

THE FAIRER SEX-MAKING IT STRONGER

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INTRODUCTION

The most marginalized constituency of human society is that of a woman. It cuts across the boundaries of caste, creed, religion and region. In advanced countries, women are enjoying better status but the condition of women remains generally poor in the third world countries. Indian society is no exception. Though Indian society is changing fast yet women in rural and semi-urban areas remain marginalized. Women did enjoy better status in Vedic ages. They were well looked after, they could get education and even widow marriage was socially sanctioned. But in mediaeval times, their condition became deteriorated. The practices of purdah system, dowry and sati degraded the status because of which daughters are considered a burden. There are many reasons for their poor status. Illiteracy is the most important of them. Lack of knowledge awareness of self and society employment opportunities rob women their freedom. No country can make progress if condition of women remains deplorable. Thus the need of the hour is that women should be empowered and their status both in family and society should be improved. Women improvement has now become buzzword in India. The last decade witnessed very active and multifaceted efforts in various national and International forums for achieving principles of equality,

sustainability and empowerment with a special focus on women, in Indian context, the concern for women's empowerment was very visible in the thoughts and writings of social reformation of the 19th and 20th centuries and this rich legacy of women empowerment was once again re-emphasized by our constitutional framer which later on was translated by the government into policies, initiatives, schemes and programs for empowering women. Apart from these, the year 2001 was adopted as women empowerment year during which National Policy for women was adopted to change the status of women.

What is empowerment and what empowers women?

Empowerment is both a process and a result that neither can be measured nor can it be taken by some individual or institution and given to somebody else. A woman can only empower herself; role in supporting the journey and providing an enabling environment. Women are empowered when they become aware of the unfair power relations they face and are able to take challenge to overcome self-reliance. In order to build self-confidence and to evolve a female agenda, besides education, formation of coalitions to have a united strong voice is equally important. Women's movement advocated country wide formation of grassroots and professional women's groups around a common goal. And thus empower women to ask for gender just laws and institutions and if justice is being denied to law in their own hands. Through women's activism, introduction of equality in discriminatory laws relating to marriage, dowry, divorce, inheritance and domestic violence have been introduced and this has empowered women. The government of India under pressure from the women activists and international aid agencies has followed a policy of positive discrimination in the government employment and in changing the legal

system to bring about gender equality in access to education and health and participation in local decision making. It set up a commission in 1975 to identify the extent to inequality and discrimination and another inquiry to evaluate the effect of gender just policies after quarter of a century in 2002 which reported that” After 55 years of independence, gender equality is nowhere in view.” Women are still unequal to men, but the last quarter of a century has seen tremendous improvement in their status through progress in education, in having better health and longevity of life and entry in jobs in organized sectors. While we have found no direct co-relation between increase in education with female work participation rate and representation in legislatures, education does lead to individual development and creates awareness about individual rights and is thus empowering at the individual legislatures. Despite the fact that 44 million more girls attend primary schools in developing countries than in 1990, and despite the fact that the education of girls and woman’s now on policy-making agendas in most developing nations, the gender gap is still unacceptably wide. “Girl’s education makes all the difference, not only in terms of economic development but human development,” says Mary Joy Pigozzi of UNICEF. What, then, explains such discrimination, when all indicators show that girls’ schooling is a proven effective investment for society? Perhaps the fact that individual families do not always see it as an immediate benefit. “Policy-makers should recognize the costs and benefits from the parents’ perspective,” suggests are cent World Bank discussion paper. “If parents incur greater costs to educate girls but society reaps greater gains, then governments ought to consider special measures and targeted subsidies to help girls attend school.”

Many governments now realize this. Southern Egypt's 200 girl-friendly community schools are a shining example. The Egyptian government is now integrating their best practices – active learning and child-centered class management – into the formal education system. Malawi has cut the costs of schooling for parent's by laminating school fees and abolishing compulsory uniforms. In Mashan County in China, villages and households that take effective measures to send girls to school are awarded priority for loans or development funds. Even a simple measure like building separate toilets for girls is sometimes enough to keep them in school. African and South Asian countries especially have a long way to go to close the gender gap. An average six-year-old girl in South Asia can expect to spend six years in school—three years less than a boy the same age. And when gender disparities meet urban/rural disparities, girls lose out even more. A girl based in a rural area runs three times the risk of dropping out of school than a city boy. Discrimination is reinforced in the classroom, as research shows that both male and female teachers tend to give more attention to boys, a trend now being tackled by gender sensitive training programmes.

Traditional beliefs and practices are often at the root of the gender gap. Girls may be expected to help look after home and siblings and be forced to marry young, or else their parents lack trust in the education system. One of the reasons parents lack trust is the threat of sexual harassment by male pupils or even teachers. The onset of puberty, which can occur as early as ten, is a crucial time.

In many societies, parents who willingly send their daughter to school remove her at puberty, for fear of an unwanted pregnancy, and marry her off early instead.

“Education is the right of every child ,even the girl who becomes pregnant, “says Eddah Gachukia of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)who has successfully lobbied against national policies in Africa that deny schooling to pregnant girls.

Women and Girls:Education, not Discrimination mother and child in South Asia. An educated woman has fewer and healthier children and is more likely to send them to school.

The Multiple Benefits of Girls’ Education:

- Increased family incomes
- Later marriages
- Reduced fertility rates
- Reduced infant and maternal mortality rates
- Better nourished and healthier children and families
- Greater opportunities and life choices for women(including better chances to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS)

Women and Girls: Education, not Discrimination!

WorldEducationForumDakar, Senegal

Benin now offers basic education opportunities to girls who drop out from school. Guinea has raised the marriage age and made it an offence for male teachers to harass female pupils. A promising initiative in Tanzania helps girls speak out about their problems and find solutions to overcome obstacles to their own social and academic development.“You can’t dissociate the education of girls and the education of women,” claims Aicha Bah Dialloof UNESCO, who

underlines the necessity of reaching both girls and their mothers in the same initiative. This dual approach was successful in the Kayes project in rural Mali, where an imaginative community-based campaign used riddles, rhymes and the radio to change long-held attitudes to girls and women. Once the village women were involved in literacy and income-generating activities, they supported the movement to educate girls. They made daily visits to the homes of absent daughters and marched them off to school if the parents had no good excuse! In three years, school enrolment in eighteen villages doubled to 44 per cent, and girls' enrolment rose from 18 per cent to over 33 per cent— well beyond the original goals.

“Now I am somebody; before, I felt like nobody,” is how women interviewed in northern Namibia expressed their feelings after attending literacy classes. The empowerment which literacy brings is the key to a better life. It is well known that uneducated woman has fewer and healthier children, and is more likely to send her children to school. In Brazil, for instance, illiterate women have an average of 6.5 children, whereas those with secondary education have 2.5 children.

The child of a Zambian mother with a primary education has a 25 per cent better chance of survival than a child of a mother with no education. Literacy also gives women a voice. In Bangladesh, women with a secondary education are three times more likely to attend a political meeting than are women with no education. Micro-credit schemes modeled on the Grameen Bank have literally revolutionized the lives of thousands of poor rural women. Bangladeshi women participating in the UNESCO/Grameen Bank Life-oriented Education Programme decide themselves what training they require, from accountancy, legal matters to health and family life. Ownership is a vital

element of such programmes. When group of fisherwomen in Benin decided they needed numeracy before literacy, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization adapted educational material using symbols instead of words to describe goods and services. Many non-governmental organizations promote women's issues and gender sensitivity. Associations of University Women from Nepal to New Zealand run initiatives to provide educational opportunities for teenage mothers, demystify economics or provide training in mediation skills to reduce domestic violence. Finally, female leadership is an emerging theme in education. The Women's Institute in Chile promotes educational activities to enable women to take an active public role and to deal with social and political issues. A far cry from literacy classes in a rural village, or is it? The principle is the same: empowerment, empowerment, and empowerment. Now I am somebody; before, I felt like nobody, is how Namibian women expressed their feeling safer attending literacy classes. "Gender-Sensitive" Means Boys Tools it true that "parents look after girls more" in the Caribbean, as 16-year-old Sebastian Brizan, from Trinidad and Tobago, complains? Unlike elsewhere in the developing world, boys in the Caribbean do significantly worse than girls at school. Since the 1970s, women in the Caribbean have taken greater advantage of education. As a result, they have been demonstrating higher levels of achievement. Among the trends are equal opportunities at preschool, primary and secondary education; enrolment in favor of females in the Bahamas and St Lucia; better performance of girls than boys in school on average and more females passing the secondary school entrance test. But if "gender-sensitive" means a concern for equality for boys too, rigid ideas about gender roles are going toned addressing. So is the low proportion of male teachers in the region, especially in Jamaica. "It's not popular to be

male and studious,” remarks a teacher from Barbados. “It’s not macho.” In the Caribbean, as elsewhere, there is a need to make the education system more gender-sensitive – ready to tackle obstacles to progress at school for girls and boys alike.

There is an increase in female work participation rates through women empowerment. It is presumed that increase in literacy and attainment of higher level of productivity and earnings. However, my research in Rajasthan villages showed that women’s participation in traditional economic activity i.e. agriculture is determined more by caste value systems than by educational levels. In analyzing the 1961 census data on women workers by level of education, I had found a U-shaped curve: rapid fall in participation rate with increase in the level of education from illiterate to literate up to 10 years of schooling, and a sharp increase in the rate of increase with higher secondary, college and professional education. The decline of WPR of women of the cultivating caste families in my research in Punjab in 1963 and among cultivating caste and scheduled caste families in Rajasthan in 2000, with increase in family income, was also accompanied by increase in literacy and preliminary level of education among women. Also, there is an increasing trend among high caste women to work as white-collar salary employees with higher secondary and college education and is part of the same phenomenon in analysis of the macro data.

Nowadays, education rate of women is increasing, and they are more confident and participating in politics too.

Participation of women in local government

As a result of 73rd and 74th amendments of the constitution (1992), one third of the seats in all elected bodies from the village panchayat to

the district level are reserved for women. Large majority of women who have entered these institutions are either illiterate or have very little formal education. If and when the women's reservation bill for 33% reservation of seats for women in national and state legislatures are passed, we will have a lot of grass root for women, who are getting trained in electoral politics at local levels, enter state and national level legislatures. Women's entry in electoral politics through reservation has and will quicken the pace of their political empowerment. The one-third representation of women in local bodies, however, has come about not because of increase in education among women but due to affirmative action for reservation of seats for them.

Educational level is not a criterion so far in distribution of ticket for contest in national and state legislatures or in local bodies. But its absence among elected members who become ministers and have to tackle complex development issues is being felt. For example, in Delhi state, the task of deciding and supervising planned development of the mega city is in charge of a man who is just a high-school graduate.

New Proposals for promoting girl's education

After independence, the government has introduced many policies for women education. Some of them are:

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is an effort to universalize elementary education. The main objective of this scheme is to bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and upper primary by 2010. In this scheme, the focus is on education of girls, which include provision of free textbooks to all girls up to class VIII, separate toilets; back to school campus for out of school girls, bridge courses for older

girls, recruitment of 50% women teachers, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centers in/near schools in convergence with ICDS program, teacher's sensitization programs to promote equitable learning opportunities, gender-sensitive teaching-learning materials including textbooks, intensive community mobilization efforts, 'innovative funds' per district for need-based interventions for ensuring girls' attendance and retention.

Delhi Laadli Scheme

Eligibility criteria:

The financial assistance to be given under this scheme is subject to the following eligibility conditions:-

- (a) The parent/guardian/applicant must be a bonafite resident of the National Capital Territory of Delhi for at least three years preceding the date of application. Ration Card/ Voter ID Card or any other valid identity proof should be attached with the application form.
- (b) The girl child must have been born in Delhi: Birth Certificate issued by the Registrar must be attached.
- (c) The annual income of the parents of a girl child should not exceed Rs 100,000. Income certificate or affidavit should be attached.
- (d) This scheme can be implemented in any recognized government school, MCD School, private school, public school, NDMC School or Delhi cantonment board school provided that the girl child satisfies all the above eligibility conditions.
- (e) The financial assistance under this scheme can be availed by not more than two eligible girls in a particular family.

MahilaSamakhya

The MahilaSamakhya scheme was started in 1989 to translate the goals enshrined in the National Policy on Education-1986 into a concrete program for the education and environment of women in rural areas, particularly those from socially and economically marginalized groups through informed learning. The MS scheme recognizes the centrality of education in empowering women to achieve quality. The MahilaSanghas or women's collectives at the village level provide the women a place to meet, reflect and ask questions. The program has focused awareness of the need to educate girls, which has resulted in a direct impact on enrollment and retention of girls in schools.

National Program for Education of girls at Elementary Level

For the education of under-privileged girls at elementary level of girls at elementary level, the NPEGEL has been formulated. It is a part of SSA and is implemented under its umbrella but as a distinct and separated gender component plan of SSA.

The Kasturba Gandhi BalikaVidyalaya scheme was launched by the Government of India in August, 2004 for setting up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging pre-dominantly to SC, ST, OBC and minorities in different areas. The scheme of the KBGBV ran as a separate scheme but in harmony with the SarnaShikshaAbhiyan, NPEGEL and Mahila Samakhya for the first two years, but has since 1st April 2007 merged with the SSA program as a separate component of that program. The objective of KGBV is to ensure access and quality education to girls of disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level.

Problems and issues of girl education

Indians are very conservative by nature that's why Indian girls are facing many problems in education. Their blind faith, social taboos, conservative attitude and superstition stood against the education of girls in our country. But nowadays, Indians are aware about the education of girls. But a large number of women are still in the dark. The women should be educated in the interest of our national progress. One of the major problems of girls' education is the quantitative task involved in bridging the gap between educational development of boys and girls. Many problems in relation with the development of girls' education in India are as follows:

- **Scarcity of women teachers:** In our institution, scarcity of women teachers is there. Almost all the institutions are trying to appoint more women as teachers to attract more girls and encourage them to study.
- **Lack of parental awareness:** In India, generally parents prefer boys to be educated more than girls. This lack in awareness holds back girls at home.
- **Inadequate Hostel Facilities:** Cheaper residential facilities are not available to girls, which also affects their education.
- **Discrimination of gender:** according to United Nations, which is launching a ten-year Girls' education initiative at the world education forums, girls are systematically more disadvantaged than boys on the basis of gender.

Suggestions:

Women today have come a long way from the days of yore when it was either kitchen or the husband's vibrant today that she is able to juggle not only the kitchen but highbrow social life with ease.

Today, India is brimming with success stories of women. In fact, they not only hold offices of importance in corridors of power, but they also script new and sometimes uncharted stories of success in business.

Indian women entrepreneurs are making their presence felt globally and have proved their mettle in a male-dominated world. However, they have had to brave harsh weathers to witness that ray of hope in their life. Despite all the social hurdles, many women have become successful in the field they have chosen. They have achieved this with their hard work, diligence, competence and will power. Their ability to learn quickly, persuasiveness, open style of problem solving, willingness to take risks and chances, ability to motivate people, knowing how to win and lose gracefully have given them an edge in the business world. This potential needs to be recognized and utilized in productive and service sectors for development of the nation. Here are some suggestions for women education so that they can be recognized better in the society:

- **Educational Facilities:** Despite the fact that more than 44 million girls attend primary schools in developing countries than in 1990, despite the fact that the education of girls and women is now developing nations. Thus, schooling facilities should be provided to the girls near to where they live.

The Tribune (2010). *Rich, Educated Couples less interested in Girl
Child: Expert*, May 31, pg. 03.

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