

DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA POST-MODERNIZATION

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There are various policies on women's education and we need to highlight some of the basic issues affecting the progress of women's education since the introduction of planned development in the country. After independence the first governmental act to organize the education system in the light of independence was the setting up of the University Education Commission, headed by Prof. S. Radhakrishnan to 'suggest improvements and extensions that may be desirable to suit the requirements of the country'. Widely acclaimed, the report of the Commission on the issue of women's education referred that:

"Women's present education is entirely irrelevant to the life they have to lead. It is not only a waste but often a definite disability". "The present system of women's education, based as it is upon men's needs, does not in any way make them fit for coping with the problems of daily life". "The modern educated Indian women are neither happy nor contented nor socially useful. She is a misfit in life. She is highly suppressed, and needs opportunities for self expression. The new education must provide this opportunity".¹

The Constitution introduced in 1950 included a number of important provisions which had direct and indirect bearing on education.² after two years the country entered into a new era of planned development through the Five Year Plans. The First Five Year Plan visualized education as the vehicle for the successful achievement of planned development. Commission's recommendations on women's education the first Plan stated that "everyone realizes the significance of the problem of women's education in the special circumstances of our country today and the need for adopting social measures for solving it. The general purpose and objective of women's education can not of course be different from the purpose and objective of men's education. There are, however, vital differences in the way in which this purpose has to be realized."³ The commencement of first Plan coincided with the appointment of Secondary Education Commission headed by A. Mudaliar. Mention may be made here, that the government constituted special commissions for university education and secondary education to go into the Details of problems and

hurdles and suggest ways and means to remove them but till now no special Commission has been constituted to enquire the problems of elementary education which is the most important stage for the educational development in terms of both quality and quantity.⁴ The secondary education commission on the issue of girls education stated interalia "in a democratic society where all citizens have to discharge their civic and social obligations, differences which may lead to variations in the standard of intellectual development achieved by boys and girls cannot be envisaged".⁵

A National Committee on Women's Education⁶ was appointed by the Government in 1958 to go into the difficulties that hindered the progress of girl's education and to make recommendations in order to bring girls' educational par with the boys. The Committee had recommended several measures which were generally accepted by the Government. In essence these measures were: top priority for the expansion of girls education at the elementary stage; campaign against the traditional prejudices against girls education; appointment of women teachers; on demand separate schools for girls at higher secondary stage; incentives, special central assistance to all states till 80 per cent of girls in the age group 6-11 are enrolled; parity between boys and girls be reached as soon as possible; earmarking special fund by UGC for higher education of women; and establishment of National Council for Women's Education. The Government appointed another Committee on differentiation of curricula for boys and girls in 1963.⁷

A year later the Bhaktavaslam Committee was appointed to look into the causes for the lack of public support particularly in rural areas for girl's education and to enlist public cooperation. The Committee after going into details of the causes suggested interalia "the strategy for the development of the education of girls and women will have to take two forms. The first is to emphasis the special, programmes recommended by the National Committee on Women's Education and the second is to give attention to the education of girls at all stages and in all sectors as an integral part of the general programmes for the expansion and improvement of education".⁸

The Education Commission (1964-66) which discussed at great length almost all aspects of education, on the issue of women's education endorsed all recommendations made by the previous Committees on girls education. In addition the Commission recommended that "education of women should be regarded as a major programmes for some years to come and bold and determined effort

Should be made to face difficulties involved and to close the existing gap between the education of men and women in as short a time as possible....."⁹Regarding girls education the policy stated "the education of girls should receive emphasis not only on grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation".

The year 1975 must be regarded as a watershed when rethinking on women's issues started when United Nations declared 1975-85 as women's decade. Most of the recommendations made by the Committee were accepted by the Empowered Committee¹¹ and thus were incorporated into the National Plan of Action for women.¹²

The post '75 phase saw more official concern towards improving women's access to education. The sixth Five Year Plan envisaged changing in the priorities in order to bring everyone into the fold of education system. Eradication of illiteracy and promotion of adult education programs and more emphasis on universalization were given priority on the educational front. In fact these were the issues mostly affecting girls and women. The plans for the first time include a chapter on "Women and Development" which deals with the issues of education, health and employment of women. The Seventh Plan 1986-90 by and large envisages similar measures.

Literacy/ Illiteracy

Female literacy rate improved from 7.95 per cent to 24.82 per cent between 1951 to 1981. More than three decades of planned development, in addition to several committees and commissions recommendation, the data on education indicates widening gender gap in access to knowledge. What is more disturbing is that this gender gap in literacy instead of narrowing in increasing at a faster rate although this was minimal during the colonial period. Despite constitutional guarantee for equal opportunity of education for both the sexes' women's education continues to be plagued with bias. "Women's and men's education should have many elements in common but should not in general be identical in all respects, as in usually the case today, Persistence of ambivalence between traditional and modern attitudes of which, the overriding influence of the traditional attitudes towards women's education, was observed by the Committee on the Status of Women in India.

A gradual shift in attitude towards women's issues started in the post '75 period. This beginning of concern towards women's issues could become possible because of the momentum generated by the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) which got strengthened by the Declaration of Women's Decade by the UN. The establishment of women's unit in the Indian Council of Social Science and Research (ICSSR) in the year 1976 has direct bearing of the CSWI's report and UN Declaration for Women's Decade. The programme of women's studies Undertaken by the unit in the

subsequent years had the objectives (a) to improve policies for women's socioeconomic development; (b) to increase public consciousness and review the debate on the women's question and (c) "to develop new perspectives in the social sciences through examining basic assumptions, methodological approaches and concepts, e.g.. the family household, women's work, productivity, economic activity etc. to remedy the neglect and under assessment of 30 women's contribution to the society".

The significance to acquire more awareness on women's issues guided the SNDT Women's University at Bombay to establish a research unit on women's studies in 1974. This pattern was followed by several higher educational institutions including universities in the subsequent years. By 1981, 41 universities, 8 advanced centers of research and 9 institutions of national importance had undertaken research on women during 1975 and 1980. Such studies included 181 projects and 57 doctoral researches. 3 out of 7 central universities and at least 10 of the state universities have initiated some activities in research and teaching on women since 1980. In 1983, the University Grants Commission (UGC) issued a guideline suggesting Vice Chancellors of all universities to consider ways integrating women's issues and concerns into the teaching and research programmes of different discipline.

The foregoing paragraphs show that there has been four distinct issues affecting the progress of women's education:-(a) illiteracy, (b) non-enrolment, (c) wastage and drop-out, (d) ideological biases in the content and curricula. Significantly these issues have been identified by most of the official and non-official documents which- dealt -with the question of women's education after the publication of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India in 1975. The National Policy on Education 1986 is quite remarkable in the sense that for the first time in the history of educational development in the country (perhaps in the world) a separate section on "Education for Equality" has been incorporated.

Another landmark of the new education policy is the document 'Program of Action'35 prepared by the Government ,The Program of Action commits to eradicate illiteracy a young women belonging to the 15-35 age group by 1995, through mass scale adult education program. For increasing enrolment and retention of girls in schools especially in rural areas where incidence of non enrolment and drop-out is quite high, support services like day care centers were established in all such areas by 1995. Those girls who were unable to attend whole day school will be educated through non-formal education centers. As an incentive to parents to educate girls, an overriding priority is to be given to skill development linked to employment opportunities in the local areas. An emphasis had been added to the promotion of vocational skills among girls and women along with education. This had been visualized in order to equip girls and women for employment to take active part in the process of national development.

Conclusion

In the Charter of 1833, English was announced to be the official language in India. The advent of English education in British India was thus a reformation movement of the 19th century which provided opportunity for the women and people belonging to the lower castes for education. Thus, the British is

credited for bringing a revolution in the Indian education system. The colonial period, from 1757 to 1947, were the period for the uprising for various scholars and reformists

India saw the rising of various government universities, Apart from the Indian Universities and Governmental colleges, several Non-Government and Private schools were also established by Western Christian missions, to provide opportunities for elementary education. Women education became prevalent with the advent of the British and different Women`s colleges were founded and Female education in British India flourished. Post-independence, with the further development of the nation, education system in India has also improved drastically. Numerous colleges and institutes have emerged all over the country to provide better educational opportunities to the students. Development of Education in India is one of the factors driving the nation towards further enhancement.

References

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- 2 The Constitution guaranteed free and compulsory education for all children up to 14 years of age which
- 3 The First Five Year Plan, Government of India, 1951, Chapter XXXIII, Para 102, pp. 357.
- 4 Some states have constituted Committees to look into the issue of pre-primary or primary education i.e. Karnataka in 1961, Rajasthan 1969 etc.
- 5 Report of the Secondary Education Commission, Government of India, 1953, Chapter IV, pp. 56
- 6 Report of the National Committee on Women's Education, Government of India, 1959, Chapter XVI
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