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Role of education in empowering rural women for sustainable development in India

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Abstract

India has been a country of villages and the Indian women are being treated as goddess but their present situation is very poor in all the ways. They are suffering with problems since their birth. Tradition and customs are also against to women. Many NGOs and government are trying to uplift their lives but these efforts are not sufficient. Education is key barrier in their growth and empowerment. Still the fact remains that our country is the home to the largest number of illiterate population in the world. About one-third of India's population is currently functionally illiterate and about 50% of the entire adult female population cannot read or write. The rate of illiteracy is particularly high in rural areas, especially among women. Women's education is critical to the largely development of any country. In India, though much emphasis is being laid on the gender equality in terms of education, yet discrimination in access to education does exist. There is a rural and urban divide in access to education for women. In this paper all these problem are being discussed and a suitable suggestions is being made to overcome the problem.

Keywords: women, education, empowerment, rural, sustainable development.

Introduction

Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training or research. Education is characterised in two parts, i.e. formal education and informal education. Formal education is the learning of the skills which we get from schools and institutions whereas informal education is the learning that goes on in daily life. Naturally informal education persons learned from relatives, societies and their friends in other hand formal education is required for empowering the individual with some special skills which make them distinguished in the society. Women constitute almost half of the human race but comparatively education level of women is lower than men. After the sixty years of independence India is so far to provide full formal education to all. In 2005 Indian government passes an act to provide education to all and definitely it is working and seeing in society. But still there are several barriers in case of women education, so they are lacking in different sector including employment.

Urban women are in some better position in compare to rural women but they are beyond to men.

Table 1: Demographic profile of education

Gender	Urban	Rural
Male	93.79%	86.39%
Female	79.92%	58.75%

Source: Ministry of human resource development

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Women education in India has been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women is very limited in the country. Women can play a very important role in the development of the country as they represented the half of population. This is believed that female education affected by of gender inequality, traditions of society which

pay as barrier in access of education to women and this resulted into increase in poverty and backwardness of the country. Educating girl leads to a number of social benefits including women empowerment. Presently women in India are facing several problems due to lack of education such as domestic violence, cruelty of men, gender discrimination, discrimination in the distribution of power and work, economic exploitation, sexual exploitation etc. Education is the key for women empowerment, prosperity, social development, and welfare of community in all manners. Women are oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walk of life.

In order to fight against the socially constructed gender biases, women have to swim against the system that requires more strength. Such strength comes from the process of empowerment and this will come only with education. Rural areas are more backward in terms of facilities, income generation, distribution of food and health so there is a huge need of education. Backwardness of rural areas is only because of lack of education of men and women. Somehow men community involve themselves in physical work employment but women do not involve themselves in any kind of income generating employment so as an observation statement it can easily said that rural development comes from women education and empowerment.

Women empowerment also aims to find out the effect of education on SC and ST women in rural areas. Empowerment of women involves many things – economic opportunity, social equality and personal rights. Women are deprived of those rights, often as a matter of tradition. In rural areas, women are generally not perceived to have any meaningful income generation capacity and hence they are relegated mainly to household duties and cheap labour. Without the power to work and earn a good income their voices are silenced.

The realities of rural life in India are difficult to comprehend. A majority of villages do not have sustainable economies and only through oppression of women and caste system of society. In this situation the NGOs and government officials should support to women education which can give a better life for them.

Education is a path of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life.

Historical Development of Women Education

The history of Indian women can be divided into three periods i.e. Ancient, Medieval and Modern. The East India Company ruled over India since 1757 to 1947, which is called modern period. During this period institutions were opened to promote the education of men in modernized way but nothing was done to promote women education. In 1858, the British government took upon itself the direct responsibility of the administration but in spite of this, they did not pay any attention towards the education of women of this country. Savitribai Phule started the first girl's school way back in 1847 with just 13 girls. Later, she started an exclusive school for 'untouchable' girls in 1852, braving the stiff opposition from vested interests and casteist elements, who believed that women should be confined to the four walls of the house and had no role or right in society. In 1904, Annie Besant established Central Hindu Girls School at Banaras and Prof. Karue established SNDT Women's University at Poona for the promotion of women education.

After independence, India's national government introduced some committee's and commissions for the development of women education in India, i.e. Radhakrishnan Commission or University education Commission (1948) Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh committee (1959), Smt. Hansa Mehta Committee (1962), M. Bhaktvatsalam Committee to look into the causes of Public Support particularly in Rural Area for girls Education and to public Corporation, Kothari Commission (1964-64), Resolution on the National policy on education (1968), Report of the Committee on the status of women in India (1974), Challenge of Education (1985), National policy on Education (1986), Programme of Action (1986), and (1992), etc. On the other hand, to develop the primary education and to achieve the aim of universalisation of primary education upto age level 6-14 years, some schemes or programmes like, OBB, DPEP, SSA, NLM, National Programme of Nutritional Support of Primary Education (NPNSPE) or (Mid-Day Meals), RTE Act 2009 and Knowledge Commission etc. were introduced to achieve the national goal i.e. hundred percent literacy. Despite these government efforts to the education, still women are lacking behind than men. Women of India generally remain uneducated as a result of ignorance; women become victims of man dominated society.

Review of Literature

According to Prof. M.K. Ghadoliya empowerment of the women can be done through Self Help Groups. He in his case study found that - in view of low literacy rate of women and the gigantic task of educating rural women a suitable strategy will have to be planned. The major task is to identify the areas where these groups in fact, are facing problems because at this stage only the problem solving adult learning technique will attract these rural poor to improve their working and income. The success of any strategy of women empowerment depends upon the following factors:

1. Level of education, hard work
2. Social custom
3. Family planning, small family
4. Health, medical services, cleanliness
5. Environment, tree growing, kitchen gardening

According to Robert Jensen, television is very helpful in increasing the status of women in India. In his paper "The Power of TV, Cable Televisions and Women Status in India" has found that the introduction of television appears in general to have had large effects on Indian society. This is particularly the case for gender, since this is an area where the lives of rural viewers differ greatly from those depicted on most popular shows. By virtue of the fact that the most popular Indian serials take place in urban settings, women depicted on these shows are typically much more emancipated than rural women.

Scrase (2002) reports that several of his respondents thought television might lead women to question their social position and might help the cause of female advancement.

According to Anju and Sidney (2002), in their study measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development, attempted to outline the most promising methodological approaches to measuring and analyzing women's empowerment. They review major strands of theoretical, methodological and empirical literature on empowerment from the fields of economics,

sociology, anthropology, and demography, and attempt to summarize what we know and do not know about what leads to women’s empowerment, and its consequences for development and poverty reduction. Based on their analysis, they provide some concrete recommendations regarding where the field stands in defining, conceptualizing, and measuring empowerment, and what might be next steps for utilizing and refining existing frameworks, collecting data and conducting analyses, and incorporating approaches from related literatures .

According to Shakuntala (2005), in her book *Empowering women: An alternative strategy from rural India*, pointed out that the more vital inhibiting factors leading to the disadvantaged position of women are their ignorance, powerlessness and vulnerability. She emphasized the need for bringing about an attitudinal change among women as the most important step towards empowerment. According to Mr. Mukut Sonowal, modern education and facilities have influenced much in women empowerment. But still rural women are lacking behind in comparison to women living in urban areas. Moreover, women of SC, ST communities living in village areas are more lacking behind in comparison to general women living in these places. On the other hand we did not think about the rural development without empowering the women. There is difference in equality and vulnerability of women in all sectors – Economic, Social, Political, educational, Health-Care, Nutrition, Right and Legal etc. Education is the main barrier for women empowerment and rural development.

Present Status of Women in Rural India

Women are the centres of the any family. It is an established fact that there are three evil in the social status of urban and

rural women in India. Illiteracy, Poverty and Illness still provide huge challenges in rural areas and women are among the most vulnerable groups. Due to the circumstances women contribute to the economy and to the combating poverty through both remunerated and unremunerated work at home, in the community and at the workplace.

Table 2: Status of Indian Women In Comparison with the Women of other Developing Countries

India	China	United States	Pakistan	United Kingdom
43.5%	58.5%	82.5%	28%	74.5%

Source: Ministry of human resource development

The Government of India launched a Centrally Sponsored Scheme “Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education” in 2008-09. According to the scheme, a sum of ` 3,000/- is deposited in the name of the eligible girls as fixed deposit, who are entitled to withdraw it along with interest thereon on reaching 18 years of age and she should have already passed 10th class examination. The scheme covers (i) all girls belonging to SC/ST communities, who pass class VIII and (ii) all girls who pass VIII examination from Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (irrespective of whether they belong to SC/ST) and enroll in class IX in Government, Government-aided and local Body schools. The objective of the Scheme is to establish an enabling environment to reduce the drop-outs and to promote the enrolment of girl child belonging mainly to SC/ST communities in secondary schools. 15.70 lakh girls have been benefited so far under the scheme. So far 3.11 lakh girls have benefited in the year 2012-13.

Table 3

Girls Education at glance- 2010-2011								
Enrolment, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Gender Parity Index (GPI)		All Categories			SC		ST	
		Total (Boys+ Girls)	Girls	% of Girls	Girls	% of Girls	Girls	% of Girls
Enrolment {in lakhs}	School Education	2485.68	1169.91	47.07	221.41	18.93	111.97	4.50
	Open School Education	4.76	1.51	31.70	0.15	10.57	0.16	11.12
	Total (School Education)	2490.44	1171.42	47.04	221.56	18.91	112.13	9.57
	Higher Education	266.51	111.30	41.76				
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)	Class (I-V)	116.0	116.7		132.7		136.7	
	Class (VI-VIII)	85.5	83.1		90.6		87.0	
	Class (IX-X)	65.0	60.8		67.5		49.1	
	Class (XI-XII)	39.3	36.1		36.1		24.8	
	Higher Education	18.8	16.5					
Gender Parity Index (GPI)	Class (I-V)		1.01		1.01		1.00	
	Class (VI-VIII)		0.95		0.97		0.96	
	Class (IX-X)		0.88		0.91		0.86	
	Class (XI-XII)		0.86		0.90		.76	
	Higher Education		0.79					

Source: Statistics of School Education 2010-11/ National Institute of Open School (NIOS), Available on ministry of HRD

Table 4

S. No.	States/India	Rate of increase in literacy rate (females)	
1	Andhra Pradesh	17.71	9.31
2.	Chhattisgarh	24.33	8.74
3.	Haryana	15.26	11.04
4.	Himachal Pradesh	15.16	9.18
5.	Karnataka	12.53	11.26
6.	Madhya Pradesh	20.94	9.73
7.	Maharashtra	14.71	8.45
8.	Orissa	15.83	13.85
9.	Punjab	12.95	7.98

10.	Rajasthan	23.41	8.81
11.	Tamil Nadu	13.10	9.43
12.	Uttar Pradesh	17.85	17.04
13.	Uttarakhand	18.00	11.07
	India	14.39	11.79

Compiled from: Census of India 2001-Provisional Population Totals Chapter 7, Census of India-2011-Provisional Population.

It has always been a constant endeavor of the Department of Higher Education to frame different schemes and projects to ensure larger participation and enrolment of women. Therefore, reducing the gender gap in higher education is a focus area. There has been a phenomenal growth in enrolment of women students in higher education in the country. The share of girl's enrolment which was less than 10% of the total enrolment on the eve of independence has been increased to 41.50% in the beginning of the academic year 2010-11. The following table gives the data relating to Enrolment and number of girls colleges in Higher Education in the Country.

Discussion and Suggestion

It is challenges to providing higher education to rural Indian women must be put in the context of the demographics and cultural traditions of the country. The Indian Government has made heroic efforts to provide universal literacy and primary education. The literacy rate (ages 5 & up) of India increased to 62% in 1997 from 52.21% in 1991, but the 1997 female literacy rate was just 50% and the rural female literacy rate was just 43%. The adult rates (ages 15 and up) were 54% total, 40.7% for women. The total enrolment in secondary schools in 1997-98 was still only 50% of the eligible population of which 44% were girls in primary school, 40% in middle school and 37.1% in secondary school. So the percentage of students who qualify for higher education is still small, particularly among female students. On the other hand, as of 1997-98 there are 229 universities in the country, 16 central universities and remaining operated by the states. And there are some 9,274 colleges, 7,199 of them colleges for general education and 2,075 colleges for professional education. Together they enroll some 7 million students and employ 331,000 teachers. In addition the Indira Gandhi National Open University provides flexible higher education opportunities to large segments of the population who have no access to the colleges and universities. Established in 1987, it now has 47 programs consisting of 553 courses and 1999, it reached over 172,000 students.

There is some suggestive feature of MHRD to increase the level of women education in India.

Responsive Education System to the Girls

1. Ensure access to schools
2. Increase proportion of woman teachers
3. Training to enhance gender sensitivity of teachers
4. Develop gender sensitive and relevant curriculum & textbooks.
5. provide supportive structures such as Early Childhood
6. Care and Education centres
7. provide alternative learning facilities
8. ensure basic facilities in schools-toilets and drinking water
9. Generate Community Demand for Girls' Education

Generate Community Demand for Girls' Education

1. Motivation and mobilization of parents and community
2. Enhance the role of woman and mothers in school related activities
3. Ensure people's participation in school committees
4. Strengthen links between the school, teachers and community

Women Education is the need of the today in rural area. A mother is the first and best teacher of a child. If she is not educated how well the child can do? She can nurture the brain and talent of her child better than any mentor in the world. Education is something which helps everywhere and is never wastage of time efforts or money. It will always pay you back. When education reaches rural area's women it leads to eradication of the evils present in the society. The best part is that educating the girl makes her independent to lead a life with the head held high, she can be the support to her family, and she can protest against dowry, she is less prone to domestic violence or threats to left alone

Conclusion

Men and women complement each other. If men were supposed to handle outside stuff then women were more responsible for internal affairs. The only difference in this notion is, today women are equally competent behind the veils and outside world. They are more confident and one can find them in every possible sphere of human's life. No male bastion is untouched by females and that's a wonderful sign of strides made by women. Education is one composite single variable, which has the capacity to transform many odds turning in favour of girls more specially so in the rural India. Therefore, an exclusive emphasis on girls' education is necessary. Education for adolescent girls is constraint due to many factors; the most prominent of them is non-availability of infrastructure and schools. Secondly, the travel time taken in reaching school, fear of crime and unknown eventuality would raise therefore provision of public transport exclusively for girl child is necessary.

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