



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 8.4
IJAR 2023; 9(2): 83-88
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 04-11-2022
Accepted: 09-12-2022

Dr. Shikha Saini
Assistant Professor,
Department of Political
Science, DAV College for Girls,
Yamuna Nagar, Haryana,
India

Women and education in India: A historical analysis

Dr. Shikha Saini

Abstract

An attempt is being made in this paper to know the educational status of women education in India in a historical purpose. An analysis of the socio-religious set-up and the women role in the socio-religious and political set-up of the ancient, medieval and modern India is very comprehensively done to know the Indian perspective of women education in socio-cultural and historic sense. A special emphasis is given to analysis the level and status of women education in Vedic India and the impact of the foreigner invasions and Islamic rule during the medieval period. The impact of the western education, philanthropist efforts of Christian missionary and British bureaucracy and the responses of the Indian reformist and their impact on the education level of the India women are duly focused upon in this paper. The analysis of the policies, programmes and the special initiatives of the government of India is done in a comprehensive manners, in nutshell this paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the issues and challenges to which the women education has been facing in India from the Medieval period.

Keywords: Education, women, school, Vedic, Islam, British, bureaucracy, westernization, society, Indic, values, government, policy, programme

Introduction

Education of an individual is defined as a process and activity that results into total or overall development of an individual. Education plays the major role in the every one's career and life settlement. It provides a skill for earning and knowledge of living and prepares an individual to become a better part of the family, society and nation. The last decade of 20th Century witnessed the triumph of democracy and advent of liberalization; privatization and globalization which emphasized on the spreading of education and education become the grammar of the global governance. Under the unique initiatives of UNO various international agencies like UNESCO, Education for All (EFA), Development Alternatives with Women (DAWN) International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI) United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and other region and country specific organizations have been working to educate every individual irrespective of their caste, color, class gender and country, universal efforts to educate individual are aimed to make the human society better. (Pandit Madusudan, 2011, also see: D. Padmawati, 2008, Mehta Asha Kapoor, 1999) ^[21, 22, 23] As we are aware of the fact that women education is one of the core are on which International governance is focusing upon and some of the above organizations are working on the education and skill enhancement of women solely. Although as per the established norms of the Indic values and heritage women were free to participate in the every sphere of life along with their counter partners, we have the examples of the women, rulers and warriors and saints from the ancient times, which are thousands year older than the emergence of the western civilization. (R.S. Sharma, 1983, also see; Jayshree Dubey and Anuradha Sharma, 2011) ^[18, 19] However, foreigners invasions and the political change during the medieval period has had deep impacts on the socio-religious and cultural set-up of the India Society and Indic values. The inherited values of Indian civilization like respecting the dignity, honour of women and not harming of children and commons by the enemy Kings and their armies and even not harming to the commons after defeating enemy King or annexing the his Kingdom have had ended in the middle ages as foreigners invaders of the Arab, Turak and Mughal origin attacked India.

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Shikha Saini
Assistant Professor,
Department of Political
Science, DAV College for Girls,
Yamuna Nagar, Haryana,
India

The Islamic invaders created a sense of insecurity as they looted the women along with the property of Hindus. The emotional set-back to which the Hindus families particularly of North –India faced due to the abduction and looting of their women folk by the Islamic invader have had very negative impacts on the Indian society. (Upadhyay Neelam and Rekha Pandey, 1990) ^[17] The Islamic rulers attempted to impose their coercive norms on the Hindu population, however, the resistance of the Hindus to save their culture and women from the Islamic rulers and norms have results into the more rigidity and conservatism. The evil practices like child marriage, Pardah and infanticide is sad be developed in the middle ages and it was an attempt of the Hindu society to save their women and honour from the Islamic rulers. (Jagannath, N.V., 1996) ^[20].

The Modern India witnessed the Western Invasion and the establishment of the British rule or supremacy over India. The parameter to which the British Bureaucracy and scholars adopted to measure the socio-religious, economic and political set-up of the Indian society was again alien. The cultural values, heritage and the glory of Indian history were not only ignored by the British but they attempted to establish the supremacy of western values, culture and history over the Indian values, culture and history. A selective approach was adopted by the British bureaucracy and scholars to present a very gloomy picture of history, culture and social set-up of Indian society. The British rule and the western values were presented as a bone for the upliftment of the Indian society. Western education was presented as a very effective mode to transfer the traditional society of India into a modern one. Western and English medium education was presented as a scientific education and for the promotion of English education Christianity missionaries were employed at mass in India, the Indian knowledge system was not only ignored but every attempt was made by the colonial power to alienate the Indian from its rich heritage and ancient knowledge system.

Women Education in Ancient period

Free and equal access to education for both sexes seems to have been available during the early Vedic period. Women than enjoyed equality with men in pursuing their interests freely and had the right to participate in academic discourses in field such as astronomy, philosophy, logic, mathematics and geography. Love marriage (Gandharva Vivah) and remarriage of widows were permitted. In this period, both husband and wife were joint owners of the family property. Both the girls and boys were permitted to Vedic studies. An educated Vedic woman had a voice in the selection of their husbands. The unmarried person was not eligible to participate in Vedic sacrifices. In the Upanishad period, there was a large member of Brahmavadnis (Gargi, Maitrayee etc.) who devoted their life in the study of philosophy. (Mishra, R.S, 1984) ^[24].

Women Education Medieval Period

The decline in the status of women witnessed with the foreign invasions i.e., during medieval period. Sati, Child marriages and ban on widow remarriages became part of social life. The Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent brought the pardah practice in the Indian society. Polygamy was widely practiced especially among Muslim and Hindu Kshatriya rulers. The evil practice of the Jauhar (Practice of the Voluntary immolation of all the wives and daughters of

defeated warriors) among the Rajputs or Rajasthan become prevalent only after the Islamic invasions. This practice was followed by the royal women from the family of the defeated Hindu kings to avoid capture and consequent molestation by the foreign invaders. The negligence of education and lowering of the marriage age during the Middle Ages brought disastrous consequences upon the position and status of women. Remarriage of women was stopped and they were asked to devote themselves to ascetic life at home. (Poonia, Meenakshi, 2011) ^[11].

Women Education in Modern India

A new era of challenges and struggle against the sophisticate and intellectual encroachment of the British Empire through the Missionary Education was faced by the Indians with the establishment of British Empire. Although the British support and rule provided every facility to the Christian Missionary to spread the Christianity and Western values through the mission schools, colleges and hospitals, however, the indigenous social reformists and the elite made the strong arrangements and some of them even dedicate their life to uplift the status of women through the Indian efforts and Indian education institutions and to control the western influence over the Indian Society.

The opening of the separate schools for girls by the Christian Missionaries was immediately followed by similar efforts of the Indian reformers. The opening of Hindu College in 1816 in Calcutta to promote women education was a major step in this direction. The Christian Missionaries under the guidance of Miss Cooke made arrangements for the education of women in 1812. She opened thirty schools and made efforts to attract the girls from the upper caste Hindu families, her schools also enjoyed the patronage of Hindu gentlemen and staffed by Brahmin Pundits, however, she failed to attract girls from the higher castes. (Vishalakshmi, R, 1985) ^[14] One of the most important schools for girls was Hindu Balika Vidyalaya opened in 1849 in Calcutta by J.E. Drinkwater Bethune, legal member of the Governor-General's Council and President of the Council of Education. (Bagala, J.C, 1956) ^[10].

The matter of women's education remained an important issue for the British Government also. Lord Dalhousie, Governor-General and of India from 1848 to 1856 declared that no single change was likely to produce more important and beneficial consequences than female education. Sir Charles Wood, President of the Board of Central Education from 1853-1855, issued an education dispatch in 1854 that detailed a shift in Government Policy, from providing higher education for the elites to support for mass education in the vernacular. This new focus on a total system of education was aimed to include both sexes. With the opening of Bethune School in 1849 the efforts of British Government for the education of India women had been initiated. The Education Commission of 1882 further recommended the expansion of girls education with the result that the post of Inspectors of Girls Schools were created and a few training schools for women teachers were also established. By the end of the nineteenth century there were 12 colleges, 467 secondary schools and 5628 primary schools for girls with a total enrolment of 4,44,470 students. Miss Mary Carpenter, who visited India twice between 1866 and 1869, was able to secure a grant of \$12000 per annum, for five years on matching basis, for the establishment of

normal schools. It was in 1868 that the Madras, Bombay and Uttar Pradesh Government recommended to the Government of India, to open normal schools, a step necessary for the promotion of female education. (Mathura, Y.B, 1973) ^[15] However, the philanthropist efforts and the service to which the missionaries and the British bureaucracy were making were aimed at westernization of the Indian society.

The real breakthrough, however, came only after the Indian renaissance or when the Indian elite and the social reformist took the responsibility of the educating their women. First the Brahm Samaj, then the Prarthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj then all supported women education. In North India women education was encouraged by Arya Samaj under the teachings of Swami Dayanand Saraswati. By the end of the nineteenth century, progressive Arya Samajists recognized the importance of involving women in their reform efforts. The Jullundhar Samaj opened the Arya Kanya Pathshala (Girls School) in 1890 with a lady Principal in charge.

In 1854 there were approximately 626 girls' schools. In 1872 Carpenter Keshub Sen, and other English women, Annette Akroyd, set up a normal school. Later Akroyd broke with Keshub and worked with another group of Brahmanas to establish the Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya (Hindu Girls School). By 1878 this school had merged with the older Bethune school to become Bethune College, an affiliated college of Calcutta University, by 1900 the Sharada Sadan had trained eighty women who were able to earn their own living through teaching or nursing. (Nelhercol, Arthur. H, 1963) ^[3].

Modern India witnessed many campaign and movements launched by the social reformers, educated elites, socio-religious organization and the philanthropist efforts of British bureaucracy and Christian missionary with a mission to spread Christianity through education. These resulted not only in the legislative provisions to protect the women against structural violence and the challenges which were imposed by the socio-political change due the establishment of British imperialism.

Women Education in Independent India

As an independent nation from its very beginning Indian leadership was a very conscious for the role of women in the development of the nation as they are the half of nation's population and the establishment of the self-reliant nation was not possible without the women participation. Education institutions were the vital place to inculcate national ideas among the children and to prepare them as responsible citizen.

The University Education Commission (1948-49) has made certain recommendation regarding women's education. But the most important development in the field of women's education after independence was the setting up of a National Committee for Women's Education in 1958 under the Chairmanship of Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh. This committee recommended social measures to bridge the gap between girls' education and boys' education at the primary and secondary levels. It strongly recommended that special funds must be allotted in the various plan periods for furthering and developing the programme for girls' education.

The Union Ministry of Education set up the National Council for Women's Education in 1959, Most of the state governments have established state councils for women's

education. Smt. Hansa Mehta Committee was appointed in 1961 by the National Council for women's education to examine the problem of curriculum for girls at all stages of education. Another committee was appointed by the council in 1965 with Shri M. Bhaktavatsalan as the Chairman to look into the girls' education. The Education Commission (1964-66) also made valuable recommendations regarding women's education in India. The National Committee (1974) studied various aspect of the status of women and their education.

Women education was on the top priority of the Indian leadership and a special emphasis on the women education was recognized in the Third Five Year Plan (1961-66) hence a largest share of the expending on the social sector was allocated to the education sector. The emphasis on women education was continued during the fourth and fifth five year plans, a strategic programme for functional literacy to equip women with skills and knowledge to perform their functions as good housewives was also recommended in the Fifth five year plan. The fifth five year programme was implemented during the International Decade for women and the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) submitted its report "Towards Equality" during the fifth five programme. It is pertinent to mention that CSWI had comprehensively examined the rights and status of women in the context of changing social, economic and political conditions and the challenges relating to the advancement of the women. CSWI reported that dynamics of the social change and development had adversely affected a large section of women and had created new imbalances and disparities and to educate women was felt to be the immediate need of the nation. (Government of India, 1986) ^[4]. In the Sixth Five Year plan the development of women was treated as separate issue from the family welfare and a special chapter on the development of women was documented in this plan. According to the document four strategies, namely Economic independence, educational advancement, access to health care and family planning and supplementing income for tribal women were emphasized. (Desai Neera and Amit Gupta, 1987) ^[12] During the Seventh Five year period, Indian Parliament adopted a National Education Policy in 1986 ^[4], which included a chapter on Education for Women Equality. (Government of India, 1985) ^[7]. In the Eighth Five Year Plan, strategy for women development covered new trust- areas such as improving women education, database, enumeration of women workers and provision of supportive services, encouraging women organizations and stepping up social security measures. The government also initiated certain programmes such as supplement income generation for women, girls education, equal remuneration for equal work, hostel for working women and crèches for their children, functional legal literacy, family-welfare, promotion and strengthening of self-employment, review and streamlining laws concerning women, etc. (Government of India 1992) ^[6] A comprehensive strategy to empower women through the education was designed in the Ninth Five year Plan and an approach paper for the women empowerment was brought out by the Planning Commission and it was accepted by the National Development Council. The important objective was that women empowerment should be the focus of planning process, empowerment at the outset, means choices for women and opportunities to avail these choices. The supportive environment should be provided to women

at all stages by the home, school, religion, government and work place.

To boost up the programme for women development, a National Perspective Plan for women (1988-2000) was brought out by the Department of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Human Resources Development. Education of girls was given top priority and awareness regarding the necessity of educating girls so as to prepare them to contribute effectively to the socio economic development of the country. (Anand Anita, 1997) ^[1].

Government Policies and Women Education

Although educational development was on the priority of the Indian leadership from the independence onwards, the special requirement of women education was recognized in the Third Five Year Plan (1961 – 66) and the largest share for expending on social welfare services was allocated to the education sector. The emphasis on women education was continued during the Fourth and Fifth Year Plan also (1969 – 1974). The basic policy was to promote women's welfare as the base of operation. The outlay on family planning was stepped up to reduce the birth rate through education.

The Fifth Five Year plan also recommended a strategic programme of functional literacy to equip women with skills and knowledge to perform their functions as good housewives. The Fifth Five Year Plan was implemented during the International Decade for Women and the submission of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) entitled "Towards Equality" also took place at the same time. The CSWI had comprehensively examined the rights and status of women in the context of changing social and economic conditions and the problems relating to the advancement of women. The CSWI reported that the dynamics of social change and development had adversely affected a large section of women and had created new imbalances and disparities and to educate women was felt to be the immediate need of the nation. (Government of India, 1986) ^[4].

In the Sixth Five Year Plan the development of women was treated as a separate issue from the family welfare. Until then they were provided welfare services along with other weaker and handicapped sections. It was, for the first time that a chapter on development of women had been documented in the Sixth Five Year Plan. According to the document four strategies namely, Economic independence, educational advancement, access to health care and family planning and supplementing income of tribal women, were emphasised. (Desai, Neera and Gupta, Amit Kumar, 1987) ^[12].

During the Seventh Five Year Plan period, the Indian Parliament adopted a National Policy on Education 1986 ^[4], which included a chapter on Education for Women's Equality. (Government of India, 1985) ^[7] The Eighth Five Year Plan strategy for women's development covered new thrust-areas such as improving women's education, database, enumeration of women workers, and provision of supportive services, encouraging women's organisations and stepping up social security measures. The government also initiated certain programmes for women such as social welfare, nutrition, supplement income generation, girls education, equal remuneration for equal work, hostels for working women and crèches for their children, functional and legal literacy, family-welfare, promotion and strengthening of self-employment, review and streamlining

laws concerning women etc. (Government of India, 1992) ^[6].

The Ninth Five Year Plan came into effect from April 1, 1997. An approach paper was brought out by the Planning Commission and accepted by the National Development Council, An important objective in the Approach paper was the empowerment of women. In planning process, empowerment at the outset, means choices for women and opportunities to avail of these choices. The supportive environment should be provided to women at all stages by the home, school, religion, government and work place.

To boost up the programmes for women's development, a National Perspective Plan for Women (1988–2000) was brought out by the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development. Education of girls was given priority and awareness regarding the necessity of educating girls so as to prepare them to contribute effectively to the socio-economic development of the country. (Anand, Anitha, 1997) ^[1] Sahajani Shiksha Kendra: A Programme of Literacy and Education for Women Empowerment. (Hazra, Anupam, 2013) ^[2].

A comprehensive policy on women education *Nirantar* was initiated by the central government in 2002. The objective of this policy was to educate women from every strata of Indian society, including the tribal, dalit and rural women. For the purpose vernacular was adopted to teach them at primary level. The programme broadly aims at empowering women and adolescent girls through literacy and education – an education that connects with their lived realities and rights, and enables them to develop analytical skills on gender, development and other issues. *Nirantar's* SSK programme foregrounds 'literacy for empowerment', by linking women's lived realities to its educational initiatives which take the form of camps, centres or the development of locally contextualised material for enabling and sustaining literacy.

Various strategies adopted in the SSK programme like, Village-level literacy centres, which are located in the community or hamlet and run over a period of 18 months. Village-level (six-day) literacy camps, Residential (ten-day) literacy camps, Regular literacy follow-up, issue-based meetings with women learners and Residential School for School Dropouts (Eight-month Bridge Course).

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

KGBVs are residential upper primary schools for girls from SC, ST, OBC and Muslim communities. KGBVs are set up in areas of scattered habitations where schools are at great distances and pose a challenge to the security of girls. This often compels girls to discontinue their education. KGBVs address this need through setting up residential schools in the block itself. KGBVs reach out to: Adolescent girls who are unable to go to regular schools, out of school girls in the 10+ age group that are unable to complete primary school and young girls from the migratory populations in difficult areas of scattered habitations which could not qualify for primary/upper primary school. KGBVs provide for a minimum reservation of 75% seats for girls from SC/ST/OBC and minority communities and 25% to girls from families that live below the poverty line. Till 2009-10 there were 2570 KGBVs in the country. After the RTE Act came into operation, an additional 1030 KGBVs were

sanctioned, taking the total number of KGBVs in the country to 3600. (Government of India, 2012) ^[5].

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)

NPEGEL is being implemented in educationally backward blocks (EBB) and addresses the needs of girls who are in school or out of school. NPEGEL also reaches out to girls who are enrolled in schools, but do not attend any school regularly. NPEGEL emphasises the responsibility of teachers to recognise vulnerable girls and pay special attention to bring them out of their state of vulnerability and prevent them from dropping out. Both NPEGEL and KGBV are expected to work in tandem to complement efforts under SSA to ensure inclusion of all girls and provide them quality education. While NPEGEL is designed to work through the day schools, KGBV establishes residential schooling facilities for the girls in remote areas that are not served by upper primary schools or in areas with educational disadvantage amongst certain social groups. (Government of India, 2012-2017) ^[8].

The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)

A centrally sponsored scheme with a funding pattern of 75:25% between Centre and States (90:10% for Special Category and North Eastern States), was launched in 2009–10. The major objectives of the RMSA are (i) to raise the minimum level of education to class X and universalise access to secondary education; (ii) to ensure good-quality secondary education with focus on Science, Mathematics and English; (iii) to reduce the gender-centric, social and regional gaps in enrolments, dropouts and improving retention. The interventions supported under RMSA included (i) upgrading of upper primary schools to secondary schools; (ii) strengthening of existing secondary schools; (iii) providing additional classrooms, science laboratories, libraries, computer rooms, art, craft and culture rooms, toilet blocks and water facilities in schools; (iv) providing in-service training of teachers; and (v) providing funds for major repairs of school buildings and residential quarters for teachers. Despite being launched in the third year of the XI Plan, RMSA was welcomed and the strength of students increased very fast, the target of enrolling 3.2 million students was achieved within two years of the launch of RMSA and 2.4 million more students were enrolled in secondary schools during the Eleventh Plan period. (Government of India, (2012-2017) ^[9].

Conclusion

Education is an important instrument for of an individual, community and nation's growth. The very foundation of the development of human civilization is based on the learning experience, doing the new experiment and sharing of this experience thought the others through the oral and written means is called educating the other and society. The culture of the free sharing of ideas and experiences with the others helps a society; nations and civilization grow more than the other civilization. As a nation and civilization India has rich tradition of sharing of ideas and knowledge with others, there is copious literature on the intellectual tradition of sharing and debating on the ideas and experiences by the scholars and commons from the Vedic and pre-Vedic, Indian women were equally provided with the opportunity of intellectual growth and have very rights to participate and

intellectual debates and sharing of the their ideas on any relevant issue without any discrimination and subordination to their male companions. The foreigner invasion particularly of the Arab, Turk and Mongol and establishment of the Islamic rule in the some parts of India and brutality to which these Islamic invaders committed against the commons including the children and women have had a very deep impact on the social set-up across India during the medieval period. The challenges to which Indian society faced for the protection of their women folk and Indic values have had definite impact on the status of women and civilization development. The Modern tomes witnessed the British invasion and establishment of the British rule in some parts of the country and political supremacy of the Indian Provinces in the other parts of the country. The serious and sophisticate challenges to Indian civilization and social set-up came from the philanthropist efforts Christian Missionary and British Bureaucracy, who through their selective approach established that the Indian society and Indian history and Indic values are very outdated and backward and they are required to be changed by the western education and values for the advancement of Indian society. The Indian elite and social reformist took the task of protecting and promoting their values and women education and a large numbers social reformist devoted their whole life for the women education during the colonial India. Women education and their role in the nation building has been recognized by the leadership with the very dawn of India's Independence and many policies specially for the girl child education were launched and till the date government of India along with the other social organizations is very keenly working for women education. Moreover, as a civilization state the women education have a social base and social support and in the today Indian the numbers of girls' toppers in the school and college education are more than the boys. However, the data's and some empirical studies suggests women are still behind the men in the education and gap between the male and female literacy rate is near about so despite of all the efforts of the social reformist, social organizations from the colonial India and efforts of the government of India after Independence, still there is a need for the hard efforts at the socio-economic and political level to establish a parity of education for male and female education in India.

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