

Anna Roopraj

GENDER EQUALITY IN DEVELOPMENT DURING SECOND HALF OF 20TH CENTURY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Anna Roopraj
Student, Punjabi University Patiala

Abstract

Women as a means and an end of human development, is related to the vulnerable or disadvantaged sections of the society including women. The objective of present paper is to trace the participation of women in the developmental process. Different governmental interventions based upon concept of 'equality of opportunity' have been reviewed. The question of gender equality and development as emphasized in sustainable development goals (2015-30) has its roots in the efforts made in the second half of the 20th century and the findings of the paper have reflection on historicity of women empowerment.

Introduction

Forty two years ago, in 1971, the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Government of India also appointed the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) to study the status of women in India. The Ministry was acting on a UN request for a status of women report for International Women's Year in 1975.

The 1971 Committee had two tasks: One, to examine the constitutional, legal and administrative provisions that have a bearing on the social status of women, their education and employment. Two, to assess the impact of these provisions. The Committee concluded that there was an increase in the marginalization of women in the economy and society. The CSWI report towards equality found demographic trends of declining sex ratio, disparities in the life expectancy and death rates between men and women; and the difficulties involved in women's access to literacy, education and livelihood.

Education as means for Women Empowerment



Women account for more than half of the world's illiterate population and achieving literacy for them could be one of the first steps towards empowering women to participate more equally in society and free them for economic opportunity which can be seen as highly important end in itself. The education enhances their decision making capacity in vital areas, especially in the areas of reproduction. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women and giving knowledge, skills and self-confidence which is necessary to make them to be full partners in the development process.

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) called for 'special emphasis on the removal of disparities and to equalize educational opportunities', especially for Indian women, scheduled tribes (ST) and the scheduled case (SC) communities. It was emphasized that: "education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women". This reiteration was in continuity of stress on women education in National Commission on Education (1964-66), which called for:

"making concerted efforts 'to close the existing (at that time) between the education of men and women in as short a time as possible'; and 'greater attention to be paid to the problems of training and employment of women teachers' along with focusing on employment of women in teaching, nursing and social services".

Consequently, National Literacy Mission (NLM) was established in 1988 to eradicate illiteracy among large masses of Indian population, the major share of which was women and more specifically in case of rural and socially disadvantaged groups. It may be mentioned that one of the major objective of NLM's strategy for making India literate by 2000 AD was to evolve 'linkages between literacy skills with development programmes' for ruralities, women and other weaker sections who were at a disadvantage, mainly because of illiteracy and poverty. It was for the first time that literacy movement was started with a mission mode and in a continuous process in three phases, total literacy campaign, post literacy campaign and continuing education programme – in all districts of India. Later on the focus was also brought to give impetus to education of girl child through DPEP in educationally backward districts of the country having low female literacy (Basu, 1993).

The Dilemma



It is well documented through empirical database and theoretical perspectives that the linkage between education and development is strong enough and development is dependent on education for all (EFA) – both ‘school education and literacy’ and ‘higher education’ (NIEPA, 1990) especially of the girl child and women (Kabeer, 1994; Weiringa, 1994; Mammen & Paxson, 2000). A major aspect of development process of developing nations like India is the problem of disparities and the nature and sources of these inequalities (Coles, 1977; UNESCO, 1981; Draper, 1989). When development is to be with a human face, it focus on the perpetuating inequalities prevailing in socio-economic system with a bias towards scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, economically backward communities and differently abled (Adelman & Cynthia, 1973; UNESCO, 1995). It becomes more prominent among women folk of these marginalized sections of society. The girl child and women of these marginalized sections are victim of multiple disadvantage and are at risk of being deprived of any tangible benefit of education and development (Dighe, 1992; UNDP, 2000).

As per Census of India (2001), the gender gap in literacy status stood at 21.70% as compared to 23.24% in 1991 – being 18.3% in 1951. This shows that as the literacy profile of India showed an upward trend, the gender gap also grew and was a major issue for policy makers in 1980s and 1990s. This problematic gender gap in literacy – a pathway to development – became more acute and confounding with increasing population on the one hand and imbalanced sex ratio (being 933 in 2001 as per Census 2001) in the five decades of development after independence. The work participation rate of adult population increased from 33.08 to 39.10 from 1971 to 2001, the figures being 52.41 and 57.68 for male population and 12.11 to 25.63 for female population (Census of India, 2001). The female work participation in rural areas increased nearly two-fold over the period 1971-2001, which is of (13.42 to 30.79), whereas, male participation stood nearly same around 51-52 over the same period. The female work participation rate in urban areas also showed increase from 6.68 to 11.88, thereby indicating that growth in female work participation in rural areas was confined to agriculture and allied activities or in government initiated poverty alleviation programmes during 1970s and 1980s. The gender gap in urban work participation is attributable to women’s role only in domestic service sector– denial of opportunities to women equitable in development– because of low educational levels or illiteracy. It may be stated that illiterate women in rural areas were engaged in informal sector– a lower level of livelihood for a human being. Needless to point out that rural poverty remained a major bottlenecks in the path of education and development– especially the



disadvantaged section including women.

The 50 years of path of national development of independent India with five year plans along with major recommendations emerging from different commissions and committees established from time to time to focus on social sector, especially in education, health and population growth took care of girl child and women in a gradual manner. Thus the development process— mainly focusing on infrastructural development, economic growth and employment— started accepting disparities to be the focus for around development of people with diverse needs and aspirations through length and breadth of Indian society (Arnold, 1992; Weirang, 1994; Wooley & Marshal, 1994; Agnihotri, 1995). The issues of poverty, illiteracy and backwardness became the focal points in the successive years in the successive plans to ameliorate the social and economic well-being of all, especially the women folk towards the end of 20th century to look ahead with a new vision of gender equality in development in 21st century.

Pathway to Development

As mentioned earlier, the literacy being a catalyst in development process, the denial of literacy to women was taken as denial to development – social, economic and political. The emergence of concept of human development index of nations by United Nations Development Programme in 1990s was further extended to gender-related human development index (GDI) in 1995 and then gender empowerment measure (GEM) to take into account the women's representation in economic and political power along with active participation in development process for social upliftment (UNDP, 2000).

The question of women's development in India got prominence in 1970s, when Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79) laid stress on increasing the employment level, reducing poverty (garibi hatoo) and justice. There was shift in approach to women's, upliftment from 'welfare to development' to cope-up with numerous problems of the family and the role of women in emerging society aiming at integration of welfare services with development process. During this period Committee on Status of Women Report entitled 'Towards Equality' (1975) laid foundation for emancipation of women by adopting a multidisciplinary approach to alleviate their status – both in social and economic aspects along with their role in decision-making, both at familial and societal levels. The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) was marked with a special focus on gender issue by including a separate chapter on 'Women and Development' (Chapter



27) and adopted a three-pronged thrust on health, education and employment. A specially designed intervention — Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) — was launched to provide ample opportunities of self-employment to the women from below poverty line families in rural India.

In continuity with several programmes launched during sixth plan, an effort was made to integrate women into national development by identifying key areas having direct linkage with women in different ministries during Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90), the specific programmes in development schema — focusing on girl child and women – were initiated in 1980s and two major developments are worth mentioning. A major thrust through a status report on working women in informal sector — SHRAM SHAKTI — highlighted the plight of marginalized sections of Indian society and made a series of recommendations for emancipation of working women, in their search for a dignified life:

Gender inequalities exist in all sections of society. The division of labour is highly sex biased. It favours men against women. The discrimination is manifested in the works of male and female and their earning. Gender inequality is also marked in discriminatory food allocations and acquiring educational and vocational skills. In spite of the impressive increase in total numbers of literate women, the male-female gaps remain large. The present situation of illiteracy amongst women which is negatively related to fertility rates and infant child mortality rates further perpetuate gender inequalities.

The perspective plan for women by government of India (1988-2000) prepared a roadmap for development of women — both on account of education and employment — by the end of 20th century. The clarion call of Education for All (EFA) laid an emphasis on women's education:

'not only because of their low participation, but 'to ensure that the entire movement for widening access and participation in basic education subserves the goal of women's equality and development' (NIEPA, 1990, p. 40).

The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) made a shift in approach to women issues from 'development to empowerment'. The setting-up of National Commission for Women (NCW) in 1992 to safeguard rights and interests of women, adoption of National Nutritional Policy (NNP) in 1993 in order to improve nutritional status of expectant and nursing mothers along with that of children and adolescent girls, launching of Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) in 1993 to promote thrift activities among women and launching of India Mahila Yojana (IMY) in 1995 advocating



an integrated approach to ‘women empowerment’ through ‘Self Help Groups (SHGs)’. This Yojana was later transformed into ‘Integrated Women’s Empowerment Programme (Swajmidha)’ and Mahila Samridhi Yojana was merged into it for a more holistic approach to ensure a paced improvement in women’s status — both social and economic.

During this plan period, 73rd and 74th Amendment Act of 1993 to the Constitution of India were made to reserve women seats in the local bodies — a major step towards political empowerment. Another milestone was Kasturba Gandhi Education Scheme (1997) to establish girls’ residential schools in those districts where female literacy was low — in a continued effort to promote girl child’s education through District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), launched in the beginning of 1990s.

The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) – a plan to bring India more glorious in 21st century – made agenda of ‘empowerment of women’ in order to enable women to act as ‘agents of social change and development’. This plan period witnessed convergence of a number of on-going services and programmes in women-specific and women-related sections along with organizing women SHGs as a major programme for women’s empowerment — through a participatory approach in development — with adult education as an instrument of attack on poverty, illiteracy and helplessness among women, especially in rural and backward areas of India.

The role of women’s capabilities and aspirations was the key focus in the plan’s implementation agenda with ‘human face in development process’. The establishment of financial institutional framework along with other infrastructure related programmes led to the adoption of ‘National Policy on Empowerment of Women’ in 2001 — stressing on elimination of all forms of violence against women, whether at domestic or societal levels, arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices – to ensure ‘gender equality’ in a way that they play an independent role in Indian society.

Challenges Ahead

There is no denying of the fact that there has been a remarkable progress in social and economic status of women vis-à-vis men folk during the fifty years of national development after independence. The nation’s progress as a whole may be considered to be good if not excellent if the challenges of ‘illiteracy-poverty-ignorance-superstition-traditional orientations studded with orthodoxy’. The success of NLM strategy for literacy and development — showing varied levels



of impact across the country — led to rechristening of the programme as Saakshar Bharat Mission (SBM) in 2009 to focus more on women education in educationally backward districts exclusive focus on women's education and development. The targets achieved in terms of 'literacy-health-employment' (the basic concept of human development) are to be seen across inequality — based on regional, locational, social class and gender. The population growth — nee explosion — had been one of the barriers to the equitable and linear development path of Indian society. The improvement in literacy status was coupled with increase in number of illiterates, especially those in rural areas and socially disadvantaged sections—and above all the women. It happened inspite of concerted efforts at policy level since 1970s — beginning with CSWI report (1975) and followed by well designed intervention strategies in the successive five year plans. The emergence of concept of sustainable development in the last decade of 20th century was in continuous governmental efforts across globe to education to issues of poverty illiteracy and gender equality (Sharma, 1998). The gender development index — a qualifier to human development index — showed the poor performance of governmental programmes to address to the uplift of women to move towards gender equality in development schema by 2000 AD. The focus of development, as a result of these efforts, during 50 years of independence in the second half of 20th century, remained on development agenda of government across the globe, include India which are being the basis of sustainable development goals (2015-30) to be achieved by the end of third decade of 21st century.



REFERENCES

- Adelman, I., & Cynthia, T. M. (1973). *Economic growth and social equity in developing countries*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Agnihotri, S. B. (1995). Missing females – A disaggregated analysis. *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 19-26.
- Arnold, F. (1992). Sex preference and its demographic and health implications. *International Family Planning Perspective*, 18(3), 93-101.
- Basu, D. (1993). Mobilizing women for literacy. *Literacy Mission*, 16(6), 32-33.
- Coles, E. E. T. (1977). *Adult education in developing countries*. New York: Pergamon.
- Dighe, A. (1992). The role of adult education in reducing class and gender disparities. *Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, 6(2), 133-140.
- Draper, J. A. (1989). *Adult education: A focus for the social sciences*. New Delhi: Indian Adult Education Association.
- Government of India (1966). *Education and National Development: Report of the National Commission on Education (1964-66)*. New Delhi: Ministry of Education.
- Government of India (1974). *Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79)*. New Delhi: Planning Commission.
- Government of India (1975). *Towards equality: Report of the Committee on the status of women in India*. New Delhi: Ministry of Education and Social Welfare.
- Government of India (1980). *Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85)*. New Delhi: Planning Commission.
- Government of India (1985). *Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90)*. New Delhi: Planning Commission.
- Government of India (1988a). *National Literacy Mission*. New Delhi: Ministry of HRD (GoI).
- Government of India (1988b). *National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000 AD)*. New Delhi: Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of HRD (GoI).
- Government of India (1992). *Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97)*. New Delhi: Planning Commission.



- Government of India (1997). *Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002)*. New Delhi: Planning Commission.
- Government of India (2001). *Census of India, 2001*. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.
- Government of India (2009). *Saakshar Bharat Mission*. New Delhi: Ministry of HRD (GoI).
- Hatt, E. R. (1989). *Shramshakti: Report of National Commission on Self-Employed Women in the Informal Sector*. Ahmedabad: SEWA (Self Employed Women Association).
- Kabeer, N. (1974). *Reversed realities: Gender hierarchies in development thought*. London: Verso.
- Mammen, K., & Paxson, C. (2000). Women's work and economic development. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 14(4), 141-164.
- National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. (1990). Education for all by 2000 AD: Indian perspective. *Working Paper*. New Delhi: NIEPA.
- Sharma, S. L. (1998). Sustainable development: Socio-economic imperatives. In K. C. Kaistha & S.K. Sharma (Eds.), *Population, spatial mobility and environment: Issues and challenges for sustainable development* (pp. 240-253). New Delhi: Anamika Publishers.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2000). *Human Development Report 2000: Human Rights and Human Development*. New York: UNDP.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (1981). Women and Development: Indicators of their changing role. *UNESCO Socio-economic Studies 3*. Paris: UNESCO.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (1995). *World Education Report 1995*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Weiringa, S. (1994). Women's interests and empowerment: Gender planning reconsidered. *Development and Change*, 25(4), 829-848.
- Woolley, F. R., & Marshal, J. (1994). Measuring inequality within the household. *Review of Income and Wealth*, 40(4), 415-432.



