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Dr. Rinu Saraswat

Associate Professor at School of Law, Apex University, Jaipur, M.A, LL.M, Ph.D,

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Dr. Nitesh Saraswat

E.MBA, LL.M, Ph.D, PGDSAPM

Currently working as Assistant Professor at Law Centre II, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Dr. Nitesh have 14 years of Teaching, Administrative and research experience in Renowned Institutions like Amity University, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Jai Narain Vyas University Jodhpur, Jagannath University and Nirma University.

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BBA. LL.B. (Hons.) (Amity University, Rajasthan); LL. M. (UPES, Dehradun) (Nottingham Trent University, UK); Ph.D. Candidate (G.D. Goenka University)

Subhrajit did his LL.M. in Sports Law, from Nottingham Trent University of United Kingdoms, with international scholarship provided by university; he has also completed another LL.M. in Energy Law from University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, India. He did his B.B.A.LL.B. (Hons.) focussing on International Trade Law.

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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal provided dedicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you



WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN INDIA

AUTHORED BY - SHVENI PANCHAL & VIDHI KHANDELWAL

ABSTRACT:

Education is a major factor in the development of a society and the improvement of the country. Women's education is important for leading a sustainable life and balancing the outside habitat. As humans, women have the right to support the country's development and set up a society. Therefore, women's empowerment through education is as important as male education because women have the potential to increase the growth of the country. Being half of the population, women in India do not represent themselves in education-driven industries. This research paper will explore the complex and multifaceted issue of women's education in India, examining the historical, social, and economic factors that have shaped women's access to education.

Furthermore, it comprises the challenges faced by women related to marriage, caste and class discrimination. Lastly, this research paper also includes the importance of women's education and highlights the policies that help promote literacy for all women in India.

INTRODUCTION:

Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of social, economic, and political development. In India, women's education has been a critical area of focus, particularly since the country gained independence in 1947. Despite significant progress in recent decades, women's education in India remains a debatable issue, with significant challenges and enormous opportunities for growth.

In early times, women's education in India was shaped by a range of social, cultural, and economic factors. During the colonial era, women's education was largely limited to the elite classes, with few opportunities available for women from marginalized communities. Post-independence, the Indian government made significant efforts to promote women's education and empowerment, including the establishment of women's universities and colleges, and the introduction of scholarships. Furthermore, many advanced policies were initiated by the governments such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups that

took an active role.

However, various challenges obstructed women's education, including poverty, lack of access to education infrastructure, and societal attitudes that prioritized boys' education over girls'. In addition, women from marginalized communities, including Dalits, Adivasis, and Muslims, faced particular hurdles in accessing education, due to factors such as caste-based discrimination, lack of access to education infrastructure, and poverty.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY:

The right to education has been recognized as a significant part of every person irrespective of gender. In ancient times, education for men was promoted in all cultures, while women's education wasn't given much importance. Significant gender discrimination prevailed across the globe. The need for women's education was not considered, whereas men were being educated as doctors, lawyers, engineers etc. To break this stereotype, women have fought for their right to education for almost 200 years now. Their battle included countless movements all over the world in which men also participated. The archives of Indian women are full of pioneers who have broken gender barriers and worked hard for their rights. As a result, women have made progress in the fields of politics, science, arts and law. During the Vedic times, women enjoyed a high societal status even though they belonged to patriarchal families where sons were given higher priority and daughters were also equally entitled to all the privileges. The Atharva Veda supposes that a woman can become successful in her marriage when she is properly trained during her learning period. However, during the post-Vedic period, the education of women declined and they were treated as the property of men. However, in the 19th century, when voices were raised against the inferior status of women in society, social reformers recognized the need for women's education. Earlier steps for women's education were taken through the establishment of the Bethune School in Calcutta in 1849 and a few schools for girls were also introduced in regions of Gujarat and Maharashtra. Despite several efforts taken by social reformers, the awareness for women's education wasn't widespread.

Later, women emphasized the need for education and took active roles in national movements to build organizations for educational support.

CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN INDIA:

Women in India have faced and continue to face challenges due to societal norms, economic limitations, and inadequate infrastructure in certain regions. Going back in time, the traditional mindset has always prioritized male education over female which has led to a major impact on the growth of education amongst females. As of 2021, 91.95% of women in India were literate. This is an increase of 14.4% since 2010.

However, the literacy rate for women in India is still lower than the literacy rate for men. Moreover, the disparity between male and female literacy respectively is – 82.16% to 65.46%. Despite the established Right to Education Act 2009, which guarantees free compulsory education for children aged 6-14 years, this ratio continues to significantly increased.

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S EDUCATION INCLUDE:

1. Early Marriage:

Women in India are expected to get married early despite the legal restrictions on the minimum age of marriage. As per the reports, 27% of girls in India are married before they reach the age of 18, and 7% are married before they reach the age of 15. Child marriage remains a significant problem in India, with one of the highest rates globally.

This situation is most prominent in rural areas, where early marriage restricts women from pursuing their education leading them to be more dependent on their husbands. In addition, early Marriage often leads to early pregnancy which results in withdrawal from educational pursuits.

2. Caste and Class Discrimination:

The literacy rate of Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) people has been consistently lower than that of the general population. Women belonging to scheduled castes (SC), and scheduled tribes (ST), are considered economically disadvantaged as compared to the general population. Therefore, accessing education did not make it to their priority list in life.

Data indicates that female literacy rate among SCs in 1981 was 15.48 percent, which increased to 26 percent in 1991 and 41.72 percent in 2001. Along with other barriers, caste and class

discrimination became an additional barrier to women's education in India. Women are often regarded as social pariahs or "untouchables," and they continue to endure stigma despite being recognized as equal citizens of India. Often leading to them facing significant limitations, particularly in accessing educational opportunities. Their struggle to obtain education hampers not only their personal growth but also the overall quality of education they receive.

3. Legal and Policy Challenges:

In India, despite various policies and schemes made by the government to facilitate and encourage the role of education in women's lives, the results have been underwhelming. The government wants to enforce the importance of gender equality by increasing employment opportunities for women. However, success can only be achieved by increased participation of women in gaining education for the overall economic growth of the country. For instance, schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) exist but implementation of this scheme remains to be a key issue. A key reason is the obstacles that come due to a lack of coordination between home and the outside environment. It becomes difficult to understand that a woman needs to balance the role of a wife, a mother, and a working woman at her job- who can serve the country and fulfill her financial needs by being independent. Despite possessing the mental, physical, and potential strength required to excel in various fields, women often face significant challenges in pursuing education. The key to unlocking their capabilities lies in education itself, yet, despite their inherent qualities and potential, societal barriers continue to hinder their access to learning opportunities.

4. Poverty

Poverty remains an unforgettable barrier to women's education in India. In economically disadvantaged families, the immediate need for income overshadows long-drawn gains from education. In improvised communities, families often face a scarcity of resources such as food, shelter, and healthcare. The financial burden of education, which consists of school fees, uniforms and books, can be overwhelming for families living in poverty, making it difficult to prioritize sending girls to school.

Furthermore, poverty also leads to many other challenges that hinder girls' access to education. Girls from poor family backgrounds may be forced to work to supplement their family's income, leaving them with limited time and less energy for school.

SOLUTIONS TO COUNTER OBSTRUCTION FACED BY WOMEN IN ACCESSING EDUCATION:-

1. Incentivizing transportation for girls which allows them to approach schools without any hassle and providing facilities to women with disabilities is crucial.
2. Providing vocational education and skill training programs that can encourage women to pursue careers in Law, Engineering, and Mathematics, areas that have been historically seen as underrepresented.
3. Offering scholarships and financial aid for girls, especially from marginalized communities can reduce the economic barriers to education.
4. Guarantee that schools provide a safe and supportive environment for girls, free from sexual harassment and gender-based violence.
5. Leveraging digital platforms and mobile-based learning that can provide a quality education through online courses that enable women even from rural areas to access education.
6. Educate women in all-round development- mentally, socially, physically, psychologically, and economically.

IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION:-

Women's education plays a major role in the country by mainly contributing to both the government sector and society. Women's education in India helps women to participate in more government activities. They play a key role in representing the other women of the country, by being a voice for important issues in the parliament such as equal pay for women in job sectors, equal rights to women overcoming gender equality. The education helps them to move forward and become capable enough to raise such issues with sheer confidence. It not only helps them become independent without having to depend on their husbands but also increases their awareness and knowledge to make the right decisions. Gender equality is essential for an equitable society encompassing the advocacy for women's rights, including the right to education, freedom, and the right to vote. Empowering women through education enhances their quality of life, enabling them to achieve a harmonious balance between their professional responsibilities and household duties. Education helps women to get better employment opportunities which indirectly raises the standard of living of a woman. Empowering women through education is crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty, as it equips them with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in the workforce and make informed decisions

contributing to economic growth. Indra Nooyi is an example of a woman who has broken barriers and become a role model. She ascended to the role CEO of PepsiCo and later joined the board of directors of Amazon. Women's education helps as they become role models for other women by inspiring them. Through women's education, India can achieve the objective of social development. In addition, It helps in the overall development of the country, by increasing the GDP of a country. Educating women creates a vital opportunity for the social and economic development of India. Creating a positive impact on society, especially the youth who gradually learn to respect even more. Education is needed for women. It is important for a woman's self-dignity.

PROGRAMS AND POLICIES TO PROMOTE WOMEN

EDUCATION IN INDIA:

Initially, the government showed concern for women's education in 1947 and made efforts to launch special schemes for facilitating access to education for all girls in both rural and urban parts of India. Later, the government of India appointed an Education Commission in 1964, under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari and the main recommendation of the Kothari commission was the standardization of the educational pattern of 10+2+3 across the country, which embraced the importance of prioritizing girls' education at the primary level to meet constitutional directives. The Commission advocated for accelerating and expanding educational opportunities for girls at the secondary level, which incorporated the establishment of separate schools for girls and the provision of facilities such as hostels, scholarships, and vocational courses. The commission also provided free education up to fourteen years of age, including the lower secondary education level. This commission laid importance on women's education and set up state and central-level committees to oversee the progress. There was the establishment of schools and hostels for women and the committee was urged to find jobs for women in the educational sector.

The initial step was taken by Rajiv Gandhi's National Policy for Education in May 1986, which removed disparities and equalized opportunities, especially for women belonging to Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Caste (SC) communities. Later, a committee was created under the chairmanship of Acharya Ram Murti in May 1990 to review the recommendations of the National Policy of Education (NPE) and to modify its recommendations if any.

Thereafter, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1994 was set up to achieve the objective of universal primary education.

A scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All Movement, SSA) was an Indian government initiative which aimed at the universalization of elementary education in a time-bound manner. A special program was also brought on girls' education through the National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL, launched in 2003) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV, launched in 2005). These programs provided access to elementary education for girls through community mobilization and cluster development.

The Indian Government also passed the Right of Education to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act in 2009, which came into force on 1 April 2010. According to the RTE Act rules, all private schools had to enroll children from weaker sections and disadvantaged communities.

Apart from these schemes, there are a few more government policies in India that encouraged women in higher education and those are as follows:

- Postgraduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship Scheme for Single Girl Child Swami Vivekananda Single Girl Child Scholarship for Research in Social Sciences to Encourage Women's Participation in Higher education.
- The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) launched UDAAN to enable disadvantaged girl students and of ST/SC sections and minorities to transfer from school to post-school professional education, especially in science and maths, through free and online resources.
- PRAGATI (Providing Assistance for Girl's Advancement in Technical Education Initiative) is a scheme that allows selecting one girl per family (whose family income is less than six lakhs per annum) on merit at the qualifying exam to pursue
- In 1989, the Mahila Samakhya Programme was initiated to empower women through education. This program aims to improve the social and economic status of women by providing education and skills. Focuses on women from disadvantaged communities to give them an uplifted livelihood.
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao is a scheme launched on January 22, 2015. This scheme aims to lower the Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and promote education and empowerment of girls. Policy focuses on the well-being of girls and seeks to ensure they have access to

education, healthcare and protection from discrimination and violence.

Through awareness campaigns, the government aims to change societal attitudes towards girls and assist equal rights for girls in all spheres of life including education and work. These schemes provide financial assistance, skill development, and scholarships to women to empower them as a community through the opportunity to educate and employ themselves.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude, the evolution of women's education in India has been a journey marked by significant challenges and progress. Historically, societal norms and patriarchal structures hindered women's access to education, consigning them to subordinate roles. For centuries, education was a privilege mainly reserved for men, leaving women's potential largely unrevealed. However, through tireless efforts by social reformers and women themselves, there has been a growing recognition of education as a fundamental right for women, leading to the narrow gender gap in literacy. Despite this progress, significant barriers persist. Early marriage, particularly in rural areas, continues to impede girls' education, with many married before the age of 18, resulting in early pregnancies and the abandonment of educational pursuits. Moreover, caste and class discrimination further restrict access to education, especially for women from marginalized communities such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

In response, the Indian government has introduced several policies and initiatives aimed at promoting women's education. The Kothari Commission (1964) laid the foundation for expanding educational opportunities for girls, while schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Right to Education Act (RTE) have worked to make education more accessible. Programs such as Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) and NPEGEL focus on girls in rural and disadvantaged areas, ensuring they have access to quality education.

Women's education is crucial for societal and economic development as well. It empowers women to become independent, contribute to the workforce, and challenge gender inequality.

Educated women are better equipped to make informed decisions, support their families, and advocate for their rights. Lastly, women's education drives economic growth by breaking the cycle of poverty and unlocking new opportunities.

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