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EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION

Dr. Anita Modi

Gender equality is a constituent as well as an instrument of development. It is not possible for a country to achieve the objective of growth in real terms unless half the population is at disadvantage in terms of basic needs, access to knowledge and political voice. Before independence, Indian women were subjected to gender oppression and gender discrimination. Gender biases prevailed in all spheres of life whether social, political or economic.

It is widely recognized fact that unequal educational status of men and women is both a cause and consequence of a wider gender inequality. Keeping this fact in mind, the government has considered education as the most effective weapon to break the vicious circles of gender discrimination and gender inequality. Truly, education is associated with a wide range of desirable outcomes like higher productivity and

rate of growth, lower level of fertility and better child nutrition, higher level of self esteem and better management of domestic relations. It is a well recognized fact that education of women is the only panacea for all kinds of problems. Education has been considered as one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process.

Considering education as one of the most important means of empowering women, many programmes, schemes, awards and facilities have been initiated by the Central Government and State Governments to promote girls and women education. The Government of India has taken recourse to comprehensive literacy drive for girls related to poor and socially weaker sections of the society.



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Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Sarva shiksha Abhiyan is a comprehensive scheme launched in the year 2000 with an objective of widening the scope of elementary education throughout the country. This programme aims to improve the performance of school system through community owned approach and to impart qualitative elementary education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years by 2010. To bridge the gender gap in education, special emphasis is laid on girls' education in this scheme. Operation Blackboard Programme was also merged in this programme in the year 2002-03.

National Literacy Mission – The main objective of this mission is to provide literacy to all. This mission is a blending of activities related to nutrition, literacy, environmental protection and skill formation. Because of this programme the enrolment of children in schools has increased and the drop-out rate has declined.

Adult Education Programme: The main objective of this programme is to achieve self-reliance in terms of literacy. The special emphasis is laid on to equip women with necessary skills and education to improve their economic status and well-being in the society.

Efforts have been made to ensure that at least one third of the students in each Navodaya Vidyalayas are girls. It is also noted that free education is imparted to girls up to class XII in Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kendriya Vidyalayas. Provision of free education for girls is available in many states of the country to promote girls education.

National Girl's Education Programme, 2004 – The aim of the programme is to provide extra facilities and financial help to motivate the girls for education at primary level. In this programme, emphasis is being laid on the construction of models schools, provision of text books, stationery, uniform and other necessary inputs for education of girls,

thereby the burden of education of poor class can be reduced. It is well known fact that the girls of poor families are deprived of education because of economic burden of education. Wide spread poverty and discriminating cultural practices and the prime causes for the gender gap in education. This programme is intended to remove these barriers, thus promoting girls education.

Mid Day Meal Scheme – It has been started by the central Government in 1955 to ensure nutritional food to the students of class I to V, now extended up to class VIII. The scheme also aims to promote enrolment, retention and attendance of children in primary schools. The scheme has motivated the girls to primary education by relieving them from household chores. Because of this programme, the enrolment and relation of girls to schools has increased remarkably. Under the centrally sponsored programme at +2 levels, **Vocational Programmes** are being designed to encourage the participation of girls in the non-traditional and emergent technologies.

Shiksha Karmis Programme – It has been started in Rajasthan to make provision for girls education in hilly and inaccessible terrains. In the scheme, the primary school teacher in single teacher schools is substituted by a team of two locally resident educational workers called Shiksha Karmis.

In the same way the Central Government has sponsored the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1994 to provide primary education to all children. It aims at reducing the drop-out rates to less than 10 percent.

Literacy Award Scheme: Central Government has launched a scheme of 'Decadal Literacy Award and Decadal Female Literacy Award' for those who have done a pioneer task in the field of education.

Because of the active involvement of Central and State government in women's education,

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<p>the enrollment of girls in schools has increased remarkably.</p> <p>We have seen that because of these programmes the literacy rate of women has increased. However there is still a gap between male and female literacy rates, high dropout rates of girls in school is also alarming. Many factors are responsible for the non-enrolment and high drop-out rates of girls.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Poverty is attributed as one of the main cause of deprivation of girls from education. Because of poverty, the girls have to take care of the siblings at home, do household works and work outside to contribute in family income.2. Early marriage of girls is also a factor responsible for the high drop-out rate of girls. It is reported that in some parts of the country, almost 50 percent of girls are married between the ages of 10 to 14 years.3. Conservative attitude and social traditions are also responsible for the withdrawal of girls from schools. The belief that "Education is of little value in practical life" also hinders the path of education of girls.4. Inadequacy of infrastructure facilities like toilets, drinking water, transport and hostel facilities in schools is also responsible to the high drop-out rates of girls. Lack of qualified teachers is also a major barrier in the path of girl's education.5. Again, the fear of sexual harassment deters the parents to send their daughters to the schools and a factor responsible for high drop-out rates of girls.6. The fixed school time is not suitable for girls in rural areas. During the school times the girls have to perform different tasks related to home, fields and youngsters. So this is one of	<p>the major causes of the lower enrollment of girls in schools in rural areas.</p> <p>It is a well known fact that problems of adult women are more acute and complex. They are engaged in household chores, rearing children and fields work continuously and little time is left for education. So, special measures should be taken to spread literacy among these illiterate women.</p> <p>To achieve the goal of 100% female education, the following measures should be adopted by the Government in collaboration with NGO's and Community. Some of these are as follows:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Creating community awareness for girls education at all levels.2. Strengthening's adult literacy programs and freeing the illiterate women from their home management occupations are necessary to attain the objective of functional literacy.3. To bring about an attitudinal change in the society towards girls and their education.4. Special women fellowship and training programs may be started to cater the special needs of the women folk and they can be motivated to join these programmes.5. Organizing career campaigns in schools and educational centers to make the girls aware about the education and career opportunities.6. Improvement in the infrastructure like availability of water, sanitation and toilets in schools should be done on priority basis.7. The effective and cognitive efforts of parents are necessary for ensuring girls education so efforts must be done to change the mindset and attitude of parents towards girl's education. <p>(The author is Head, Deptt. of Economics, Chirawa, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, e-mail: anita3modi@gmail.com)</p>
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