



WOMEN EDUCATION: NEED, STATUS AND INITIATIVE

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Introduction

Women are an integral part of our society. The idea of human race can't be conceived without the existence of women. Education is important for everyone including girls and women. Educational achievements of women can have positive effects on the family and society across generations. Women education no doubt is vital for the growth and development of the family and society as whole, but it is a matter of fact that vast majority of women throughout the globe continues to be far below than men (Bharadwaj and Rani, 2011).

Since time immemorial women have been seen as wives who were intended to cook, clean, and take care of the kids. Fifty to seventy years ago, a woman was no more than a house wife and caregiver in the family. Women had no personal options, no voice and no freedom. The role of woman in society was primarily contributed by religious beliefs. Man had constant negative attitude towards woman. Changes in the society began when women wanted more from the society for their life. Since the 1960s and 1970s, the women's movements and women's studies have been beginning to rise throughout the world. Now a day women play important roles in modern society. Women are entering into professions such as medicine, law and engineering and into higher position in the fields of politics, education etc. As time passes women start to gain more important role in society. Same as men, women could learn knowledge and teach and be useful in education in any field. If a mother is a well educated and trained person, she can be a good teacher and trainer for her children. As a mother, a woman affects her children (boys and girls), as a wife she affects her husband and as a female in the family she affects her father, brothers etc.; so the role of women in family and society is very high. An educated woman can understand and use food

products, health items, and sanitary products in the correct way and also teach proper usage of such items to the members of her family (Naeeni, 2010). The dignity and culture of a society can be known from the status of women in the society. Empowerment is a process of acquiring knowledge and awareness which enable a person to move towards life with greater dignity and self assurance. An empowered woman is a social strength. Empowerment has become the key solution to many social problems and empowered woman leads to benefit not only to the individual woman and to women groups, but also to the families and communities as a whole through collective action for development (Pandya, 2008). Dominic and Jothi (2011) stated that women must define their own needs and goals as well as strategies. Women must exercise full participation in decision making process in all walks of life and fully participate with men in finding equitable and practical solution to issues both in the family and society. Women are capable of building such children who may lead the country to the path of progress and prosperity. Discrimination against women is well known in every society. There is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors such as social, economic, political, education, health care, right and legal etc. Women have been oppressed in all these spheres of life; therefore they need to be empowered in all walks 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 empowerment will come from education (Sonowal, 2013).

Need of Women's Education in the Context of Personal and Social Development

Education is an important strategy to improve individual's well being as well as social development. An educated person is more politically active and has better knowledge about his/her legal rights. Boonto (2008) states that women who have higher education have higher participation in family planning. Acharya (2008) demonstrated that education brings a woman to gain better understanding of her rights and responsibilities and makes her more confident about her possibilities, including the possibility of divorce, decisions of family affairs and personal affairs within the family. Education not only improves the physical well being at the individual but also brings positive change in the society and enhances the productivity and ability to contribute to the national income. Women power is crucial to the economic development of any country. Therefore, to acquire a quality of good life and to enhance the economic growth of the society woman education is highly essential. Provision of formal and functional education is needed for the women folk because (i) it would empower them to know and ask for their rights to education, health, shelter, food, clothing

etc.,(ii) it would empower them to know to fight against every form of discrimination against their folk, (iii) it would enable them to take decision and accept responsibilities for taking such decision concerning themselves (iv) it would give economic power to the women and there by enable them to contribute their quota to the economic growth of the nation, (v) it would help women to reduce maternal and infant mortality rate through improved nutrition and child rearing practice, and (vi) it would empower them in participating in the world of the politics and governance as enlightened citizens (Kumar and Sangeeta, 2013). Education is needed to girls and mother in determining fertility rates. Their education is associated not only with healthier children, but with children's acquisition of knowledge, language and literacy skills. It can be said that woman's and mother's education is directly interconnected to girl's participation in education. Low women educational rates adversely affect to the countries socio-cultural and economic growth (Bhandari and Smith, 1997).

There is a need of women's education to obtain health benefits in their personal life. An educated woman can earn money, have better job opportunities, be better prepared to financially support self and family, participate substantially more in civic and community activities for instance filling leadership role, voting and donating blood (Madsen, 2011).In addition, in order to achieve access to health care and family planning, women education is necessary. Education enables women to bring the welfare of whole family and bring improvement in children's welfare as well (Jutting and Morrision, 2005).

Existing Status and Issues of Women's Participation in Education

In India education has been a long term challenge especially for girls and women. A 2009 Indian government report shows that the drop out school rate was of 25% including girls and also poor and disabled children. Although women education is an important as men's education, girls are being banned from school by their families because of the sexual assaults on them and many other reasons. By sex, 73% of the Indian men can read and write, while 47% of the women are able to do these basic things (Priyanka, 2013). In 2011, 57 million children of primary school age were out of school, down from 102 million in 2000; more than half of these out of school children live in Sub Saharan Africa. Globally, 123 million youth (aged 15 to 24) lack basic reading and writing skills; 61 percent of them are young women. The literacy rate among young women is increasing at a faster pace than that of young men. In Northern Africa, the female literacy rate grows 28 percentage points from 1990 to 2011, compared to 16 percentage points for young men over the same period. In southern Asia the literacy rate for young women and young men rose by 26 and 17 percentage points,

respectively over the same period. All regions are moving closer to the point at which male and female literacy rates are equal. Since 1990, the literacy rate among adult women has risen by 10 percentages versus 7 percentage points for men. Even so, women still represent two thirds of illiterate adults worldwide (UN, 2013). UNESCO (2012) report notes that women have reached parity with men in earning Bachelor's degrees. In Master's degrees they have an edge over men, accounting 56%. However a different story is found at the highest levels of education (PhD), where they only account for 44%. According to data presented at a recent British Council Workshop, *Absent Talent: Women in Academic and Research Leadership in East Asia*, just 7% of Turkey's Vice Chancellors are women. The situation is worse in Japan, where only two of its 86 public universities (2.3 percent) are headed by women. This gap is less wide in Australia, where 18 percent of higher education institutions are led by women (Grove, 2013). In many cases women work hard but they often receive little credit for their accomplishments. The daughters of city based professional parents have really undergone a sea change in their socialization. The parents are giving the best education to their daughters and expect them to be independent and follow careers. This revolution in values contrasts with those values which dominated prior to the nineties, i.e. education and its linkage to the job market early on in life, was only for those men who needed jobs and was certainly not for women. In this changed situation, the priorities of women have also changed. They too want professional education and are therefore entering the so called masculine disciplines (Chanana, 2004).

In India the rate of female literacy is far behind than male literacy. Although plans and programs at national and international levels are implemented for enhancing women's education, women are still less participating in education than men. So gap between male and female literacy is persisting. In this context, the factors responsible for low female literacy rate in India are: (i) gender based inequality, (ii) social discrimination and economic exploitation, (iii) occupation of girl child in domestic chores, (iv) low enrolment of girls in school, (v) low retention rate and high dropout rate, (vi) deprived of access to information and alienated from decision making process, (vii) absence of teachers in schools and (viii) schools established in faraway place etc. (Rani, 2010). In September 2000, 188 heads of states from around the world signed the Millennium Declaration and established the Millennium Development Goals. While most goals aim to achieve significant progress in development by 2015, one goal was to be achieved by 2005 – gender parity in primary and secondary education. But more than 75 countries are still not achieving the goal. Still in many places of

the world, providing education to women and girls is at great challenge. Investing in boys rather than girls is perceived as bringing higher financial returns for families as boys are more likely to find work and be paid a higher salary. Girls are dropped out from schools due to their domestic responsibilities and poor school environment. The physical and sexual violence in educational institutions is common phenomena in many countries. Parents don't want to send their daughter to schools unless the school environment is in safety condition. Violence against girls and women has been identified as a key barrier to girl's education in many DFID programmes (DFID, 2005). Psychological barrier of parents hinders in girls participation in school. Parents do not feel safe in sending girls to male-dominated environments. They sometimes feel that sending girls to school will expose them to physical or sexual abuse from teachers or boys. In Nepal, schools are established on political grounds rather than on the basis of any scientific mapping. This has resulted in an inadequate distribution of schools. In some communities, there is no schools at all, while in many others one can find more than one school. Distance to school usually matters for all children, especially for girls (Bista, 2004). The international labor office reports that 100 million girls are involved in child labor globally, many with "little or no access to education" (ILO, 2009).

Initiatives for Better Women's Participation in Education

Education is basic agent to bring change in the status of women. National and international initiatives are in implementation to improve women's education (CEDAW is one of the key among the international initiatives to bring and change in the development of women's education). It appeals for a national legislature to remove discrimination against women; to spread equality between men and women; and to rectify the social and cultural patterns that perpetuates discrimination. The main strategies adopted by the Govt. of India for increasing female literacy in the country include: (i) National Literacy Mission for imparting functional literacy, (ii) Non Formal Education, and (iii) Universalisation of Elementary Education (Rani 2010). In India the National Literacy Mission (NLM), launched in 1988, introduced Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) as a strategy for eradicating illiteracy in the age group of 15 to 35 years, women and other disadvantaged groups with low levels of literacy were identified as important target groups for TLCs. The operational strategies of the NLM have in recent years recognized the need for enhanced participation of community volunteers and NGOs to build a positive climate for literacy consistent with the goals articulated by the Education for All program (UNESCO, 1991).The provision of scholarships is believed to boost the educational participation of girls and disadvantaged children by mitigating economic barriers

(Bista, 2004). Emphasis on girl education at all levels is a key in improving the status of women in the society. Girls' and women's right to education is a central obligation of states parties under the convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW convention). This obligation is set out in article 2 and 10 of CEDAW convention as well as in other international human rights document such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All (EFA), Dakar Framework for Action. Governments, the international community, NGOs and the private sectors must partner closely with communities and schools to support families, especially rural families, so that their daughters and sons can finish school education. Government and civil society must also work harder to create more opportunities for adult to return to school, gaining access to the classroom learning that has not been available in the past. Greater incentives must be made available to ensure that more young women are entering in colleges and universities. Developing guidance programmes that will encourage young women to pursue studies in the areas of science, technology, medicine, engineering, agriculture and economics (Bachelet, 2011). Education provides women with greater earnings capacity and it promotes smaller, healthier and better educated families who can deal effectively with the challenges of the 21st century (Ityavyar, 2005).

Conclusion

Women take an important role in the changes of society. In early society discrimination against women is a well known fact. Also in the present society women are not at par with the men because of socio-psychological and other prejudices levied against them. Women are remaining far behind the men in different spheres of life because of their low social and educational status in the society. It has been realized now that education plays a key role for the total empowerment and development of women. Starting from the international level to local level efforts are being made for enhancing the educational status of women. Slowly, women are occupying important place in the society because of their improved educational status in the society now a day. They are entering into the political, economic and educational institutions which were mainly occupied previously by men. They are entering into the professions like engineering, medicine, law etc. Education is helping a woman to know better about her rights and duties. Women are earning Bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees and PhDs now a day. Government, international communities, NGOs and private sectors need to work harder to support and create more opportunities for women education that has not been available in the past. It is necessary to create awareness among the public about the

importance of women education and its benefit for social political and economic development of the society.

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