



EDUCATION IS A TOOL TO EMPOWER WOMEN

Dr. Bimal Kanti Basumatary

Associate Professor

Kokrajhar Govt. College, Assam

Education plays very vital role in the life of individuals as well as society as a whole. Education, particularly of females, can have a much more powerful role in effecting social change than other factors of societal nature. In the context of female education in India, social scientists in recent years have developed a large number of empirical evidence demonstrating how education can promote greater capabilities such as the freedom to participate in political and economic process, use new technologies, project one self against exploitation of all sorts, exercise personal mobility, attain higher social status and increased child and maternal well-being. Benefits of women education are enormous at the social level - a more productive work –force, lower fertility, lower infant and child mortality and improvement of social status. Children who grow up without basic education find it harder to sustain themselves and their families. It becomes difficult for them to make their way in society in a spirit of tolerance, understanding and quality. Education helps people learn how to achieve fundamental human rights such as health, nutrition, safe motherhood and employment avenues while improving the quality of life.

If someone analyse the problems that Indian come across everyday, it will not be very tough for him to find out the problem of education or illiteracy as the major or most potent one for their a pathetic and precarious condition. Education is the peerless instruments for the achievement of all sorts of development in economic, Social and political. Simply providing constitutional provisions to women for equal rights treatment and opportunities are not enough for improving the status of women. This will carry meaning and purpose only when women have basic education to understand the inherent values of these provisions. Education contributes towards creating better self –image which in turn helps in liberating women from their psychological and sociological constrains.

Article 45 of the Indian constitution under the Directive Principles of State policy envisages, “The state shall endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this constitution for *free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years*”. Accordingly, the constitution provisions under article45 should have been fulfilled by 1960, But unfortunately, this commitment could not achieved. The govt. of India again made another solemn promise of “Education for

All” by 2000 at the *Education for All Summit* in Delhi in December 1993. The programme and policies for achieving Universal Primary Education by 2000 and Universal Literacy by 2005 too failed to meet the govt. policies. The sad era of our failures does not end here. The worst part of it is that the numbers of illiterates in India continued to increase steadily with the rapid rise in population and lack of commensurate increase in infrastructure to provide education to the in-coming members of society.

Gender differential in literacy is such a vital issue that it deserves a special mention here. There are high gender disparities in literacy levels in different states. They are obviously greater in low-literacy states. The state level variations in the level of literacy by sex are quite enormous except for Kerala, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland where variations are somewhere in between 4% to 10% several studies.

The State of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh tend to show a lower level of literacy than the national average of about 65%. On the other hand, the State of Goa, Gujarat Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Tripura have recorded a much higher level of rural literacy than the national average. According to the studies it is found that literacy rates for both men and women are lower among the poor and landless and among the SC, ST and OBC. Several studies have shown that the gender gap in literacy varies quite significantly by religion, caste, region, education and the place of residence. The same perhaps does not found in the case of ST.

Female education is usually not promoted so much in India for many reasons. For example many parents often fear that education will make a girl less attentive to household chores and less willing to obey both her parents and her husband. This thought are institutionalised in the familial value system across North India, where parents of educated girls must offer a high amount of dowry in order to attract better-educated man. Besides, another important reason is that a large number of educated women do not enter the paid work-force and offer reciprocal support to her natal household because of social restrictions on her mobility. Where social norms dictate that girls marry young and live with the husband’s family there is little sense in sacrificing their contributions to family labour and risking the bigger amount of dowry in order to benefit some one else’s household. Though parents may be concerned about their daughter’s individual well being and recognised the benefit of female education, it is difficult to promote voluntary co-operation for the greater interest of the societies with poor cohesion and few civic networks to promote and safeguard reciprocity. This is indeed the case in most parts of the educationally backward states.

In addition to low economic returns the entrenched cultural bias against females also accounts for educational gender gaps. For many, little has changed since the Laws of Manu were set down about 2000 years ago: women are unfit for independence and their education is a threat to the status quo. Such biases may partly explain the reason why India has been so reluctant to implement compulsory primary education—the reason cannot be entirely economic as often claimed. Most of the scholars believe that the educational change requires political will- the framers of national policy on education duck the tough task of building consequences for compulsory education and curtailing child labour. Instead they promoted a massive effort to build a non-formal education system.

Since the Indian Society is highly patriarchal and patrilineal, the societal value of female has been quite low since time immemorial. Female are so undervalued in society and that their education obviously get neglected. Because of being economically poor, most people do not need to spend their hard earned money on their daughter's education. Parents hardly expect any return from their daughters. This is the important reason why the dropout rates at primary level and middle school levels are greater in case of females.

If we want to control the rapid rise in population, we must move fast enough on the road of rural literacy programme, especially in the sphere of female literacy, where lot of spade work is required. The fact that there exists a positive relationship between female education and social development is evident from the situation as it prevails in southern Indian States. A remarkable social change has been occurred in Kerala where women enjoy a high rate of literacy and consequently have a greater say in decision making process including child bearing. Emphasising the important of women education there is remarked, ***“To educate a boy is to educate an individual but to educate a girl is to educate a family.”*** So, if we want to get out of the vicious circle of rapid increase in population, high incidence of infant and child mortality and poverty, the special priority should certainly be accorded to education of rural girls and adult females.

Empowerment is the process of generating and building capabilities to exercise control over one's own life. Women's empowerment is a model of gender analysis that traces women's increasing equality by empowerment through five phases, viz. Welfare, access, conscientation, participation and control. Empowerment is a process whereby women can establish their control over various assets and which helps them to develop themselves confident. According to Naila Kuber, ***“Empowerment is the expansion in people's abilities to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability previously denied to them”***. Women empowerment is closely associated with the question of national building since women are responsible for enriching healthy life and living to make it more meaningful and enjoyable. Therefore empowering them is very essential rather urgent need of the day. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, ***“you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women”***

“Women need to be empowered” has been deeply realised by socially and educationally enlightened section of people realizing the fact that women play a very vital role in development of human resources and in shaping the character of the country's future generation. As we all are aware of the fact that women constitute almost half of the population of the nation, the responsibility of making them more and more powerful and stronger also lies in the hands of every citizen of India. The trust of attaining and strengthening women empowerment must be accomplished through a well planed, well defined and well organised efforts extended by every conscious citizen of India.

The tendency of man to keep women in industries and their organisation, lake of self-confidence among women, high rate of illiteracy among women, socio- cultural norms and values in favour of man, failure on the part of government to fully implement the law towards the system of dowry, child marriage, total responsibility of upbringing children, lake of co-operation from husband and family members, lake of financial independence, lake of understanding on the concept of equality of rights and responsibility on the

part of the common people, lack of family planning are some of the factors that stand as a strong barrier on the way of women empowerment.

Thus, a powerful thrust towards strengthening the process of women empowerment must be developed among the intellectuals and conscious citizens of the society. Empowerment of women is a process, a movement and collective action for elevating and enhancing the self, confidence, self respect and ability to upgrade the mental set up in the society. Empowerment does not mean only in challenging but in eliminating all the obstacles that come in the way of progressive development of women folks. To anticipate women empowerment of women some special steps need to mention below here:-

- Every girl should get free and compulsory education till higher secondary level.
- Use education as a tool of basic change in the status of women.
- Encouraging girls for all kinds of vocational, technical and professional education as per their needs, interest and attitude.
- Inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice through education should get priority in the educational system.
- Increase job for women in various departments and organisations which will give them a sense of dignity and identity.
- The attitudes of the husband and other family members should be positive and encouraging.
- Girl's health and nutrition should be taken care of in this direction.
- More seminar, workshops, conference, sensitisation etc. should be organised on women related issues.

Conclusion: - Education is a discipline which can easily illustrate the social fabric and speeds up the process of modernisation and development. Despite the fact that education plays such a vital role in the life of a nation, the tempo of universalisation of education has been slow in India. A faster pace of spread of education is possible only when all the rural habitations have access to a well-knit institutional set up imparting education at least up to the higher secondary level. Female education deserves a special attention in view of the low level literacy among females as well as to improve the position of rural women.

There are many reasons for the differing levels or the slower pace of universalisation of education in India. The rise of population, use of child labour, neglect of female education, lack of adequate infrastructural facilities for primary education, poverty, lack of political will on the part of govt. to implement the policy of compulsory education and the fatalism on the part of people are the most important reasons for such huge number of illiterate population in the country. In order to expedite the process of universal education, a higher expenditure, greater bureaucratic efficiency, sincerity and integrity on the part of public servants to the cause of education are also very important conditions.

Referances:-

1. Sing J.P. “*Man and Development*”, Vol. XXVII, No-I, Pub. By Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, March 2005 Chandigarh.
2. Roy Ranjana and Sengupta S.K, “*Selected Portrait: Position of Women, Aged and Weaker section in contemporary India*”, Published by Print Media; Kolkatta, 2000.
3. Ahooja Krishna, “*Women and Sustainable Development: An International Dimension*”, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1995.
4. Department of Women and Child Development, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing; 1995, Department of Women and Child Development Government of India, New Delhi; 1994.
5. Director of Adult Education, MHRD, Literacy facts at a glance, Director of Adult Education, MHRD, New Delhi;2001.
6. Gupta Sunit & Mittal Mukta, “*Status of Women and Children in India*”; Anmol Publication Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 1995.
7. Gurumurthy Anitha,” *Unpacking the Status of Women: A Model for Studying Gender Equality*, National Institute of Advance Studies, Bangalore, 1997.
8. Maitra Anjana and Sinha, “*Women in a Changing Society* “, Ashish Publishing House New Delhi, 1983.
9. Shukla P.D, “*The New Education Policy in India*”, Starling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1990.
10. Pandey Jawaharal, “*Adolescence Education, Part II, National Population Education project, NCERT, New Delhi, 1999.i & Sons*
11. Sen Amarthya, “*Many faces of Gender Inequality*”, Essay Published in *Frontline Magazine*, Kasturi & Sons Ltd., Chennai.