

Higher Education- A Path towards Women Empowerment

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Abstract

Education is the key yardstick by which the growth and development of a country can be delineated and as such it has occupied an honoured place in the society. The paper analyses gender disparity in education evident across the socio-economic spectrum in India. Concern for girls' education in last few years has led to a considerable expansion of access at the primary level. There is a need to develop gender-specific pedagogy and provide flexibility in the system of education, in which women could fulfill their aspirations, overcoming their domestic obligations. Higher education should prepare them to face a world of opportunities and challenges.

Keywords: Education Commission, Higher Education, Institutions, Women, Women Education.

Introduction

Education of girls is vital not only on grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation. Promotion of gender equality in education is essential for human resource development. By educating a woman you educate the whole family. Given that a woman has the responsibility of the whole family on herself, an educated woman is better capable of taking care of the health, nutrition and education of her children and more so be an active agent in the social and economic development of the country.

Education has a direct impact on women empowerment as it creates in them awareness about their rights, their capabilities and the choices and opportunities available to them.

Higher education means the education beyond the level of secondary education. It leads to an improvement in the depth and quality of public opinion, as well as to more active participation of the marginalized in the democratic process. No society has ever liberated itself economically, politically, or socially without a sound base of educated women.

Necessity of Higher Education for Women

There are two different views on the question of women participation in higher education - traditional and modern. The traditional view supports women's education to equip them to become better wives and mother. But modern attitude visualizes education as an instrument for women's equality and development.

Women education has two aspects- individual aspect and social aspect. It is education which increases women's abilities to deal with the problems of her life, her family, her society and nation. Education increases confidence in a woman. In a word, over all development of a society depends on the development of its total members. But if half of its members are legged behind, obviously it will create hindrance to the development.

Indian Context- Policies and Programmes

In India, providing education to all the citizens is a constitutional commitment. The principal of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian constitution, in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only guarantees equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.

The constitution also gave primary responsibility for elementary education to the state governments, while the central government was given responsibility for technical and higher education. This situation changed in 1976 after the 42nd Amendment to the constitution was passed, making all education the joint responsibility of the central and state governments.

National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 and its Programme of Action (POA) gave high priority to gender equality and committed the entire educational system to work for women's empowerment. The National Perspective Plan 1988-2000 reiterates this point of view and states that women themselves must overcome their handicaps. Thus, there has been a careful articulation of education for equality for women, which is reflected in the educational policy discourse.

Monitoring committees for women's/girls' education at the Ministry of Human Resource Development level and also state level were formed to monitor the indicators of gender concerns in all policies and projects. Emphasis was laid on enrolment and retention of the girl child in formal and non-formal schooling; recruitment of rural women teachers and removal of gender bias in the curriculum.

Mass literacy campaigns in different parts of India were launched which brought out volunteers from all sections of society as instructors, master trainers and organizers. Adult Education Programmes, Total Literacy Campaigns, Post Literacy Programmes, and continuing Education Programmes were also started. Nationwide gender sensitization programmes were undertaken to cover a large number of educational personnel to include educational administrators, teachers and teacher educators.

Its overall goal was to create circumstances to enable women to better understand their predicament, to move from a state of abject disempowerment towards a situation in which they could determine their own lives and influence their environment, and simultaneously create for themselves and their family an educational opportunity which enhanced the process of development.

Higher Education for girls in India

Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world. There has been phenomenal expansion of educational opportunities for women in the field of higher education both general and technical. Women education at the university-both college levels has been diversified and reoriented in tune with the changing requirements of the society, industry and trade. It is quite well known that inspite of a very well formulated policy of positive discrimination, the representation of SC/ST students is not adequate and the proportion of women is negligible. They generally join general education courses and are denied access to elite/courses and institutions. It is quite well known that inspite of a very well formulated policy of positive discrimination, the representation of SC/ST students is not adequate and the proportion of women is negligible. They generally join general education courses and are denied access to elite/courses and institutions. Further, disciplinary choices are affected by socio-economic factors especially in the case of Scheduled

Caste/Scheduled Tribe students whose representation remains marginal in higher education. But they too, are better represented in states in which women have better representation and in which higher education facilities have expanded in recent years.

Conclusion

It must be admitted that women are in no way lesser than men. They have all the power and capacity as that of men. But they fail to manifest themselves for different reasons. It is true that women participation in higher education amongst schedule caste, schedule tribe (both plain and hill) and Muslim community is much lower in comparison with other communities. This is also a serious matter for our country.

We should have to change our thinking, our attitude towards women. We should have to think that women are not just reproduction. They have feeling, thinking and all these as the men have. They have all the capacities as that of men and thereby they can do all these as men, if not more. So their power and capacities must be recognized.

The government of India should have to take special initiative for the improvement of higher education among these communities. The biggest challenge before the Government and NGO's is to create awareness and sensitization among people of all levels, especially in rural areas, about the special needs of women and girls. They need to be made aware that imparting education to women is a great service to society. This vital section of society has remained bound in the shackles and been deprived for far too long. There is a need for affirmative and real action in their favour which will ensure the women to right to food, shelter, health, education and employment. However, the recent changes and developments are kindling hopes for better and promising future.

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