

EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY FROM KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT: *Women education is a key to the development of any country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. The most powerful tool that changes the position of society and nation is only women's education. Education improves the status of women within the family as well as in society. So we cannot ignore the importance of women education in reference to women empowerment in all around the world in general and in Kashmir in particular. It is the education which helps an individual to discriminate what is good and what is bad. But in present time the movement of women has locked in the society because of having low educational status. The women belonged to rural areas of the world like in Kashmir are still unaware about their empowerment. This paper discusses the impact of educational backwardness on the empowerment of women as well as the challenges and changes that we must have to deal with during the process.*

INDEX-WORDS: *Education, Empowerment, Government welfare schemes, Kashmir, Women*

INTRODUCTION

Education is the process of facilitating learning or the gaining of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. It can be defined as the hopeful and respectful cultivation of learning undertaken in the belief that all should have the chance to share in life. When we are going to talk about the educational empowerment of women then we can say that education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Education in general and higher education in particular, has an enabling role in emboldening the women community. One way to judge the state of a nation is to study the status of its women. In reality the status of women represents the standard of culture of any age. The social status of the women of a country symbolizes the social spirit of the age. Mostly women education has been ignored but when women who contribute almost half of the population are empowered it will strengthen the national economy. Education is considered as a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their lives.

Education is one of the ways to spread the message of women empowerment. However rich and humongous any country is no goals or dreams of our citizens will be achieved without effective education. Education not only educates a person but also helps her realize that they are vital part to the society. Occupational achievement, self-awareness and satisfaction are among the many things that will be ensured by effective use of education. The importance of education for woman has been accepted worldwide, making decision about their family size, delay marriages, use family planning methods for small family and play an important role in society. It is education by which women are allowing to go out of their houses and work in different organization of the country. The couple mutually takes the decision about the family size if women are educated (Z. Ullah *et al*: 2011).

We cannot say that all educated women are empowered and can enjoy their life very happily, but dependent women no matter how much they are educated are not empowered women. If women think just that being highly educated and employed they are empowered, it is a myth. Because women who are even educated and employed are also violated but what is here needed is the confidence among women. Women have to awake from deep snooze and understand the true meaning of empowerment. It is a well-known fact that women play a significant role in the creation of family and making a nation better. Educated women are not only raising their own socio-economic status but they are enhancing the intellectual horizon of their children, uplifting socio-economic condition of their family and playing a significant role in raising their family status.

Women comprise approximately half of the population in the world. Therefore a nation's advancement is incomplete without the progress in the status of women. For centuries, women were treated as substandard to men in many ways. Women were not allowed to vote, own property, or work in many jobs. This situation is due to strong compulsion to culture. Such endurance is exercised not only for the sake of society and children, but also due to lack of confidence to

live as a single woman and face the challenges of life. Now we are somehow out of those dark ages, women are more empowered to do whatever they want. This means that they have the ability to choose their own destiny, job, vote, and can do anything as a man can do. Education also makes the women strong, empowered, creates self-reliance and brings determination in life. It has a central role in the struggle to achieve women's equality and empowerment both in the family as well as in the community. Lack of education, information and low level of literacy exacerbate the situation of deprivation in all sector of life. Education helps in generating awareness among women about their legal, social, political and economic rights, provisions and privileges to fight against all sorts of social discrimination. It enables them to realize their potentialities, developing skills, seeking employment and improving their nutritional and health conditions.

Geographically both male and female have the same space in society, yet male and female are not treated equally in the society. Women are unequally access to education, physical, health care and financial resources opportunities in the economic, social, political and cultural field. Female has a lower status than male almost everywhere in the world. Women and men are just like the two sides of the same coin, so they should work together in life. There should be given equality in each and every step of life. Education is the responsibility of both men and women. In Kashmir, most of the women work inside the houses, and are completely dependent upon their men and the movement of women has locked in society because of having low educational status.

The University Education Commission (1949) has rightly remarked '*there cannot be an educated people without educated women. If general education had to be limited to men or to women, that opportunity should be given to women, for them it would more surely be passed on to the next generations*'. But the educational status of women in Kashmir like their counterpart to another place in the country was also depressing and quite depressing. Women in the traditional Kashmiri society were generally subjected to discrimination, inequality and oppression. The role of women remained confined to domestic affairs and they were debarred from education (Dabla: 2007). People were highly conservative and the realization that women need to be educated was totally lacking. The first effort to educate Kashmiri women came from the Christian Missionaries. It was between 1893 and 1895 that a missionary school for girls was started by the Church Missionary Society.

There was strong opposition to this school as it aroused suspicion in the minds of people who were conservative in their outlook. They feared that in the school the minds of their women would be polluted by the impure ideas from foreign lands which would lead them astray (Bazaz: 1959). Only a few girls attended the school and their parents were somewhat on the shake, as the public opinion was very much against them (Biscoe: 1998). The dedication and personal efforts of the missionary ladies who laid the foundation of this school encouraged parents to enroll their daughters in this school (Khan: 2005). With the partition of the country, the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference formed the first elected government in the State. The Party prepared the Draft of the future constitution of the State which was given the name of '*Naya Kashmir*' in which education in the State of Jammu and Kashmir was a major and important demand. The Draft provides special arrangements for women's education in accordance with the provision of the Women's Charter (Khan, 1973). A breakthrough in women's education came in the year 1950, which saw the establishment of first women's college, on Maulana Azad Road, Srinagar and the higher education among Kashmiri women started to gain popularity with the establishment of this college. In 1961, another college (Nawa Kadal College) for women was established. With the establishment of institutions of higher education exclusively for women, there was a change in the attitude of women and their consciousness rose. As a result of steadily changing attitudes of the community towards girl's education, the number of Muslim women in schools and colleges has gradually improved and their participation in modern education has increased though at a sluggish pace (Khan: 2005). In order to bridge the gender gap and remove or minimize the disparities in educational attainment, various policies and programmes that have been initiated by the central government for education of women and implemented in Jammu and Kashmir are like:

- i. *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)*: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) promotes girls education through equalization of educational opportunities and elimination of gender disparities.
- ii. *National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Education (NPEGEL)*: The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) is a focused intervention of the government of India to reach the 'Hardest to Reach' girls, especially those not in school through the development of a model school in every cluster with more intense community mobilization and supervision of girls enrolment in schools.
- iii. *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)*: The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme was launched in July 2004 for setting up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging predominantly to the Schedule castes, Schedule Tribes.

No doubt women's education in Kashmir has made considerable progress and even parents are showing interest to educate their daughters along with their sons. But still, their progress is slow because of their low levels of literacy. Our laws, development policies and other strategies have enabled the women towards advancement in different spheres. There has been a perceptible shift in approach to women's issues from welfare to development orientation and further to the empowerment of women economically, socially, politically and legally. Despite all these measures, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enshrined in the Constitution and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women on the other. There is still a lot required to be done in this sphere. There is also a need to take more strict measures for improvement in the education of women in Kashmir because education plays a significant role in raising the status of women. The planners, administrators and implementers involved must pay greater attention to guide the process of bridging the gender inequalities in education. Hence the greatest need of the hour is to raise the social status of women. To bring about such a change, they have to be informed of what legal and administrative provisions are available in the country which is possible only through their education. In fact, the education of women has come to be considered as more important than that of men.

There are some related studies that I have mentioned here are:

According to Yasmeen Mohiuddin et al, in '*Country Ranking of Women Status: An Alternative Index*' affirmed that the lower status of women gives low wage rates than men in all fields and their large number of responsibilities of the family due to abandonment, divorce, etc. in the developed countries. Women's lower status is not only affected their work but also their services such as education and health. Women's status can also be judged by indicators. According to Swami Vivekananda '*There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing*'. In reality, the status of women in the question of gender equality is far from their legitimate right (Mohiuddin et al: Dec 1995).

E. Bbaale & P. Mpuga (2011) in '*Female Education, Contraceptive Use and Fertility Evidence from Agenda*' discusses the positive impact of women's education on their late marriages, autonomy and lower fertility. This study also shows female education making women more autonomous and giving more control about various dimensions in their life (E. Bbaale & P. Mpuga: May 4, 2011).

Lubna Yousuf, Ouffee Maqbool in '*Higher Education and Women Participation in Kashmir: A Trend towards Change*' states that there is no denying the fact that education has a vital role in the life of an individual as well as society. In the case of an individual, education helps to discipline the mind, sharpen the intellect and refine the spirit. Education is the nourishment of the mind with knowledge and as such it helps in the formation of an integrated personality of an individual. Theoretically, the need for higher education for both males and females is the same. But practically it could be said that female education is more important than that of male (Lubna et al: Nov. 2017).

Neeraj Bargoitra, and Dr. Aman Bhardwaj in their study '*Women empowerment in Jammu & Kashmir: An analytical reflection of initiatives and endeavours*' that Empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of the 21st century not only at National and International level but also at the State level. Many initiatives have been taken up in the shape of different policies and schemes at different levels which are inclined in the direction to ensure gender equality and women empowerment.

Bhat et. al. in '*Gender Disparity and Policies of Inclusion: A Case Study of Women's Education in Jammu and Kashmir*' stated that gender disproportion has been the main concern in India's detection for achieving the goal of universal elementary education. Education for women is the best way to empower her in all the fields and can improve the health conditions and economic status among her family members and lack of education among them can become an obstacle to the country's economic development (Bhat et al, 2011).

Sharmila and Dhas et al (N Sharmila, Jan 14, 2017) write on '*Development of Women Education in India*' by stated that women constitute almost half of the population of the world so education for women is the only way to develop the wellbeing, sustenance and economic status of a family circle that comprise a micro-unit of a nation wealth (Sharmila et al, 2017).

CONCLUSION

In order to promote the presence of women in the decision-making levels or to think about the empowerment of women in the real sense which has been defined as empowerment is a way of defining, challenging and overcoming barriers in one's life through which the individual increases her ability to shape her life and environment then we have to give the women of ours the quality education and try her to understand the actual meaning of empowerment or to make her independent. In certain cultural contexts, stronger efforts are required to avoid the exclusion of women from

accessing to and participating in higher education. Such exclusion denies women the right to contribute to sustainable social and human development. Female education is important not only with entire women realms but also with the future of the whole nation. Prominent educationists view 'a literate mother will never have an illiterate child', or we can say that an educating woman means an educated future. For increasing female literacy rate the government should provide free and compulsory education to all females at all level of education. Govt. should provide reservation policy for female in all sectors. Society and family should cooperate for enhancing interest and support for girl's education. They should provide a sympathetic attitude towards girl's education. Guidance and counseling also provided through education, helps women select their jobs and build career paths. Education will help women to empower through the knowledge of science and technology to face the challenges of today's technological age. It also helps them in garnering information through the computer all over the world. Education not only educates a woman but enables her to make decisions and accept responsibilities at her home and outer world. Education helps a woman to understand her rights to equal treatment like a man in the society have.

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