



Education : a tool to challenge the patriarchy : a study of Guwahati, India

Paramita Dey

Department Political Science, Cotton College, Guwahati, India.

Abstract

Education is concerned with human resource development. The role of education in economic change of society through human resource development is very much significant in the developing countries. Development cannot be sustainable unless it is equitable. Today's development has people-centred approach emphasising the empowerment of people. Woman is the key to this development and empowerment of women is pre-requisite for creating an egalitarian society.

Education can create a new outlook. It is a powerful device to change human nature in a desirable way. The process of education helps individual to know the self. It is education, which prepares them for full membership in the society. Changes brought about by education are permanent and transcendent in nature. Education determines the levels and well-being of people.

Gender discrimination and patriarchal attitude which are being practiced for so many years have incapacitated women in such a way that they cannot stand alone unless a strong support is provided to them. Women of both urban and rural areas have realised the significance and importance of education to challenge the age-old domination and exploitation of patriarchal society. They have found education as a means towards empowerment which would ensure their participation in the decision-making in all walks of life. The present paper will try to highlight this changed behaviour of girl students, specifically in the higher education level, considering Gauhati University as the universe of study.

Keywords : Development, Education, Equality, Gender discrimination.

1. Introduction

The recognition of female education as social issue is very recent in India. In case of female education, it is particularly important to address the conservatism of social attitudes and parental inertia. The role of education in economic change of society through human resource development is very much significant in the developing countries. Development can not be sustainable unless it is equitable. Today's development has people-centred approach emphasising the empowerment of people. Woman is the key to this development and empowerment of women is pre-requisite for creating an egalitarian society. Micro economic

research has revealed that education improves individual income. Research also indicates the contribution of education to better natural resource management and rapid technology adaptation and innovation.

Plato, the great political philosopher recognised education as the most important tool to establish a harmonious state. It is also necessary to mention here that Plato emphasised on the education of both sexes, as he believed that there is no difference in the native virtues of girls and boys (Sabine, 1973). Aristotle said "Education is an ornament in prosperity and a refuge in adversity." Education can create a new outlook. It is a powerful device to change human nature in a

desirable way. The process of education helps individuals to know themselves. It is education, which prepares them for full membership in the society. Changes brought about by education are permanent and transcendent in nature. Education determines the levels and well-being of people. The importance of education has been emphasised by the leaders of the nation also. While addressing the nation on the eve of 64th Independence Day, the President of India Pratibha Devi Singh Patil stressed on the enrolment level of higher education in India. She said "I believe that empowerment through education is important as it opens many doors of opportunity. This will provide the 'brain power' for the nation". Same argument has been reflected in the speech of the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh when he said "Today, almost every child in our country has access to primary education. Now we need to pay more attention to secondary and higher education. It is our endeavour that every child, irrespective of whether he is rich or poor and which section of society he belongs to, should be given an education that enables him to realise the potential and makes him a responsible citizen of our country."

2. Methodology

The education for female and male populations in this context has been conceived and organized as de- jure similar and equal in the exposure, while the process and its social worth for the two groups with consequences for global society are de- facto different and unequal. In spite of several odds and hindrances, the present paper is trying to analyse the change of behaviour among girl students at the formal higher education level from positive point. The present paper has taken the students of Gauhati University as the universe of study. While developing this paper various books, articles, newspapers, internet sites have been consulted. The reports of university have also been studied.

3. Hypothesis

Though woman faces various hurdles at every walk of her life, she has found education as

the means to reach the goal of empowerment. The present paper has following hypotheses—

- (i) Education is an important path for social and economic transformation.
- (ii) Education paves the way to end the age-old gender-discrimination.

Education is concerned with human resource development. However, education and health can be seen to be valuable to the freedom of a person in at least five distinct ways—(1) Intrinsic importance; (2) Instrumental personal roles; (3) Instrumental social roles; (4) Instrumental process roles; and, (5) Empowerment and distinctive roles (Dreze and Sen, 1999). Greater literacy and educational achievements of disadvantaged groups can increase their ability to resist oppression, to organise politically and to get a fairer deal. The redistribution effects can be important not only between different social groups and households, but also within the family, since there is evidence that better education contributes to the reduction of gender-based inequalities. Educated population can play constructive role in the process of nation-building. It has direct impact on women empowerment as it creates in them awareness about their rights, their capabilities and opportunities available on them. Education of girls is vital not only on the grounds of social justice, but also because it accelerates social transformation. It creates greater opportunities for woman to lift herself out of poverty and to increase her social position. Education and emancipated women are assets to any progressive society. Empowerment of women is necessary to make her an active ingredient of development, not a passive receiver of it. Education paves the way for economic empowerment of women, which ultimately leads to social empowerment of women. All these accelerate the participation of woman in the decision-making process, both within / private and outside / public spheres of her life. There is a correlation between gender-equal societies and economic growth. In order to empower women, both socially and financially, the state must increase its spending on education. As the neglected half of the population becomes better-qualified, a highly-skilled human

resource pool is not only created but also expanded and sustained by the men and women who are part of it. Gender justice is also related to financial security within individual families as well as to overall national economic health. Therefore, education prepares the ground for the empowerment of women.

The reality of gender discrimination against women, at infant, children and adult levels, is one of the all too many clouds which darken the touted image of "India Shining". Our society since time immemorial has been a male-dominated one. Despite endeavours of the state, primarily legalistic, as also of a pro-active judiciary and efforts of reformist segments within society, to bring about gender equality not much of a dent has been made in an age-old mindset. The societal structure and prevalent customs, ethical mores related to issues such as marriage, the economic mechanism—everything continues to be designed to ensure the subservience of women (Dutta, 2012). Gender discrimination and patriarchal attitude which are being practiced for so many years have incapacitated women in such a way that they cannot stand alone unless a strong support is provided to them. Through various researches, the role of education in reducing poverty and inequality has been strongly established. Women of both urban and rural areas have realised the significance and importance of education to challenge the age-old domination and exploitation of patriarchal society. They have found education as a means towards empowerment which would ensure their participation in the decision-making in all walks of life.

The importance of higher education received a new impetus and emphasis was laid on education of children and emphasis was laid on education of children of weaker sections of society after Independence. It is widely accepted that higher education has been critical to India's emergence in the global knowledge economy. In 2000, UNESCO held that "Higher education is no longer a luxury; it is essential to national, social and economic development." The formation of University Grants Commission in 1953; National Education Policies of 1980s, etc have facilitated

the establishment and growth of better and quality education in India. Higher education has long been recognised as a major contributing factor to the social, cultural and intellectual life of society by improving the quality of human life. According to the latest statistics available, there are 483 universities in India today (39 Central Universities; 255 State Universities; 59 private universities; 130 deemed universities) and over 16,885 colleges including 1,798 colleges for women. In addition to this there are 1173 polytechnic institutes (UGC, 2007). The Government of India has been recommended to increase the educational outlay to 6 per cent of the Gross Domestic Products (GDP) from the present 3.5 percent. During the 11th Five year plan (2007-2012) the government opened 51 public funded higher education institutions—that included 8 new Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and 7 new Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).

In most developed countries a significant proportion of the populations (up to 50%) now receive higher education at some time in their life period. In affluent nations girls are outperforming boys and entering higher education in higher numbers. Some 81 per cent of European women aged 20 to 24 have at least an upper secondary school education, in comparison with 75 per cent of young men. A total of 59 per cent of university graduates are female (Redfern and Aune, 2010). Higher education is definitely embedded with the outcomes measurable and those which are set for realisation such as employment, productivity and many others.

However, women have considered education as the means to challenge the domination of patriarchy and to establish their right, just and equal position in the society, both within and outside the house. In order to justify this claim, a comparative study of results among the boys and girls students of both the under-graduate and post-graduate levels under the Gauhati University has been conducted. The reason for the selection of Gauhati University is that, it is the first university in the North East India. It was established on 26th January, 1948. It is situated in the west side of Guwahati city. Another reason is

that as it has 239 affiliated colleges, the comparative study would represent the trends of major parts of Assam.

4. Results and Discussions

The study goes as follows—

A comparative study of the results in Bachelor of Science (Major) under Gauhati University in the last 10 years (2000-2010).

Table - 1

	Total No. of candidates passed	Total No. of girl students passed	Percentage of girl students
2000	1485	459	30.91
2001	1241	359	28.93
2002	1385	481	34.73
2003	1275	440	34.51
2004	1167	399	34.19
2005	1416	629	44.42
2006	1173	498	42.45
2007	1120	492	43.92
2008	1318	581	44.08
2009	1230	581	47.48
2010	1047	549	52.43

According to Table-1, in the examination of Bachelor of Science (Major) examination, though in the years of 2000 to 2004, the pass percentage of girl students was not up to the mark, but in the latter years there is an increase in the pass percentage of girl students.

A comparative study of results in the Master of Science under Gauhati University in the last 10 years (2000-2010).

Table - 2

	Total No. of candidates passed	Total No. of girl students passed	Percentage of girl students
2000	518	184	35.52
2001	606	256	42.52
2002	826	312	37.77
2003	541	203	37.52
2004	551	235	42.65
2005	497	233	46.88
2006	513	237	46.19
2007	535	260	48.59
2008	510	264	51.76
2009	472	242	51.27
2010	498	261	52.41

If the Table-2 is analysed, it also shows the gradual increase of pass percentage of girl students in the examination of Master of Science under the Gauhati University.

A comparative study of the results in Bachelor of Arts (Major) under Gauhati University in the last 10 years (2000-2010).

Table - 3

	Total No. of candidates passed	Total No. of girl students passed	Percentage of girl students
2000	6224	3506	56.33
2001	6129	3172	51.75
2002	6725	4002	59.50
2003	6767	4026	59.49
2004	7799	4675	59.94
2005	8102	4403	54.34
2006	5125	3671	71.62
2007	5767	3776	65.47
2008	6642	4457	66.80
2009	6290	4245	67.48
2010	6187	4203	67.93

Though in the years 2000-2005, according to the Chart No.-iii, girl students comprised almost 50 per cent of total pass percentage in the Bachelor of Arts examination under Gauhati University, but from 2006-2010 they occupy more than 65 per cent of pass percentage.

A comparative study of results in the Master of Arts under Gauhati University in the last 10 years (2000-2010).

Table - 4

	Total No. of candidates passed	Total No. of girl students passed	Percentage of girl students
2000	1492	853	57.17
2001	1326	804	60.63
2002	1500	942	62.80
2003	2137	1372	64.20
2004	1662	1076	64.74
2005	1362	917	67.32
2006	1503	1089	72.45
2007	1604	1178	73.44
2008	1685	1207	71.63
2009	1919	1250	65.13
2010	2137	1557	72.85

Table-4 is also clearly showing the increase in the pass percentage of girl students in the Master of Arts under Gauhati University.

A comparative study of the results in Bachelor of Commerce (Major) under Gauhati University in the last 10 years (2000-2010).

Table - 5

	Total No. of candidates passed	Total No. of girl students passed	Percentage of girl students
2000	814	218	26.78
2001	926	207	22.35
2002	875	275	31.43
2003	781	251	32.13
2004	1027	357	34.76
2005	1105	344	31.13
2006	1073	397	36.99
2007	1263	467	36.97
2008	1425	496	34.08
2009	1677	682	40.66
2010	1939	735	37.90

If the Table-5 is analysed, it can be observed that the pass percentage of the girl students in the Bachelor of Commerce examination are increasing. But the performances of girl students are not as impressive as it in the case of Arts.

A comparative study of results of Master of commerce under Gauhati University in the last 10 years (2000-2010).

Table - 6

	Total No. of candidates passed	Total No. of girl students passed	Percentage of girl students
2000	93	23	24.73
2001	111	20	18.018
2002	182	68	37.36
2003	144	47	32.63
2004	120	39	32.50
2005	131	65	49.61
2006	155	70	45.16
2007	159	93	58.49
2008	148	76	51.35
2009	230	137	59.56
2010	220	120	54.54

According to the Table-6, girl students are performing well day by day in the Master of Commerce examination also.

Education as a social institution is an instrument that facilitates the reproduction of social structures. So, whole study proves that girl students have found education as a tool to challenge age-old discrimination on the ground of gender and as a tool of women empowerment. All the above-mentioned charts support this claim. Educational space, with regard to gender, must be envisioned to help decisively eradicate gender inequality.

5. Conclusion

Gender equity, considering the different needs and requirements of men and women which demand different treatments ensuring equal outcomes is the necessity of the time. Education, especially higher education helps women to

improve their lives and the change the gendered face of the community. Education enhances the capacity of independent decision making of individual, irrespective of sex. Education promotes the skills to assert the decisions which accelerate the process of women empowerment. However, issue of women empowerment is more complicated than it may appear, for there are too many ramifications — social, physiological, psychological and so on — for simplistic appraisal or endeavour to suggest measures for redress. Legislations by themselves are not being enough, providing them with resources, particularly in the sphere of education and job opportunities are essential requirements. Girl students have to convert themselves as economic assist, not as burdens. So, education, though slowly but steadily will pave the way for the end of patriarchy, leading to an egalitarian society.

References

- Dreze, J. and Sen, A., 1999 : *India : Economic Growth and Social Opportunity*. Oxford University Press. India.
- Dutta, A. K., 2012 : The girl, child of lesser god. *The Telegraph*—20th Feb.
- Gotez, A. M. and Palgrave, J., 2005 : *Reinvesting Accountability : Making Democracy Work for Human Development*. New York.
- Sarup A. K. and Sons, 2002 : *Empowering Women*, New Delhi, 11002.
- Sabine, H. G., 1973 : *The History of Political Thought*. Oxford Publishing House, New Delhi. India.
- Redfern. C. and Aune, K., 2010 : *Reclaiming the F Word—The New Feminist Movement*. Zed Books London.
- Annual Reports of the Statistical Division, 2000-2010, Gauhati University.
- <http://education.nic.in/HigherEdu/list-deemeduniv.asp>, retrieved on 15th September, 2012.
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gauhati_University, retrieved on 8th October, 2012.

