

Instilling the Awareness of Women Equality in Public via Educational Programmes

A Telescopic Indian View

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Abstract

It is more than true that Indian women have gained ground in the struggle for equality in male dominated Indian society since the Independence of India. Despite such achievements, a vast majority of Indian women are still now facing so many conventional problems. That's why they as compared to men are left out of the process of modernization as well as globalization. Leaving a meager number of urban and suburban women, Indian women are still humiliated almost daily. It refers to unempowerment of women in the terms of education, decision-making power, assets, legal right and political representation etc. To empower Indian women in real sense, in all the fields and levels, education for women and girls may be proved as a panacea in making them recognized the potentiality of themselves through the process of self-development and enhancing the sense of self.

Key words: *Women Empowerment, Attitude and Education*

Introduction

From time immemorial, the women in the developing countries especially in India were treated as a sort of thing. Her place in the society was not at par with men. In 'Manusmriti' the ancient Hindu code book, the status granted to women is quite visible and she was ranked to the lowest rung of humanity as she was treated as par with slave and animals by proprietors of Hindu Dharma. This way, our mothers, sisters and even great grand mothers were treated just like animals that can't move or do anything at their own will. Dr. Ambedkar, the father of Indian constitution, was proved to be dynamite to this existing phenomenon via codifying the common civil code for Hindus and stated that the Hindu women were tied up with the bondage of superstitions which they carried till their death in the names of Sanskar i.e. baseless traditions. As per Hindu Shastras, woman is bond slave of her father when she was young, to her husband when she is middle age and to her son when she is a mother. As in Europe, several efforts were made in the past to bring the dignity of women and inaugurated the era of equality and liberty by preaching that all beings are equal in the eyes of God.

Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the third International women's conference at Nairobi in 1985. The conference defined women empowerment as a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. Today, India stands on the second rank in the world population and next to China. The sex ratio (i.e. number of females per thousand males) of population has become 933 at 0.00 hours on 1st March 2001 rising from 927 as at the 1991 Census. This ratio of women in total population of India indicates that women hold the half majority of total Indian population. Even though they lag behind men in all respects, it is obvious from the previous related studies that little initiative has always been taken to promote true gender equality or to remove the barriers that prevent women from availing of the public facilities usually offered by government whether central or state. The government has been trying to locate the reasons why the performance of females lies lower as compared to males. It is high time to put a greater control in the hands of women for their political, economic or social empowerment in a country like India for elevating the status of women in Indian society. Gupta (1976) is of view that with the advent of independence, Indian women were granted the right to all political activities with men and their participation in the political activities of the country has also increased but it has failed to make any profound impact on women's participation in the actual decision-making process. Singh (1984) points out that the women's under-representation is conspicuous in a situation when the nation does not discourage women seeking the highest position of political power. Kamath (1991) says that "a woman premier was at the helm of India's affairs for almost two decades, yet in general, women's

involvement in politics is still low-key". Bhoite (1988) in the article 'Women and Democracy in India ' finds a wide chasm between de jure and de facto enjoyment of political rights by women in India . On one hand, women cast their votes in large numbers, take part in agitational political activities, but on the other hand, they lag behind in enjoying power positions and occupying prestigious political offices. According to her, the right to vote is a deceptive indicator of democracy. Sinha (1989) opines that it is an international experience that despite loud proclamation of constitutional equality between men and women, the few women who enter politics seldom enjoy political power or are involved in decision-making process. It is mandatory that women should possess educational and vocational abilities.

Empowerment: What?

The word or concept of 'Empowerment' comes from the patriarchal discourse because patriarchy has been obsessed by power. Women as a group have been or are devoid of that power. In other words, empowerment is transformation process or freedom to choose and action in economic, social and political fields. Borain (2004) rightly remarked, "Empowerment is the process of challenging power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of works in these directions". This involves a range of different questions:

- How do women perceive themselves and how are they perceived by intimates as well as distant others in society?; (ii) How do they treat themselves and how are they treated by others?; (iii) Are they able to make key decision about matters relating to themselves (their own well-being) and to their children, particularly their daughter?; (iv) What kind of say do they have in other aspects of decision-making within the family?; and (v) Do they have any influence in matters relating to the community and society in which they live and is this influence decisive or merely symbolic?

Need for Women Empowerment

Gender bias continued despite the many eloquent words opportunity. And among the women who are trying to stand on their own feet in a male-dominated world, there were differences of caste, creed and social class. As women have achieved success in the so-called man's world in all the fields ranging from education to industry and professions. It is interesting to note that in last decade, the concept words arrive periodically on the horizon. The patriarchy has been obsessed with power, the word empowerment points to the male ego as the man sees himself even now in the role of the provider. True empowerment relates to how a woman interacts with the situations around her and how she discovers fountains of energy within her in the existing grief-filled situations. Education can play a vital role to raise women's consciousness about themselves and in forming an association with other people whose consciousness is also being awakened is genuine empowerment. In nutshell, the real empowerment is the fountain of energy from within and it manifests itself in social action and aims at social change.

National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic policy, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73 rd and 74 th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

Goal and Objectives

The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this policy include:

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.; (ii) The *de-jure* and *de-facto* enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres- political, economic, social, cultural and civil.; (iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.; (iv) Equal access to women to health care quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.;(v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women; (vi) Changing societal and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.; (vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.; (viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child; and (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organisations. **Source:** jchittoor@csdms.org.

Rights of the Girl Child

Special provisions for girl child can eliminate all types of discrimination against the girl child and violation of her rights. If we undertake the strong measures both preventive and punitive within and outside the family. These would relate specifically to strict enforcement of laws against prenatal sex selection and practices of female infanticide, child marriage, child abuse and child prostitution etc. This would foster a positive image of the girl child within the family and outside. These measures would have special emphasis on the needs of girl child and earmarking of substantial investments in the related areas to food and nutrition, health and education, and in vocational education, while implementing the programmes to eliminate the child labour, there should be special focus on girl children.

Role of Education in Women Empowerment

The following programmes should be implemented for bringing about the substantial changes in women empowerment upto a large extent:

- (i) Equal access to educational facilities for women and girl should be ensured; (ii) Universal/compulsory education should be provided to both sexes equally. It can eliminate the discrimination among male and females; and will also be helpful in eradicating high illiteracy rate among women.;
- (iii) Gender-sensitive educational system should be created to encounter the existing gender discrimination.; (iv) Govt. should try to implement various schemes to increase enrolment and retention rate of girls in the school/college.; (v) Govt. should bring about changes in the existing theoretical and examination oriented approach to improve the quality of education and to facilitate life long learning as well as development of occupation/vocation/technical skills among women.; (vi) Govt. at central and state level should introduce several scholarship policies especially to girls for reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education. Govt. should increase the share of the budgetary resources for women schemes (Banerjee and Roy, 2004).; (vii) Special policies should be introduced to girls belonging to the weaker sections including the scheduled caste/scheduled tribes/ other backward classes/minorities.; (viii) Educationists should develop 'gender sensitive curricula' at all the level of educational system in order to address sex stereotyping as one of the causes of gender discrimination.; (ix) Seminars/conferences over women empowerment should be organized time to time.; (x) Women equality awareness via role playing method in rural areas.;
- (xi) Slogans for women equality awareness through Car, Bus and Truck etc.; (xii) Celebrity appearance should be in campaign of women equality programmes.; (xiii) Encountering the problems of women equality via shortfilms, documentaries and movies.; (xiv) Women empowerment programmes during NCC

(National Cadet Corps) Camp and NSS (National Service Scheme) Camp should be made.; (xv) Organising the drawing competitions for women equality awareness in children.; (xvi) Organising the poets meeting in rural/urban schools for women equality awareness via poem recitation.; (xvii) Organising the seminar for women equality awareness in schools.; (xviii) Organising the national and international seminar/conferences about awareness of women empowerment.; (xix) Organising the poster display competition for women equality awareness in school/college.; (xx) Banners, Posters or boards at every petroleum pump, railway station and bus stand for women empowerment.; (xxi) Women empowerment programmes by gurus (religious persons) via Astha Channel, Radio or Newspaper etc.; and (xxii) Women empowerment programmes via content area prescribed for school/college children.

In nutshell, education as considered a key factor in women empowerment can eliminate the gender differences and can also develop 'gender sensitiveness'/'feminism' among the school/college going children (future assets of nation) at the large extent.

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