

Challenges and Opportunities for Women through Higher Education

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Abstract

Education has evolved from a luxury to more of a necessity over the past couple of centuries. In the 18th century, it was limited to the financially well off and royalty. However, in 1880 it became compulsory for children aged 5-10 in England. Ever since, education has become compulsory for all children up to the age of 18 almost all over the world. This signifies the rising awareness about the importance of education around the world. As this awareness spread, people in India also understood the importance of education however they considered women more appropriate for household chores while men were supposed to work. This led to the formation of various inappropriate gender roles. In other areas, guardians simply could not afford to educate all their children and hence preference was given to boys. This being the prime reason why women did not get equal opportunities and were lagging behind men. It was not until recently when education became compulsory for every child in India as enacted by law. While this significantly improved literacy rates all over India there still were various issues with the education institutes put forward by the government. What further worsens these issues is the state of higher education. While high school education for women has made significant improvements, the percentage of women pursuing higher education is still quite low when compared to the percentage of men in higher education. This goes back to the same issue of guardians not recognizing the importance of this education in various rural areas of India. They believe that providing their daughters with high school levels of education is enough failing to understand the opportunities forgone by not pursuing higher education. Education is one of the stepping stones to success, without proper education an individual is unable to make well informed decisions. The education of these girls/women is important for the overall advancement of our nation.

Introduction:

Education is considered the basic right for the development of human beings, without it a person is comparable to a wild animal which lacks a purpose. A literate person can aid in bringing transformation not only within themselves, but also amongst their families and thus bringing evolution into society as a whole. It is of great instrumental significance in the course of economic intensification. Edification plays a critical role in demographic change, female education in particular and enhances their economic and social status. There is a co-relation between literacy and life expectancy. Furthermore, the benefits of education far outweigh its costs. It empowers and empowerment affects larger social processes (Swaminathan and Rawal, 2000).

Literacy levels can be seen as an indicator of a country's development. It is, important to look at literacy levels of both men and women (Pavlova, 2009). That is the reason "Sarva

Shiksha Abhiyan” is firmly suggested and concentrated on by our legislature. India has gained an impressive ground in this area and with each endeavor the education rate developed more than fifty percent from 1947 to 2011 (Chanana, 2000). Yet, at the same time, India has not accomplished what it ought to have during this period. Above all else, the advancement made in this area is exceptionally average. It is expected for India to take another 50 years to achieve complete literacy at the current rate (Desai et. al, 2010).

What further worsens this situation is the fact that the difference between male and female literacy level is still marginally high. The 2011 census indicated that around 82.14% of men were educated while for ladies it was 65.46% (Census2011.co.in, 2019). Although, there has been seen a generous increment in the quantity of educated ladies and the difference is narrowing, regardless it perseveres. The same census also did declare that 110 million extra ladies had turned out to be educated when contrasted with 107 men that implies that the quantity of educated women is on the rise.

Females comprise about half of our nation's population, yet, by not educating them we rob them from the opportunity to aid in advancement and improvement of India. This implies our pace of advancement is lower than what it can be. Regardless of whether females utilize their education for a job or not, the complete lack of education has an enormous negative effect on our community (Singh, 2007).

Aim of Higher Education:

The aim of higher education is to adequately equip students for the tough battle of life, to qualify them for various types of employments, apart from widening their sphere of knowledge and building their character. It has to be related to the life and needs of the nation and the people’s aspirations; and must aim at inculcating among youth the values and lead to the full development of the individual’s personality and also to change the quality of life for him/ her. The very concept of higher education postulates the development of the basic qualities which fit a person for the continually complex battles of life. But, the tragedy is that it has neither suitably equipped young men and women for the requirement of our society nor made them strong enough morally and intellectually to stand on their own feet.

Importance of Higher Education:

The modern institutions of higher education look forward and are factories of new knowledge. More than that there is more and more involvement of the universities and colleges in the stream of national life through innovation, research and inventions the universities are promoting research in various fields, for instance, there is first of all the food problem of the country. The Agricultural Universities are devising ways and means to increase food production. The quality of seeds is being improved. Instead of one crop of wheat two, even three crops are being produced. India which was deficit country in the matter of food at the time of our freedom is now a comfortably surplus State. It has built up strong reserves and is even exporting food. All this has been achieved by intensive cultivation, artificial fertilizers, and rotation of crops and qualitative improvement of seeds. The Agricultural universities in the country have rendered a yeoman’s service in this direction.

In medical science, universities are forging ahead. Now drugs for cancer, hypertension and other diseases have been discovered. In the field of physics, particularly atomic physics, our researchers can compete with the institutions of higher education of America and other developed nations. We have made rapid advances in space research besides these areas, research is also done in other areas.

An Overview of Education Level of Women In India

Literacy rates of women in India vary highly depending on the state. Furthermore, within a state as well literacy rates vary based on whether it is an urban or rural area. Kerala has the most noteworthy literacy rate nearing around 92% whereas Rajasthan has a literacy rate of only 52% hence the least female education rate in India. Other states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar that are the most populated states in India also show low degrees of female education. This is straightforwardly identified with the wellbeing and newborn child mortality. Kerala has the least baby mortality while Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have a high relatively high one (Gupta, 1990; Srivastava and Srivastava,2010).

As stated previously, lower rates of higher education for women directly deteriorates growth for the economy. India is battling hard to balance out its developing populace through various campaigns and projects such as the family arranging projects. These initiatives by the government, however, are left redundant for women if they are not educated enough to take advantage of them, leading to a more negative impact (Rao,2009 and Das, 2007).

Obstacles in the way of Women's Education

The negative frame of mind of guardians towards their daughter and her education is one of the biggest causes of low female literacy rates in India. In most of the families, preference is given to the boys for education yet young ladies are not treated similarly. Directly from the earliest starting point, guardians don't think about young ladies as winning individuals from their family, as after marriage they need to leave their folks' home. So, their training is simply considered as a wastage of money and time. Therefore, guardians like to send young men to schools however not young ladies. It is interesting to note that these guardians themselves are also not educated in most scenarios thus being ignorant to its importance. This leads to a vicious cycle forming (Chanana, 2001).

Poverty is the underlying driver of numerous issues in India and furthermore of low female literacy rates. More than 12% of populace in India is living while making less than one dollar a day which is much below the poverty line even. Despite the continuous endeavors of the government of making essential education free and making higher education more accessible, various guardians are simply not willing to send their daughters to class. This unwillingness stems from a lack of availability of educational institutes nearby.

Guardians are reluctant to send their daughters to schools if these are situated in entirely different towns. What further aggravates the issue is that the institutes which do exist simply do not have basic amenities. A portion of the schools are truly in regrettable conditions and don't have even essential services. According to a study, 54% of schools

in Uttar Pradesh don't have running water while 80% don't have lavatories while some simply lack rooms to accommodate students (Kambhampati and Pal, 2001).

Consequences of Low Literacy Levels among Women

At the point when a child or a woman isn't taught, it isn't just she who endures hardships rather the whole family needs to tolerate the outcomes of her lack of education. It has been discovered that women without higher education face a bigger number of hardships when compared to educated ones. In one of the reviews, it has been discovered that newborn child mortality is contrarily identified with mother's literacy levels. She, who does not know the significance of knowledge throughout everyday life, does not accentuate the same for her children. This hampers the family just as the country's advancement too. Illiteracy is also associated with a lack of awareness. Uneducated women are unaware about their rights, they know nothing about activities taken by the administration for their welfare. These women continue battling hard and bear brutality of life, family and even their spouses (Stromquist, 1990).

Loopholes in System:

The system of higher education in India, as a whole, has been faulted on several grounds, most of them being as valid today as they were many decades ago. Throughout, the decades a national and result oriented policy has been lacking despite all the experimentation on the lines recommended by various Committees and Commissions headed by prominent educationists. In our colleges and universities neither the teachers nor the students are serious about imparting or acquiring knowledge and broadening their vision. The immediate, and often the only, object is to pass an examination and acquire a degree. After that there is a virtual deluge and whatever little was learnt is soon forgotten. It is pity that most of our graduates are not in reality educated people in the real sense and many of them do not have genuine knowledge of the subjects they are supposed to have studied.

Apart from the fact that the teachers of today are, by and large, interested only in their salaries and other privileges and seldom perform their duties earnestly, there is also tendency to go on strike, hold demonstrations, and sit on dharanas for getting one demand conceded after another. The total number of days a teacher works in a year hardly entitles him to get the salary; he is paid For the most part of the year the faculty members have prescribed or non- prescribed holidays. Moreover, they hardly come prepared for the class lectures, and the little they manage to teach is superficial, boring, uninteresting and certainly does not deserve the description higher education. Most of the teachers resorting to tactics that are anything, but leads education to a ruinous atmosphere in the seats of higher learning and set bad example for their students .The universities and colleges are politicised .Crore of rupees are spent on higher education institutions year after year, but due to lack of vision this goes futile. The nepotism in the appointments of faculty and the lack of interest of these faculty members in the performance of their duties together has shaken the confidence of even the small percentage of earnest students. Merit does not count for much; this by itself makes modern education lower and worthless instead of making it higher.

There is blatant copying and downright cheating in examination halls and in the assessment of answer papers, sometimes encouraged by the supervisory staff itself. The examination phobia also distorts educational values and indeed all the factors put together make higher education a farcical and costly exercise. The examinations and examiners have lost credibility, because of the increasing corruption, favoritism and other malpractices that have crept in. The academic standards are low in any case, and they are becoming lower as the years pass, thus making a great mockery of higher education. The examining that enables many students to pass examinations and the art of bribery they encourage are, in fact, evils that do not educate a person, but deprive him or her of such values as he or she might have acquired through sound instruction at home or by family and social traditions. Instead of healthy concepts and sound thinking there is what may be called fragmentation of thinking, which constitutes the major weakness of the plans of action and programmes that the University Grants Commission and other expert bodies occasionally draw up to promote higher education.

Due to faulty planning in education, there is indiscriminate expansion of facilities for admission in various streams. The haphazard mushrooming of educational institutions, sometimes even lack the basic infrastructure and do not impart quality education and produce such degree holders, who are not able to get any employment or to get themselves self employed, and resultantly, waste national resources. Sometimes this state of affair is attributed to the economic recession. This pause not only froze likely expansion of employment opportunities, but also reduced the existing volume of employment in certain industries. The main culprit, however, is undoubtedly the unplanned and ad hoc increase in admission facilities.

The Planning Commission has not so far initiated any studies of the area-wise and sector-wise type and extent of unemployment prevailing in the country. This has created a dangerous lacuna in our planning. While our plans specify the percentages of increase or decrease to be achieved in other sectors like agriculture, industry, export and foreign aid, no such target is fixed for the eradication of unemployment. It has, in fact, been treated by our planners as largely a subsidiary problem which could be left to resolve itself to the extent possible by the job opportunities coming into existence in various spheres.

Conclusion and Suggestions:

No doubt, the present system of higher education is based according to the needs of people and society however it has a number of flaws. These flaws lead to people unable to attain employment after completing their degrees. Which further inculcates frustration within them and in some scenarios might even lead to severe depression. Therefore, it is clear that educational institutes have their work cut out for them. Work such as to act as philosophers and guides of the nation. It will not be wrong to say that they have contributed a lot towards feeding the body, but the soul remains starved. There they themselves have a long way to go. It must be admitted that in the matter of discipline these institutions present a deplorable picture. The newspapers and electronic media are full of reports about the troubles which brew in these institutions. Not scholars, but unprincipled politicians rule the roost. Now is high time to improve the system, otherwise it will be too late.

Universities which were supposed to be the beacon lights for the nation have become the plague-spots. It is suggested that these institutions should not behave either like Ostriches, oblivious of the sand all around as was the case with the medieval educational institutions or like pigs wallowing in the mud but like the proverbial swan swimming and in the process separating milk from water. They should be centers of learning, radiating knowledge and guiding the students as future of a nation lies on them. Only when they themselves become models of excellence can they act as guide, philosopher and friend of their country.

In conclusion, women themselves need to understand the virtue of education in their daily lives. Education can help bolster their position in society by increasing their awareness on day to day topics while make them more independent. There is therefore a need to increase the awareness of education especially in rural areas and to add more educational institutes to make it more accessible to the public. Urging our little girls to pursue higher education will enable them to accomplish their objectives while propelling our nation forward.

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