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RESTRUCTURING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Shamshir Singh¹ and Ranjit Kaur²

¹Assistant Professor, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda.

²Assistant Professor, Chaudhary Devi Lal University.

Abstract:-The socio-economic, cultural and scientific advancement of any country depends largely upon the quality of the people. The quality of the people in turn depends on the quality of the educational system prevalent in the country. It is only through the educational process that what has been achieved by the previous generation is passed on to the next generation. Thus all nations, attempt to impart quality education and today when there is explosion of knowledge information, it is a challenge for us that education should be of highest quality and standard. Education acts as a catalytic agent to bring social change. A large group of women of India is still residing in the rural and unorganized sector. Majority of Indian women are still confined to the boundary of four walls of the house and are in a socially disadvantageous position. Due to liberalization, privatization and globalization, Indian economy is moving at a very fast pace. Education must be provided to all without discrimination of caste, creed, colour and gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is the major barrier and main constraint in providing equal status to the women in the field of higher education. The time has come that the male dominated society of our country should start realising the potential of women fully so that she can make her valuable contribution to the society to which can be achieved only through restructuring of higher educational programmes especially for women.

Keywords: Women empowerment, gender discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of privatisation and globalisation is presenting new challenges in the realization of the goal of women empowerment and it is rapidly becoming the slogan of many government agencies and non government organisations. Women empowerment is the medium through which women can fulfil their long and cherished dream of living a life of dignity and respect in the society and finally achieve the status they wish to aspire for. In fact an empowered woman is a nation's strength. According to Swami Vivekanand, "..... 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 one wing (Yojana, Aug. 2001). The United Nations Organization had declared the year 1975 as women's year and the decade of 1975 to 1985 as women's decade on an international level. It enabled economists and social scientists to unveil many issues related to women and a general consensus was reached that as long as women in the society remains exploited and confined to four walls of the home, no country can proceed towards the path of progress and development. It is worth mentioning that when half of the population of a country is denied the basic right of leading a respectful life, all talk about growth

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and development is utterly misleading. So the time has finally come when we should give some serious thought and take some concrete steps through which women and finally nation as a whole can be empowered. The time has come that the male dominated society of our country should start realising the potential of women fully so that she can make her valuable contribution to the society which can be achieved only through restructuring of higher educational programmes especially for women.(Shamshir Singh and Ranjit Kaur 2014).

II. CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

Empowerment can be viewed as means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation. It strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience,(Hashemi and Schuler 1996).

Empowerment is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's lives. Empowerment includes control over resources (physical, human, intellectual and financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes).(Batliwala1994.)

Empowerment is the process of obtaining the basic opportunities for socially disadvantaged people, either directly by those people, or through the help of others who share their own access to these opportunities. Nelly Stromquist defines "Empowerment as a process to change distribution of power both in interpersonal relation and in institutions throughout the society". Empowerment also includes encouraging, and developing the skills for, self-sufficiency, so that individuals can meet their future needs. Power is the key word of the term empowerment. Power means having the capacity and the means to direct one's life towards desired, social, political and economic goals or status. Power means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. Webster's New World Dictionary (1982) says the prefix em which attached to the noun power is generally used to form verbs meaning to make, make in to etc. So the words empower means to make or cause power. Empowerment mainly consists of four components namely cognitive, psychological, economic and political.

According to Ms. Stromquist, the cognitive component would include the "women's understanding of their conditions of subordination and the causes of such conditions at both micro and macro levels of society. It involves acquiring new knowledge to create a new understanding of gender relations as well as discarding old beliefs of gender discrimination." The psychological component includes the "development of her inner feelings that women can make efforts to improve her family conditions. This means that she can contribute to the society through her individual efforts without depending upon her male counterpart.

The economic component "requires that women be able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of autonomy, no matter how small and hard to obtain at the beginning". (Stromquist 2003). The political component would encompass the "ability to organize and mobilize for change.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The word "empowerment" means to provide support to someone so that he or she becomes self sustaining and independent. Keeping this view in mind it is imperative that women should strive for empowerment in all spheres of her life especially in field of education, and employment opportunities it is highly important for the women to carve her own niche and make herself independent. Women needs to be empowered in order to become self sufficient so that they are ready to face new challenges for making an effective contribution to the family, society as well as the nation. If one woman in the family is educated the whole family becomes educated. According to Sushma Sahay(1998, p.56.)Women Empowerment is a process which helps women to change other women's consciousness through creating awareness.

A. Women empowerment and its Importance

The tradition and culture of a country is reflected from the status of women in that country. Empowerment of women is empowerment of whole family as well as society and in turn

development of a whole country. The word empowerment in the context of women in the Indian policy was used in 1986- Educational Policy which is known as the “NPE 1986” and the title of the chapter is “Education for Women’s Equality and Empowerment.” It has actually two aspects empowerment first means self empowerment that is women being able to help themselves through whatever is imparted to them and use them to get strength for themselves. It may be education, health or so on and the second is that they should be able to help others to become empowered.

Women must strive to fulfill their own goals as well as devise strategies to meet their requirements and aspiration. Women must participate in decision making process in all walks of life and fully perform her household as well as duties assigned to her by the society. In her message to mark the first day of the year of Empowerment of women, the national commission for women chairperson Vibha Partha Sarathi said, “the year to come must see women in apex decision making bodies, enter profession denied to them so far, recognize their contribution on important and legitimate and help them to fight against disease and deprivation”. Empowerment is a continuous life long process of achieving liberation involving cognitive, psychological, economic and political dimensions through the education. Given the complexity of political, societal and international interrelations, one has to systematically think about the strategies and concrete proposals for future action if one hopes to achieve such a goal. A set of strategies on education, research/ documentation, campaigns, networking, influencing policies, training and media was developed by the participants. As can be seen from the listing, the strategies are inter-related to each other.

B. Restructuring Educational programmes for Women Empowerment

In the Ninth five year plan programme of India the thrust was on strengthening the early joyful period of play and learning in the young child’s life to ensure a harmonious transition from the family environment to the primary school. Towards this, special efforts were made to develop linkages between ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) and primary education. Their operational linkage aimed at reinforcing coordination of timings and location based on community appraisal and micro planning at grass root level. Girl’s education was viewed as a major intervention for breaking the vicious inter-generational cycle of gender and socio-economic disadvantages. The effective expansion of day care services, linkages of child care services and primary schools was a major input to promote developmental opportunities for the girl child for participation in primary education and supportive services for women (IX Five Year Plan, 1997-2002). During tenth Five Year Plan a programme called ‘Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan’ was launched with an objective that all the children in the school going age (below 14 years) in India, must be in schools and should complete five years of schooling by 2007. (Xth Five Year Plan, 2002-07). Formal education has substantial contributions to make to an improved gender identity through the removal of sexual stereotypes in textbooks, the fostering of positive gender identities through the curricula, the retraining of teachers to be gender sensitive, and the provision of non-sexist guidance and counselling.

These elements are crucial antecedents of empowerment, not empowerment itself. If the concept of empowerment is freely applied to changes that are only cognitive or psychological, empowerment would not necessarily have to be translated into a collective dimension and in the case of women’s transformation, it is imperative that social structures be rearranged. It would be important to analyze the gender content and to ascertain the manner in which it is addressed/not addressed in the educational system. On the basis of the analysis, curriculum changes would need to be brought about. Likewise it would be important to reorient the teachers on gender issues so that overall gender sensitisation in the educational system could be brought about. In practical terms it would mean reorienting and re-educating policy makers; securing equal access for boys and girls in education, by organising workshops/seminars for teachers, restructuring teaching materials; availability of learning materials in regional languages; implementation of education programmes for women in the field of Adult Education; incorporating issues such as tradition, race, colour, caste, creed, ethnicity and gender and by organising programmes promoting health awareness services. The policy planners must think to integrate the economic benefits with education. It has been noted that education as such serves to empower women. This may be on the most basic level through

literacy programs or on more advance levels through university study and even Ph.D. Programs. Education is one of the most critical factors responsible for the development of a human person. Right to education, therefore, is held as a very important human right. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. The Constitution of India was recently amended to provide for the right to compulsory elementary education to children falling between the age group of 6-14 years. In India public primary education facilities have been expanded and national literacy shows an increase of 38 percent in 1991 to 65.38 percent in 2001. Participation of women in education program has grown faster than those of men. Female literacy increased two the half times faster than male literacy between 1970 and 2001. However, these achievements are small as India still accounts for 30 percent of the total adult literates all over world, where 24 percent of girls of primary age are still not in school compared with 16 percent of boys.

TOTAL LITERACY CAMPAIGN PROGRAMME:

Total literacy campaign started by the National Literacy Commission in some regions in India brought rapid social change. The Non-Government Organization (NGOs) plays a significant role in the area of education. To large extent the NGO activities have been confined to non-formal education sector. Now a partnership is emerging between the NGOs in the area of basic education as seen in the model of Lok Jumbish, a government-sponsored project for primary education in Rajasthan. Various NGOs are participating in the formal education sector, for example, Action Aid, Plan International, and Agha Khan Foundation etc. NGO action in primary education emphasizes delivery system of quality education to the marginalized people like, poor women and girls. Programs of formal and non-formal education are emphasized by the government in collaboration with local NGOs and the communities. The NGOs use the strategy of popular education in spreading knowledge among people. This is seen in people's participation in developing "IEC" (Information, Education and Communication) package of spreading knowledge about HIV/AIDS, health promotion, environmental risks, etc. In the popular education, cultural forms of education are used like, drama, music, stories, etc. Popular education is effective in increasing awareness towards various social issues like, immunization, girls' education, sexual harassment, etc. Popular education can be applied anywhere, adapting to local context, the ideology and culture of the people within the existing political system. Thus, the NGOs can play a significant role in empowering women through education and training and it is also the basis in the strategy of women's participation in political field.

B. Research/Documentation

UNICEF, Report in 1992 Conference on Education for All Girls:

Programmes of Women's Studies have attempted to dismantle stereotypes and build up women's esteem. Special studies reveal both the extent to which women have been deprived and oppressed and elements in the tradition of all civilization that promote positive images to and ease the conflicts experienced by many women in pursuit of their advancement and new roles in society. The UAC's programme for promoting Women's Studies envisages assistance to Universities for setting up centers and cells for Women's Studies. The centers and cells are required to undertake research, develop curricula and organize training and extension work in the areas of gender equality, economic, self reliance of women, girl's education, population issues, issues of human rights and social exploration (Vina Mazumdar, 2002).

The importance of doing participatory and action research was underscored. It was considered important to organize workshops to train grassroots women to conduct participatory research where they could develop skills to critically analyze their existing conditions. This will facilitate their organizing for collective action. While participatory research was considered to be important, it was recognized that traditional quantitative research was also necessary. The guiding principle, however, was to share the results with the women in a language and manner that was understandable to them. Research as a strategy would therefore entail disseminating information; producing and disseminating information leaflets regarding women's rights; referring to women in

all national and UN statistics; collecting oral history of women and documenting and analyzing successful and failed programmes of the women's movements.

Education for All programme:

It means extending educational opportunities to all, without distinction of colour and race. In our country EPA implies the following -Universalization of Elementary Education-UEE, Expansion of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Equalization of Educational opportunities for women, removal of regional and gender disparities, systematic programme for non-formal Education, imparting basic education and providing vocational training etc.

Gender Sensitization Programme

Government attaches greater importance to those efforts which trigger changes in social attitudes towards women. The women's development division of the National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, New Delhi, organize training programmes with a focus on gender issues. These programmes include Para-legal training, training of elected women representatives from villages, training of voluntary agencies reaching women awareness and gender sensitization programmes, incorporation of gender issues in development programmes etc.

In addition to this the Women's Studies Centres established in various Institutions and Universities have been imparting training on Gender Sensitization to different target groups (students, officials and administrators etc.)The programme of education for prevention of atrocities against women was started in 1982. Based upon the recommendations made in the National Perspective Plan (1988), and the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) the proposal for setting up 'National Resource Centre's for women is now at an advanced stage.

Female Literacy and Literacy Campaigns

The provision of educational opportunities for women has been an important part of the national endeavour in the field of education since India's Independence. Although these literacy campaigns are producing positive results but the problem of gender discrimination is still persisting particularly in our rural areas where the caste and creed discrimination is deeply rooted in the social fabric of our society. The NPE also provided detailed information about the recommendations of launched the National Literacy Mission in 1988 for eradication of adult literacy. Because women population constitutes majority of illiterates, the National Literacy Mission - Mission of imparting functional literacy to women was launched in 1988. The campaigns main motive is to create good working environmental conditions and develop confidence among women so that women themselves are motivated to empower themselves.'Mahila SamakyaProgrammes' have been started for empowering women so that they can stand on their own feet and become self sufficient and lead life with dignity. These programmes are directed to create a learning environment where women can collectively affirm their aim, the strength to demand information and knowledge and move forward towards attaining a quality life (New Education Policy, 1986, 1992).

CONCLUSION

Creating educational opportunities for girls and women is strongly emphasized in the work of the UN. Education, being the most powerful instrument for empowering women assumes special priority in the recent plans and programmes of National and International action. Concerted efforts are also being made to bring more and more women into the purview of education. But still there is a wide gap between male and female literacy levels in India. The development of women's independence, skill and potential is of utmost importance for a nation to progress. Keeping this view into consideration the programme of action for future has to be formulated so as to reduce the gender gap as well as illiteracy rate among girls and women so that all the barriers and obstacles in the path of women empowerment can be removed.

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