

pISSN 2320-9305

eISSN 2347-5706

Available at: <http://cjoe.naspublishers.com>

CONFLUX

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 8, JANUARY 2015

A PEER REVIEWED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL



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ROLE OF EDUCATION IN EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: PERCEPTION OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Dr. Gourav Mahajan¹

Swami Vivekananda once rightly questioned “In what scriptures do you find statements that women are not competent for knowledge and devotion? In the period of degeneration, when the priests made the other castes incompetent for the study of the Vedas, they deprived the women also of all their rights. Otherwise you will find that in the Vedic or Upanishadic age Maitreyi, Gargi, and other ladies of revered memory have taken places of Rishis through their skill in discussing about Brahman. In an assembly of a thousand Brahmins who were all erudite in the Vedas, Gargi boldly challenged Yagnavalkya in a discussion about Brahman. Since such ideal women were entitled to spiritual knowledge, why shall not the women have same privilege now? What has happened once can certainly happen again. History repeats itself. All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. The principal reason why your race h ! ! ! as so much degenerated is that you have no respect for these living images of Shakti.” Manu says, “Where women are respected, there the gods delight; and where they are not, there all works and efforts come to naught.” There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness.

Today, around the globe, home and community are not safe havens for a billion girls and women: At least one in three females on earth has been physically or sexually abused, often repeatedly and often by a relative or acquaintance. By the World Bank's estimate, violence rivals cancer as a cause of morbidity and mortality for women of childbearing age. Violence & crimes against women manifest as rape, molestation, kidnapping/abduction, acid attack; torture, abetment to suicide and outright murder for demand of dowry; wife battering & domestic violence. Violence against women is not the issue of any particular region or group; it is an ugly universal, crossing the frontiers of ideology, social class and ethnic identity. At the individual level, violence disrupts the lives of women, limits their options, undermines their confidence and self-esteem, and impairs their health psychologically as well as psychically. It denies them their human rights and hinders their full participation in society. Violence against women deprives society of the full participation of women in all aspects of development, not just in terms of hours of labour missed due to violence, but also in terms of the cost of services to the victims. It also has serious consequences for the mental and bodily health of dependent children.

Though our constitution guarantees equal rights and equal opportunities to both men and women, visible and invisible inequalities and inequities based on gender persist. The report of the National Committee on the status of women in India towards equality highlighted the process of the declining status of women and pointed out that this deterioration has accelerated for the last three to four decades. The Committee has also mentioned several other disturbing trends about the status of women such as disparity in access to health care and medical services, financial dependency, and lack of accesses to get financial assistance increasing gap between men and women in literacy, education and training for employment etc. There are several other unfortunate tendencies that have been conspicuous in India regarding woman's status such as decreasing sex ratio, increasing female infanticide and female foeticide. Malnourishment and undernourishment among girls and women, due to lower consumption of essential nutrients by girls and women and therefore proneness to diseases, higher maternal mortality rates in the lower age groups, because of inadequate health care and medical services.

Today the knowledge economy has created enormous opportunities yet too many women are still prevented from reaching their full potential by a combination of cultural restrictions, gender discrimination, and lack of resources. The country has anti-discrimination legislation in place designed to protect women, yet implementation has a long way to go. Each year, approximately 1,000 'honour killings' are perpetrated against Indian women. Along with female feticide and infanticide, acid attacks, rape, and sexual harassment, honour killings are both the symptoms of and catalysts for women's disempowerment. According to a Report named

¹ Assistant Professor, Sri Sai College of Education, Badhani.



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'Third Billion index' 45% of women believe that they're treated unfairly at work because of their gender; many others struggle to rejoin the workforce after giving birth. More than 50 percent of women report safety concerns related to commuting."

Cultural and social factors are interlinked with the development & propagation of violent behaviour. Society links daughter with honour of the family and their attitude is very defensive & they want to somehow protect this "Liability" till they pass her off to his husband. They are too apologetic about anything & everything pertaining to their daughters. An average Indian family never ventures to invest in health, education, employability, economic independence & overall development of her personality to make her a family asset.

With different processes of socialization which both men & women undergo, men take up 'stereotyped gender role of domination & control. A female child grows up with a feeling of being weak, helplessness (physically & economically), needing protection which paves the way for her exploitation later at every step. Equality between women & men presupposes promoting equal participation of women & men in decision making, supporting girls/women so that they can exercise their rights & reducing the gap between access to/control of resources and reaping benefits of development & democracy.

True, that over the years women have made great strides in many areas with notable progress in reducing some gender gaps. It is honour for us that Women in statesmanship, managing territories, governing countries, even making war, have proved themselves equal to men, if not superior. Whenever they have had the opportunity, they have proved that they have as much ability as men, with this advantage – that they seldom degenerate. They keep to the moral standard, which is innate in their nature. To quote some are as follows.

The former president of the Indian Republic was a woman (Smt. Pratibha Singh Patil – even the US has not had a woman president yet, in its history, despite being the world's lone 'superpower') . The former speaker of parliament's Lok Sabha (Lower House) is also a woman (Smt. Meira Kumar – whose father belonged to untouchable caste – so her elevation to the prestigious post is a double achievement, in terms of gender as well as caste). The leader of the Congress party which headed a coalition government, is a woman (Smt. Sonia Gandhi, listed as one of the "most powerful women in the world"), present foreign minister (Smt. Sushma Swaraj), other political party leaders like Mamta Banerjee (Trinamool Congress, now heading the government in the state of Bengal), Mayawati (a popular and powerful leader in U.P., the most populous state in the country) all testify to the rising clout of women in politics and public life.

But do all these translate into social changes, in terms of practical realities? And do the advances that a few women have made, result in significant changes in the life of the average woman or female half of the population? the answer is anything but unequivocal. In spite of outstanding examples of individual achievements, and a definite improvement in their general condition over the years, it remains true that Indian women still constitute a large body of under-privileged citizens. Even the Global picture about the status of women seems no different from that of India. Addressing the annual meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative in September 2009, former President Bill Clinton very rightly remarked that "Women perform 66% of the world's work, and produce 50% of the food, yet earn only 10% of the income and own 1% of the property. Whether the issue is improving education in developing world, or fighting global climate, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, empowering women is a critical part of the equation"

The ground reality is deprivation, degradation and exploitation of women specially women from rural areas and those belonging to deprived sectors of the society. The Urban elite class women have no doubt been benefitted by the efforts of women empowerment. Women are being brutalized, Commodified, materialized and subjected to inhuman exploitation and discrimination (Bhuyan, 2006).

EDUCATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Various writers highlight the role of education for the empowerment of women According to the International Encyclopedia on Women (1999) in the programme of action of the International Conference on Population and Development, education is considered as one of the most important means to empower women with the knowledge skill and self confidence necessary to participate fully in development process. The National Policy on Education (1986) emphasized the promotion of women's education in all areas of learning to eliminate any sex based stereo typing with the guarantee of equality before the law and the emphasize on girl's



education. Since employment plays a vital role in improving women's status in a society education of women is of prime importance in any women empowerment programme.

In spite of the forceful intervention by a bastion of female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programmes over the last 62 years and above all, the United Nation's enormous pressure with regard to the uplift of the plight of women in terms education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons. The 2011 Census report indicates that literacy among women as only 65.46 percent. The literacy rate among rural women in India is 58.75% as compared to 79.92% among urban women which indicates that the growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, the weak, backward and exploited. Moreover education is also not available to all equally. Gender inequality is reinforced in education which is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 65.46% against 82.14% of men as per 2011 Census.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the perception of adolescent girls towards role of education in women empowerment.
2. To study if there is any significant difference between perception of rural and urban adolescent girls towards the role of education in women empowerment.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

1. There exists no significant difference between perception of rural and urban adolescent girls towards the role of education in women empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

For the present research the investigator used the Descriptive Survey Method to know about the opinions of adolescent girls towards role of education in women empowerment

Sample of the Study: The sample for the present study was drawn from 10 senior secondary schools (5 from rural areas and 5 from urban areas) which were selected randomly from one distt. of Himachal Pradesh ie. Distt Kangra. A sample of 80 adolescent girl students, selecting 8 girl students of XI and XII standards from each of the selected school, was drawn randomly.

Tool Used: The investigator used a self prepared questionnaire to know about the perception of adolescent girls towards role of education in women empowerment. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items based on the four dimensions i.e. Decision making, Self-Reliance, Legal and Political Awareness, Participation in Social and Developmental Activities.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. It was found that 62% of the adolescent girls had perceived that the role of education in empowerment of women was not significant. 84% of the adolescent girls did not found any significant effect of their education on decision making either in family matters or the occupational choices. 67% of the adolescent girls perceived that education could help them to be self-reliant but didn't assure their participation in social and developmental activities. 58% of the adolescent girls viewed that education would help them to be aware legally as well as politically.
2. There was no significant difference between perception of rural and urban adolescent girls towards the role of education in women empowerment. The rural as well as urban adolescent girls did not find education to be a significant facilitator to empower women.

CONCLUSION

Although efforts have been taken to improve the status of women, the constitutional dream of gender equality is miles away from becoming a reality. Even today, 'the mainstream remains very much a malestream'. The dominant tendency has always been to confine women and women's issues in the private domain. The



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traditional systems of control with its notion of 'what is right and proper for women' still reigns supreme and reinforces the use of violence as a means to punish its defiant female 'offenders' and their supporters.

Women have proved, time and again, that they are in no way inferior to men in all walks of life. The male dominated society is not yet ready to accept it. Women just need the necessary support and encouragement of the family and the society. Greater access to education, health, skill building, credit facilities and opportunities for decision making and legal rights should be made available to women to empower them. While priority will continue to be laid on health, nutrition, education, income generating activities, there are some other thrust areas which need to be addressed with a sharper focus. To conclude, there is an urgent need for a sustained, comprehensive effort at all levels to ensure empowerment of women in a focused manner.

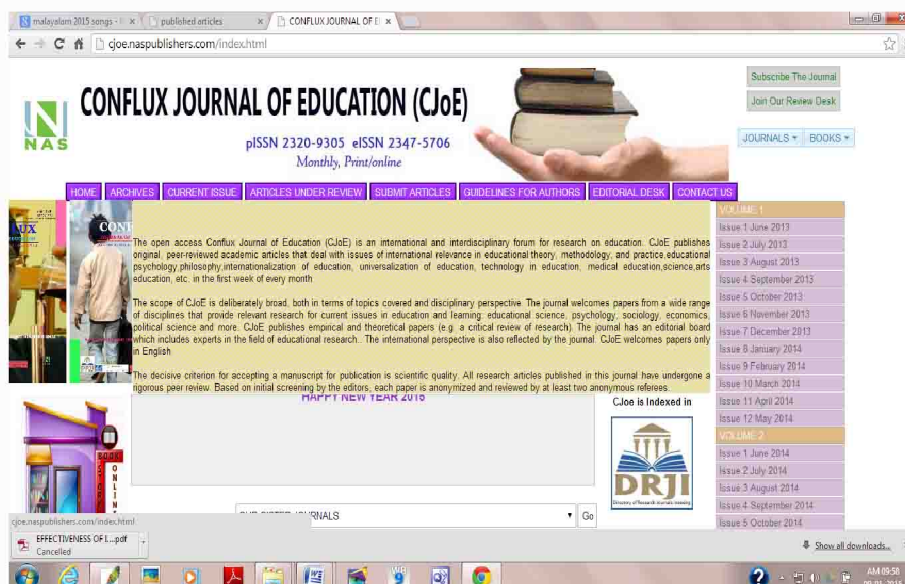
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Perinthattiri P.O., Cheloor, Malappuram Dt., Kerala, India, Pin - 676 507

Ph: 09745073615, 08907162762

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