



EDUCATION FOR WOMEN – A RETROSPECT OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES IN POST INDEPENDENCE TAMILNADU

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Abstract

Education is universally regarded as an instrument of improvement in the status of women. It is the prime factor for women's development and empowerment. Through education it is possible to improve women's opportunities for participation in the various fields of life. It liberates women from ignorance and enhances their self-esteem. It enables them to choose their own way and look after their families in a better manner. Literacy is the key factor for women's empowerment. It is considered a step-ladder for occupational and social mobility. There is a positive correlation between female literacy rate and life expectancy. Education helps women to resist exploitation, besides of course empowering them to be self-reliant. General education is very important not only for men, but also for women because it is the education that makes men and women living, interesting and intelligent. It also makes a person a good citizen of his society. The constitution of India provides for liberty, equality, fraternity and justice for all its citizens. Due to the efforts of the various education commissions and committees women education and their upliftment from different angles. Recently, women's education has greater priority as planners and policy makers finally recognized it as a key factor in determining the pace of development.

Key Words: Education, Women, Literacy, Development, Commission, Empowerment

Introduction

“Education is the means for the reconstitution of Society”

Dr. S. Radha Krishnan

Education is universally regarded as an instrument of improvement in the status of women. It is the prime factor for women's development and empowerment. Through education it is possible to improve women's opportunities for participation in the various fields of life. It liberates women from ignorance and enhances their self-esteem. It enables them to choose their own way and look after their families in a better manner. Literacy is the key factor for women's empowerment. It is considered a step-ladder for occupational and social mobility. There is a positive correlation between female literacy rate and life expectancy. Education helps women to resist exploitation, besides of course empowering them to be self-reliant. General education is very important not only for men but also for women because it is the education that makes men and women living, interesting and intelligent. It also makes a person a good citizen of his society.

Recently education has received greater priority as planners and policy makers finally recognized it as a key factor in determining the pace of development. Women in India constitute 50 percent of the country's human resources and their contributions are vital for the nation's progress. But the magnitude of illiteracy among women is very high. Only 18.33 percent of women were literate in 1951, but the present rate is 74.04.

During the pre-British era education was linked to socio-religious institutions, reinforcing the patriarchal social structure. In the British period education became a tool of colonial power enabling a small minority to have access to education. The social reformers of the nineteenth century raised the demand for women's transformation but to make them more capable of fulfilling their traditional roles. Since independence the policymakers have argued for universal education and for making education as a tool for bringing about social equality. The post independence period has witnessed a significant improvement in women's education. The southern region had a relatively favorable record in the field of women's education.¹

The constitution of India provides for liberty, equality, fraternity and justice to all its citizens. Article 14 provides equality before law to all its citizens, which reflects the provision for empowerment of women. Article 21A says that the state should take steps and made provision for free and compulsory education of all children up to the age of 14 years. There are various education commissions and committees that have discussed over the women's education and their upliftment from different angles. Due to the efforts of the following commission and committees, the education of women developed in our society.

University Education Commission (1948-49)

After independence, the first major step taken by the government to organise the education system in the light of independence was the setting up of the University Education Commission (1948-49), headed by Dr. Radhakrishnan. This commission 'suggests improvements and extensions that may be desirable to suit the requirements of the country'. The Commission covered the problems of admission, length and contact of courses, the relation between teaching and research, examination, student discipline, teachers' service conditions etc. The commission included the short chapter on women education. Widely acclaimed, the report of the Commission on the issue of women's education stated 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". The commission mentioned that there cannot be educated people without educated women; therefore opportunities should be given to women to get an education, but the commission states that the basic objective of education is to pass tradition on to the next generation.

Education should enable them to keep their home well maintained, better looking for her children and it will also help them to function as a better human being inside and outside the home. They should given the training of different types of skill like drawing, painting, which may help them to spend their leaser time harmlessly.²

The commission also suggests some special courses for women like home-economics, nursing, teaching and fine arts which enable them to fit in their social environment. The commission also recommended some significant measures for the development of women education are to increase the educational opportunities for women, to help women to get a clear view of their educational interest should be intelligent educational guidance, The college program should prepare to women as their life career and as women students should help to see and get their due position in the society, the new coeducational colleges much consideration to the needs of women, women teachers should be paid the equal salaries as men teachers for equal work.³

Secondary Education Commission(1952-53)

The Government of India appointed the Secondary Education Commission headed by A. L.Mudaliar. The Commission reported that no particular chapter has been devoted to the education of women. The commission feels that at the present stage of our social evolution there is no special justification to deal with women's education separately. Every type of education open to men should also be open to women. The commission also said that special provision should be made for the women in rural areas. The education given to women should help to develop a sense of responsibility and enable them to contribute to the economic development of the country. This commission suggested in favor of Co-education because the primary and university stages are concerned in favour of co-education, but in regard to secondary education considerable divergence of opinion.

The secondary education commission on the issue of girl's 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"

National Committee on Women's Education (1958-59)

The National Committee on Women's Education was appointed by the recommendations of the Educational panel of the planning commission, Government of India under the chairmanship of Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh in July 1957 to examine the comprehensive problems related to women's education. This commission analyzes the difficulties that hindered the progress of girl's education and to make recommendations in order to bring girls' educational equality with the boys.⁴ The Committee submitted the report in 1958 recommending 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; to constitute the National Council for the education of girls and women, to establish the State Councils for women for the education of girls and women in all states, campaign against the traditional prejudices against girls education; advised to give educational concessions to all girls, whose parents income was below a certain income level,⁵ opening of additional training institution for women teachers and appointment of women teachers in rural areas; on demand separate schools for girls at higher secondary stage; need for differentiation of curricula for boys and girls at the middle and secondary level.. To encourage the girls to be admitted in the professional and Vocational Education.

Hans Mehta Committee or Committee of Differentiation of curricula for boys and girls (1961-62)

The National Council of Women's Education and the Government of India appointed the separate Committee under the head of Smt. Hans Mehta for the Differentiation of Curricula for boys and girls in November 1961. The Committee recommended that the differentiation should not be made in the curricula for boys and girls at the primary level. It advocates that the probation of women working in primary schools should be substantially increased. In the middle stage the curriculum to be provided for the minimum courses of general education, which should be made there in on the basis of gender. They also recommended to expanding the provisions of facilities for girls in middle schools.⁶

The committee suggested that the intensive vocational courses of Secondary Education with a view to preparing boys and girls for different vocations in life, separate hostel facilities for girls, special encouragement of girls to study Mathematics and Science, to stimulate the enrollment of girls, special fee concession and scholarship had been awarded in large numbers. At the higher secondary stage, home science is a useful subject for girls but it should not be made compulsory. In 1961-62, there were 222 secondary schools, 61 training schools, 15 colleges for general education and 4 training colleges exclusively for women.⁷

National Council for Women's Education (1963)

The National Council for Women's Education appointed the committee on girl's education and public cooperation under the chairmanship of M.Bhaktavastalam in May 1963. This Committee examined the causes for the lack of public support, particularly in rural areas for girl's education and to enlist public cooperation. The committee submitted its report in 1964 and the report was published in 1965.⁸

The committee recommended the listed out the ways and means for encouraging public opinion such as establishing private schools, setting up of school buildings, providing suitable accommodation for teachers and students particularly in rural areas, popularising co-operation at the primary stage, creating public in favor of the teaching profession and to give greater respect to the teacher in the community. Popularizing the profession of teaching for women, encouraged married women to take part time teaching in village schools and to work as school mothers, educational propaganda to break down traditional prejudices against girls education, organizing school betterment committees, improving conferences supplying midday meals, uniforms and free textbooks etc.

The committee also suggested that the State Council for Women's Education should function as a part of the network of which the district councils at the district level and the Mahila Mandals and similar voluntary bodies at the town and village levels should be strong and have active links. These agencies should look upon mobilizing community efforts to promote women's education. Large number of women teachers were recruited in schools and were given residential facilities near the school campus, so as to enable them to lead a better social life. To advise the schools to conduct the conferences, seminars, distribute informative pamphlets related to the girl's education. They also insisted on the effective enforcement of the Compulsory Education Act. Thus, the committee suggested ways and means for women Education.⁹

Indian Education Commission (1964-66)

The landmark in progressive thinking about and planning for the education and development of women is provided by the report of the Indian Education Commission popularly known as Kothari Commission which discussed at great length almost all aspects of education; it endorsed all recommendations made by the previous Committees. Regarding the education of girls the commission suggests the two strategies. The first to emphasize

the special programmes recommended by the National Committee on Women Education; and the second is to give attention to the education of girls at the stages in all sectors as an integral part of the general programme for the expansion and improvement of education.

The commission also recommended that to close the gap between men and women education, establishing a separate girl's college at undergraduate level based on local demand, but not post graduate level. Separate research units for women in universities should be setup, providing opportunities for training and employment both whole and part-time as to enable women to simultaneously look after their homes and career.¹⁰

National Policy on Education (1968)

Based on the recommendations of the Education Commission the Government declared a National Policy on Education in 1968 whose aim was to achieve "economic and cultural development of the country for national integration and for realising the ideal of a socialistic pattern of society". Regarding girl's 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 education of girls should receive special emphasis and funds required for its advancement, particularly for the implementation of its special programs should be provided on priority basis.¹¹

Committee on Status of Women (1971-74)

In the post-Independence struggle for women's education and development is the publication of the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1971-74), titled Towards Equality. The committee was constituted under the chairmanship of Dr.Phulrenu Guha, conducted an extensive investigation of the problems of Indian women and indicated the possible directions for their education and development in a rapidly modernizing India.¹² It recommended co-education at all stages of education. It also provided ample opportunities for girls in classes XI and XII for education in any area. It strongly recommended universal education up to 14 years of age by providing primary schools within a walking distance and free secondary education to girls with scholarships and hostel facilities so as to improve women's education.

National Policy on Education (1986)

The National policy on Education is a significant landmark in the approach to women's education. It has attempted for the first time to address itself to the basic issue of women's equality. Major emphasis was given to participation of women in vocational, technical and professional courses. A separate course for women's studies was established at higher education levels to further women's development. It also recommended that equalization of educational opportunities should be given priority and women education should be stressed upon.¹³

National policy on Education Review Committee (1990)

The Committee reviewed the National policy on Education and its programme of Action in the context of women's education and made recommendations. It stressed on the promotion and participation of girls and women in education at all levels.

National Perspective Plan for Women's Education (1998-2000)

The National perspective plan for women's education formulated some important specific objectives for women education so that women may actively participate in the areas of social, cultural, economic and political development. The important objectives are elimination of illiteracy, universalization of elementary education and minimization of the dropout rate in the age group 6-14 years and to stagnation to negligible proportion; providing non-formal education and part-time courses to women to enable them to acquire knowledge and skills for their social, cultural and economic advancement.¹⁴

Women's Literacy rates in Tamilnadu 1951-2001

Year	Person	Female	Male Female Gap in Literacy
			Rate
1951	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	40.4	15.35	25.05
1971	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	74.85	54.16	21.70

(Source: Srinivasan.D, Current status of women's Education in India with special reference to Tamilnadu, Academia Education Weekly Digest)

As per the study period, the percentages of literacy rates among the females in Tamil Nadu increased from 8.86% in 1951 to 54.16%.in 2001.the participation of girls at all stages of education has been increasing steadily through the years.

Thus, the post – Independent period witnessed the development of women education in all aspects of their life. Women Education should be given due importance in the present society. Efforts must be made to overcome all the problems of women's education in light of the recommendations made by the above commission and committees. Recently women's education has greater priority as planners and policy makers finally recognized it as a key factor in determining the pace of development. As a result of which, universalisation of women's education will be possible in our society.

Forthrightly speaking, the right to education for women is widely accepted in principle but substantially violated in practice. Even after the 75 years of Independence, women are lagging behind in getting their due share in all developmental activities and have not been able to take full advantage of the constitutional privileges and statutory rights.

Endnotes

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