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Role of Gender in Education –Its Problem and Prospects with Special Reference in the Context of India

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Abstract:

The dualism between man and woman is the fundamental fact of our existence and the attitudes towards these issues are diverse in different cultures. The differentiation of humankind in males and females is conditioned not only by biology and genetics but also by those socially learned roles, functions, norms, behavioural pattern and expectation that are associated with maleness and femaleness in the concrete society.

The main aim of this paper is to examine the role of gender in education or educational system. The issue of gender equality is particularly underlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stating that everyone has the right to education without any discrimination on the grounds of social origin or sex. But despite this optimistic fact, certain stereotypes with gender content and expectation do exist in the educational system that still influence the students' academic performance.

There are mainly two reasons explaining the existing differences in the educational system --- one is biology and the other is upbringing. The biological argument is based on the assumption that the genetic heritage from the human ancestors determine the differentiated specialization of brains of men and women. Secondly, gender difference in behavior and personality are due to innate personality of the persons which are due to cultural or social factors and are therefore, the product of socialization.

Gender difference in education are a type of gender discrimination in educational system affecting both men and women before and after their educational experiences. This discrimination is applied to women in several ways such as hidden curriculum in schools, teacher's unequal behaviour, guardians interested in their son child's education only, pure female literary rate and so on.

In this paper, attempt will also be made to focus on the consequences of such gender discrimination in education like women's becoming of more passive, dependent, less assertive, less confident, lacking in decision making capability and the like. Finally, we shall try to put emphasis on some measures that may solve the problem to a large extent, if not completely and bring about gender equality in educational field.

1. Introduction

“Sitting in the same classroom, reading the same textbook/ listening to the same teacher, boys and girls receive very different educations”(sadker,1994). Infact, upon entering school, girls perform equal to or better than boys on nearly every measure of achievement, but by the time they graduate high school or college, they have fallen behind. The issue of gender disparities in education has been one of the concern of government and all the civil society organizations and stakeholders. As this gender gap adversely affect the female population not only in their educational life but all spheres of life, it is being deeply realized that all those involved in the education process of children need to stress the importance of equality so that all girls have the equal opportunity to feel safe and heard.

2. Objectives

As the very title suggests, this paper chiefly deals with the problems and prospects of gender role in education. The main objectives of this paper are –

1. To bring out the primary causes of gender discrepancies in education.
2. To explain the consequences of the same
3. To highlight measures that may be helpful in solving this social problem.

3. Methodology

The methodology of this paper is descriptive, analytical and historical. Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. For analysis, various journals, websites and expert's comments will be used.

4. The Problem of Gender Gap in Education

Although much emphasis has been put on provision of education, little has been done to address the causes of gender inequality, a new report has showed. According to the situation analysis report of the gender and equity responsiveness of the pre primary and secondary school levels. Girls have continued to be disadvantaged compared to boys in all aspect of education access, participation and performance at both primary and secondary school level. The problem of gender gap in education is prevalent in almost all parts of the globe. India is also not an exception.

5. History of Gender Role in Education in India

When we study the history of educational system in India, from a gender perspective, it shall be desirable to make the study by dividing the history into three phases, i.e. role of gender in education before, during and after British period. These may be discussed as follows-

5.1. Gender Role in Education in the pre British period

In ancient India, the position of women was of authority and honour. They used to study religion, literature and philosophy. The Rigveda contains a hymn which states that a girl should be married only after the period of 'Brahmacharya' (STUDENTSHIP). The Sanskrit term 'Acraryani' used to mean a lady professor. In other words, India did much for the education of women at time when most parts of the world were in the dark. The names of Gargee, Moitreya, Lilavati are still remembered with great reverence. However, after invasion of Muslims, women's education in India started suffering decline. Of course history provides some examples of Muhammad an women like Razia, Chand sultana, Nur jahan etc. who were celebrated for their learning. Then during the Buddhist period also, the education of girls remains in a poor state. Though Buddhism included 'Bhikhunis'(nuns) along with the Bhikhus (monks), there is little evidence that nunneries contributed to a great extent towards the growth of education among the womenfolk.

5.2. Gender Role in Education during British Period

During the role of east India company, female education was the most neglected subject. There was no separate school for girls and the number of girl's students attending boy's school were negligible. But some missionary organization did considerable pioneer work in this respect by starting several girl's schools in India. The Bethune school, which was started by Mr. Drinkwater Bethune in 1849 led to the opening of similar institutions in the country in subsequent years. The Indian women had a great defender of their rights in Raja Rammohan Roy and the Brahma Samaj has a record of conspicuous service for their advancement.

The wood's dispatch of 1854 recognised for the first time that the government should give frank and cordial support to female education and take effective measures for the expansion of it. But unfortunately, the government did practically nothing to implement the recommendation of this dispatch.

After the sepoy mutiny of 1857, the rule of the company ended and British crown became the ruler of India. The government then made some grants-in aid for the spread of female education. The dispatch of 1859 also recognized once again that girls' education should receive a large share of public funds. The next few years therefore, witnessed the starting of many primary and secondary schools all over India which increase enrolment of girls. In 1874 the Calcutta university for the first time allowed girl candidates to appear in the Matriculation Examination. In 1878 college classes were started in the Bethune school for girls. In accordance with the recommendation of the Hunter Commission OF1882, the standard of instruction for girls were made simpler in the primary stage than boys, small fees were levied from girl students and a large number of girl's scholarship. In 1883, The Bombay university threw all university exams open to girls.

During 1901-1902, there were 12 colleges, 467 secondary schools and 5628 primary schools for girls. In 1904, Mrs. Annie Besant established the central Hindu girls school at Baranasi. In 1916, the first medical college, Lady Hardinge college, Delhi for the girls was established which gave impetus to the growth of similar institutions in India. In the same year, the Women's university in Pune saw the light of the day due to the untiring effort of professor D.G.Carve. But still it should be remembered that even in 1937, the percentage of girl student to the total female population was only 2.38. Thus though India made some progress in the field of female education after the rule of the company, but compared to the total requirement of the country, this progress was slow indeed.

5.3. Gender Role in Education during Post Independence Period

In the post-independence period, education of women progress considerably. The Mudaliar Commission of 1953 recommended that special facilities for the study of home science should be made by the government to starts schools whenever there is demand of such school. In 1958, A NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR WOMENS EDUCATION was set up to draw up a Separate national plan for women's education. Another significant development of this period is the formation of Indian Federation of university women to safeguard the academic interests of women. Many women have joined different professional college and schools during recent years and have proved their worth creditably.

But despite such progress, the disparity between the education of boys and girls still continued. The following table will show the gender gap in education in respect of percentage of literacy of men and women in India in the post independent period-

Census Year	Literacy Rate% (Male)	Literacy Rate% (Female)	Male Female Gap In Literacy Rate
1951	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	40.40	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	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	82.14	65.46	16.68

Table 1

6. Causes of Gender Inequalities in Education in India

The above table clearly reflects the gravity of gender gap in education in post independent India. Now let us have a glimpse at the major socio-economic-politico-cultural factors that promote such inequalities. These may be briefly enumerated as follows-

Firstly, prevalence of age old superstitions, traditions, customs, orthodoxy, and conservatism compel most of our women folk to spend their valuable lives within their kitchen in the male dominated society. Prejudices like child marriage, parda pratha etc. still hamper girls' education in some rural areas.

Secondly, lack of sufficient number of separate schools for girls is also responsible for slow growth of women education in India, as most of the parents are against co-education. They have tendency to get their daughters married as soon as possible after they attain a certain age.

Thirdly, extreme poverty of the general population is another stumbling block in this regard. Most of the people, especially the villagers somehow manage to earn just their daily bread and not a pie more. So, they send only their sons to school avoiding their daughters as boys are considered better investment than girls.

Fourthly, prevalence of child labour among girls belonging to downtrodden sections and the hard domestic chores which most of the girls are required to perform is also another impediment in the expansion of female education in India.

Fifthly, the socialization process fosters a belief that women are weak and powerless and it is the duty of men to protect them. Even if girls want to learn and become independent, she is not the one who decides. This state of affairs has made her suspicious, dependent and helpless.

Sixthly, unsuitability of curriculum is also creating some problems in the education of girls in India. More or less similar curriculum is followed in our schools for both boys and girls which should have been different.

Seventhly, owing to poor condition of the means of communication, female education in rural India suffers a lot. Especially, during the rainy season, the girls find hard to go to school as no good communication facilities exist.

Eighthly, another obstacle is the fear of insecurity. The guardians hardly show interest to send their daughters in remote areas for education as girls in India are really not safe.

Ninthly, compared to boys, girls in India are not receiving proportionate attention from the government. Sufficient money and administrative reforms in favour of girl's education is not available.

And finally, improvement of education depends to a great extent on proper inspection and supervision. But our female educational institution has suffered a great deal due to improper supervision and inspection.

7. Impact of Gender Discrimination in Education

Not only the foregoing inequalities, but gender gap in education can also be seen in the form of gender discrimination in education that affects both men and women before and after their educational experience. The socialization of gender within our schools assures that girls are made aware that they are unequal to boys. Every time students are seated or lined up by gender, teachers are affirming that girls and boys should be treated differently. When an administrator ignores an act of sexual harassment, he or she is allowing the degradation of girls. When different behaviours are tolerated for boys than girls because "boys will be boys", schools are perpetuating the oppression of females. There is some evidence that girls are becoming more academically successful than boys, however examination in the class room shows that girls and boys continued to be socialized in ways that work against gender equity.

It is because of this gender discrepancy in education that girls are socialized towards feminine ideals and boys towards masculine. Girls are praised for being neat, quiet, calm, whereas boys are encouraged to think independently, be active and speak up. Girls are taught to endure the main responsibility of domestic tasks, even though their labour force participation has increased. Gender discrimination in high school and college also result in women not being prepared or qualified to peruse more prestigious, high paying occupations. It also makes women more passive, quiet, less assertive and dependent, due to the effects of hidden curriculum.

8. Measures to Remove Gender Bias in Education

It is necessary to adopt a comprehensive scheme for the betterment of the condition of women and for the better interest of the nation. The main plunks of such a scheme should be the following –

1. Unfavourable attitude of parents toward co-education should be removed.
2. More girls school should be established.
3. Number of female teachers should be increased.
4. Residential facilities should be provided to both the girls and the female teachers.

5. Period of free education for girls may be made longer than that of boys.
6. Facilities of part time education for girls should be provided.
7. Highly educated women should be employed as administrators of schools.
8. More grants- in- aid should be provided for girl's education.
9. Adequate inspection and supervision should be ensured for girls' school.
10. Civil society organization should play a commanding role in reducing gender gap in education by spreading awareness among the people regarding the importance of female education.

9. Conclusion

For sure, the implementation of the above schemes will prove fruitful for removing gender gap in education to a large extent, if not completely. In fact, many of these have already been more or less implemented as a result of which female literacy rate is increasing and gender gap in literacy rate is decreasing year by year, not only in India but also in all major parts of the globe. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 guaranteed all men and women the right to education and assured that no discrimination can be made between people on the basis of gender. It was realized that it is only through education of women that the level of culture of a nation can be raised. Jawaharlal Nehru aptly remarked, "Education of a boy is education of one person, but education of a girl is the education of the entire family."

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