement in educational processes of girl students.
10. **Unhealthy Social Practices:** It has been found that the prevalence of dowry system and other social practices act as causes of the neglect of the education of the girl child in the country.

Constitutional Provisions and Policies for Women Education in India

The Constitution of India not only granted equality to women but also empowered the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. The various constitutional provisions are as follows:

1. **Article 14:** The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.
2. **Article 15 (3):** Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes in so far as such special provisions relate to their admission to educational institutions including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State, other than the minority educational institutions referred to in clause (1) of article 30.

3. **Article 21A:** The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.
4. **Article 24:** No child below the age of fourteen years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment.
5. **Article 28:** Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions.
 1. No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds.
 2. Nothing in clause (1) shall apply to an educational institution which is administered by the State but has been established under any endowment or trust which requires that religious instruction shall be imparted in such institution.
 3. No person attending any educational institution recognized by the State or receiving aid out of State funds shall be required to take part in any religious instruction that may be imparted in such institution or to attend any religious worship that may be conducted in such institution or in any premises attached thereto unless such person or, if such person is a minor, his guardian has given his consent thereto.
6. **Article 29:** Protection of interests of minorities.
 1. Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.
 2. No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.
7. **Article 30:** Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.
 1. All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
 2. The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.
11. **Article 39:** The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing.
 1. The citizens, men and women equal right to an adequate means of livelihood;
 2. the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength;

3. children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and that children and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

12. Article 41: The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, education and public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want.

13. Article 45: Provision for free and compulsory education for children.

1. The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.
2. The State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years.

14. Article 46: The State shall promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

15. Article 51A (k): That a parent or guardian should provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years.

16. Article 350A: It shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups; and the President may issue such directions to any State as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities.

Policies for Women Education in India –

- 1. The National Policy on Education (1986):** This policy addressed itself to the basic issues of women's equality. It gave priority to the removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles increasing their access to and retention in elementary education. More emphasis has been given to women's participation in vocational, technical and professional education at different levels in order to promote women's participation.
- 2. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001:** This policy aims at the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The policy states that: "Equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured. Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize, education, eradicate illiteracy and create gender sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and

retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of vocational or technical skills of women. Reducing gender gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus area. Specific time targets in existing policies will be achieved, with special focus on girls and women, part curly those belonging to weaker sections including the SC/ST/OBC/Minorities.”

Conclusion

Women play a significant role towards the progress and development of a nation. Women have to be educated for the bright future of the country. Unless women are educated, they will neither be aware of their rights nor understand their importance. What should never be forgotten is that women like men need to be proactive in the lifelong learning process. Thus, promoting education among women is an important step to empower women and to accomplish their goals and objectives.

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