

Higher Education and Women Empowerment

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Abstract: *In contemporary period women's empowerment is a burning issue all over the world. Women's empowerment is a multidimensional concept in nature. For empowering women education in general, higher education in particular, is strong foundation. Without education the attempt and drive for women's empowerment becomes fruitless end. Education helps women to enhance psychological makeup and temperament which breeds, in turn, strong personality and self confidence. Educating women does not mean technically educated them but it mean achievement of their qualitative change in thought and way of thinking, enhancement of their power to control over challenges of life they have faced in day to day life. Education can help women in changing mindset of them, raising their status in society and reducing dependency on male. Women empowerment may achieve its horizon if women are to be educated. The main objectives of this paper are, 1) To know the co-relation between higher education and women empowerment, 2) To examine the impact of higher education in women's thought and thinking level and level of rationality, 3) Try to focus on how transform women's mental makeup, confidence level and power to control over their life through higher education.*

Keywords: Education, Psychological makeup, changing thought and thinking, power to control, women empowerment

1. Introduction

In this discussion I have sought to focus on symbiosis between higher education and women empowerment in the context of West Bengal. In the patriarchal society of India women are subject to subordination and oppression down the ages. They have to remain confined within the boundaries of the household and perform the role either as housewife or cook or bed partner of their husband whom they worship as their superiors. They are generally treated as inferior, irrational and incapable of performing hard work activities. They are born as if to be the means of sex gratification of the male sex. Dowry deaths, sexual abuse of women are common phenomena in Indian society. In this backdrop of the society, women's education plays an important role in empowering women. The Oxford American dictionary defines empowerment as "to make someone stronger and more confident especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights". So far as women empowerment is concerned, it refers not only to put them in position of power but it provides to create an opportunity for expressing the power of women in a meaningful way. Empowerment of women refers to think activity and to act as an important actor in giving their opinion in their family as well as in society. This can be possible when their thinking and opinions are heard and valued by the other members of family and of society as well women's ideas carry a rich potentialities. This potential ability comes in women's thinking through education. Education is an art of transmitting knowledge to others for accomplishing their life and adapting them for accomplishing their aim. Whereas the term higher education means all types of training with combine higher level of knowledge and skills. Higher education is directed to the basic prerequisite for attaining and sustaining an indispensable level of quality and to enhance, preserve, and develop inner efficiency to stakeholders.

2. Objectives

- 1) To know the co relation between higher education and women empowerment.
- 2) To examine the impact of higher education in women's thought and thinking level and level of rationality.

- 3) Try to focus on how transform women's mental makeup, confidence level and power to control over their life through higher education.

3. Methodology

In this paper, descriptive method and secondary data are used. Other secondary data collected from various books, journals, e-journals ect.

4. Overview of Literature

Several academic studies on women empowerment and higher education in India as well as in West Bengal vary as to the criteria of discussion on women empowerment. Agarwal and kurkreti emphasised on the close relationship between higher education and women empowerment in order to understand the essential need of empowering women. On the basis of their intensive study on women empowerment in the context of Indian society, they came to conclusion, higher education is both the instrument of empowerment and of overall development of women and therefore the achievement of women in higher education more and more is largely the achievement of women empowerment.

V.B.Patel, in her intensive study on empowerment of women through higher education, has clearly focused on the development of participation of women in higher education arena since 1950 to 2014 which accelerated the process of empowering women. She argues that in several states in India, women's enrolment in higher education increased in huge number which brings a qualitative transformation in the field of women empowerment. But she relatively failed to enlighten how and why higher education can change the women's life and what are the inner potential of higher education in making women to be powerful enough in the field of politics, economics, social and culture.

Data Analysis:

The department of higher education, Government of West Bengal has taken a vision focused on accessibility of need based education to students from all sections of society with special emphasis on females and other backward people.

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Higher education in the state is being regenerated to open up new avenues for students and creates new opportunities for them in diverse field. The higher education institutions transformed into centres of excellence committed to the realisation the above vision of the state. The higher education status is still derived by the value of gross enrolment ratio (henceforth GER). In this regard, the state has not only ensure to access higher education for people of all strata of the society but also expand the higher education network and improve the higher education GER by taking steps to support under privileged and preserving their interest.

Table 1: Increasing growth of colleges and universities in West Bengal, 2011-2015

Year	College	University
2010-2011	926	26
2011-2012	947	26
2012-2013	998	26
2013-2014	1014	27
2014-2015	1061	31

Source-West Bengal Higher Education Department, Govt. of west Bengal, Kolkata, 2016

Table 2: Number of students, ensuring gender balance in higher education, 2011-2015

Year	Male	Female	Institution Count
2010-2011	516489	383325	438
2011-2012	855873	641146	1056
2012-2013	939674	719313	1131
2013-2014	997279	788103	1187
2014-2015	985094	825528	1244
TOTAL	4294409	3357415	5056

Source-West Bengal Higher Education Department, Govt. of West Bengal, Kolkata, 2016

Table 3: Percent enrolment of total enrolments in various courses -2014

Course	India	West Bengal
Certificate/diploma	11.0%	3.78%
U.G	76.3%	82.94%
P.G	12.5%	13.17%
PH.D	0.22%	0.11%

Source-Department of Higher Education, Govt. of West Bengal -2014

The GER ratio of the state was 17.5% as compared to the national average of 19.4% in 2012. There are around 1.6 crore people in the age of 18 of 23 of which 18.69 lack are enrolled in a higher education institutes. West Bengal has seen a growth of 5.7% in the enrolment figure between 1977 to 2010 (source: AISHE 2012, and Department of Higher Education, Govt. of West Bengal).

The male GER of the state is 19% and female GER is 15.9% in 2012, while the national average for males is 22.8% and females is 15.8%. West Bengal has 0.11% of the total student enrolled as PhD students as compared to the national average of 0.22% of the total students. The participation of women in post graduate level is higher than the national average where is 54.6% of the total post graduate students in West Bengal are female as compared to 50.5% in India . Among the total enrolled students of diploma/certificate course in West Bengal 20.8% are female compared to 28.9%

at the national level (source – AISHE, 2012). In the context of increasing growth of gross enrolment ratio in higher education in West Bengal signifies that women are comparatively going ahead in the field of higher education vis-a-vis male students.

Higher education and capacity building:

Higher education is a strong impetus of building capacity for empowering those who we want to empower. Higher education not only improves a woman’s thought and perception, but also raises her level of rationality and psychological energy. The higher level of rationality employed by a woman to combat crisis in her day to day life can create a new vista and the inner strength originated from higher education breeds in turn a high level of self confidence and self dependency. A self confident woman can achieve much capability by overcoming her inferiority complex as she maintains her dignity and self respect.

An educated woman might not always directly oppose socio-cultural constraints imposed on women by our given culture, but through her thoughtful resistance and rational way of thinking help her put up a silent challenge against the everlasting net of hegemony of patriarchal society. In other words, we may say higher education empowers women to offer a positive challenge against hegemonic social norms.

Higher education sharpens and enriches ethical values of an individual. Consequently it facilitates a radical transformation of conventional ideas regarding traditional society and its members. This process of transformation brings about a radical change in thought process of women who have been subject to subordination. A slow but steady change occurs through the training of higher education in the mental makeup of women and of their power to control over their problems in day to day life. As a result of which they can show their courage to protest any kind of oppression and subordination. It is not that this process of transformation changes a woman all on a sudden. Rather it takes place naturally and slowly through a long term process. Higher education brings about an invisible change and the effect of this change manifests itself in women’s thought and thinking, attitude and behavioural pattern, actions and reaction, mentality and maturity, confidence and self respect ect. Now a question arises, how has higher education been able to change an individual? Answer is – the training which the student has to undergo in educational institutions has a strong impact of multicultural dimensions. The students and teachers of an academic institution come from diverse culture, families, communities and social units. Through the academic curriculum and activities the different cultures, creeds, communities, thoughts, beliefs and ideologies of teachers’ and students assimilate with each other. Further, socio-cultural and academic dialogue and exchange between teachers and students, students and peer groups play an important role in reshaping the earlier thoughts, ideas and beliefs of the students. Thus the continuous exchange of ideas between stakeholders on the one hand and frequent participation of students in the social activities, in their cooperation , competition and opposition with other members of the society on the other brings in a great change in the inner psyche of the stakeholders. This process of exchange turns one into a changed being.

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the above analysis it could be concluded that there is no doubt the higher education plays a pivotal role in the process of empowerment. The women who have been transformed through the academic training and interactive processes in higher education are in a sense empowered women. It is generally said that an individual of high quality and high moral standard can influence a large number of individuals. Similarly an educated and reformed woman can influence innumerable women who belong to the so called backward category. So achievement of women participation in the field of higher education is the achievement of empowerment of women. But it should be borne in mind that in the contemporary era of globalization, the negative aspects of western culture have vertically torn into pieces our world of knowledge and consciousness. As a result of it, higher education training becomes ineffective which have also undermined the effect of empowerment of women. In spite of this challenge, higher education has provided ample space for the expression of power of women in a meaningful way.

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