

IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION FOR A BETTER SOCIAL HEALTH FOR WOMEN

*Kasturi Sinha Ghosh**

Abstract: Constitution of India has several provisions to safeguard the interest of woman of our country however; they still continue to face gender disparities, sexual harassment and are deprived of their basic Human Rights. One of the reasons for poor status of women in our society is "Ignorance and lack of education". By reviewing the available reports and articles, this paper would make an attempt to highlight the relevant causes which may lead to hindrance in the path of Women's Education. Further by conducting some case studies we would also try to understand how educating a woman may bring about a positive and an overall sustainable growth in our society and enhance their social health. Efforts would also be made to recommend measures by which we may promote education for women, which would not only be restricted to basic or elementary education but to a higher level as well. Moreover in an Indian society, girls are educated only to become better home makers But education for woman shall not be only limited within the private sphere, but we must ensure that she may also contribute her cognitive skills and creative thinking effectively in the public sphere and thus ensure a dignified life for herself and a much better society for tomorrow. Further Educated Women may contribute to promote a healthy society, where she may be empowered enough to take decision for own self and also for her family. She knows about her Health Rights and may vouch for it, if she is deprived of it. Thus Education and Social Health are interlinked, and this is what we would like to establish in this paper.

Keywords: Education, Social Health, Empowerment and Health Rights

Introduction

Indian Women are regarded and worshiped as Shakti and are a source of immense power, with which she may destroy the evil forces from the society. Unfortunately in reality the story of women of our nation is absolutely different. Indian constitution has laid down several provisions for safeguarding the interest of Indian women, inspite of

which the women of India continue to face gender disparities, sexual harassment and are deprived of their basic Human Rights. One of the reasons for poor Social Health for women in our society is "Ignorance and lack of education".

2011 census report of India reveals, the literacy rate amongst men to be 82.14%

* Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, NSOU, E-mail: kasturisghosh@gmail.com

and 65.46% for women. In 2015 statistic shows that about 3.7 million girls were out of school, and 15% girls could hardly read and write or do simple mathematics and about 40% girls quit school even before completing their fifth grades. A study which was taken up in 2015 reflects the women's enrolment in higher education is about 45.9%, and about 67% women enroll themselves in general courses and only 5% got their admission for professional courses. Government schemes and programs like "Mid-Day Meal", "Beti Bachao Beti Pardhao" ensures school level education, and there are many more scholarship schemes as well as hostel facilities for girl students for promoting higher education, still the situation for women education does not seem to be up to the mark in our nation.

There are several barriers in women's education in our society. One of the major reasons being the societal mind set, which restricts girls to take up education, so as to learn how to perform daily household chore because she has to get married one day. Thus marriage is the only career for the girls in a large part of Indian societies. Further most of the schools particularly in the rural areas are located at a far off distance, without proper infrastructure facilities, non availability of female teachers, poor sanitation facilities in Schools are some more reasons which affects the enrollment figure of girls. Moreover fear of sexual harassment, poor roads and transport facilities along with prevalence of child labour and child marriages are some of the causes of low literacy rates amongst the women of

India. Even if a woman is allowed to carry on with further education she does not have the liberty to choose the subjects according to her aptitude and interest, many educational institutes does not offer enough courses for women students.

Education for women would lead to reduction of gender gap in the society thereby promoting gender equality, improvement of health status of both mother and child, enhance women's access to socio economic and political development, improvement in the standard of living, we may thus think of reduction in social problems like child marriage, domestic violence etc and ultimately the democracy of a nation could be strengthened in this way. Education for women therefore, would mean development of the entire community.

One must realize that a woman devote herself to look after the family matters, manage and keep an account of the financial needs of the household, maintains health and hygiene of the family, and help the children in their education and stands like a strong pillar of support for the family. Thus if she has the capabilities, patience, intelligence, and great presence of mind to carry out her duties in the private sphere she can definitely exhibit the same potentials if she is given the scope to perform in the public sphere as well. This is only possible, if education is made available to them.

Educated women become equipped to challenge the power relations and thus a more democratic approach to develop

may be thought of. Women with Higher level of education enjoy better health and socio economic status than their less educated women counterparts. Gradually they would become source of strength and inspiration for other women also which in turn will assure improvement in the Per Capita income HDI, GDI and ensure sustainable development of the country. An educated woman may also take crucial decision for herself, but also for her family's health and does not have to depend on others for any kind of support. She knows what is best for her. She becomes aware of her health rights, which also includes her reproductive and sexual rights. Thus women with the help of education will become decision makers and vouch for their entitlements, rights and lead a dignified life and enjoy a good social health.

Understanding Social Health

Social Health can be explained as the way in which we may create a healthy and meaningful interpersonal relationship within our society. A good social health helps up to maintain a harmonious relationship and improve our wellbeing and we may develop self reliance and become confident enough to take our own decision. Social health is much more than just the prevention of physical or mental illness or combat social problem. Being socially healthy indicates increased degree of happiness and satisfaction with one's existing socio-economic status. As we grow up we become a part of different social institutions around us like school, college, office and other communities, we

have to develop meaningful relationships with the people with whom we come in contact, and these positive relations help us build a support system making us healthier. It is the ability of an individual to handle different social conditions by involving good communication, empathy and care for families, and for people around us. However by being self-centered, violent and alone, may have serious effect on our health, thereby causing stress and depression which can be a threat to our well being and healthy lifestyle, and may affect our quality of life. It may even lead to increase in the risk of chronic disease, which may lead to poor physical and mental health. Hence social health can be considered as the main cause of well being and if the social health is disrupted, that would mean that a person is not physically socially or mentally at a good state and might be inviting adverse health issues.

There is a close link between Education and Social Health. More educated a woman is, she would have a better Social Health. Education will give her confidence to choose what is best for her. Education would enable a woman to protest against any kind of injustice which would include violence and discrimination. Good education particularly for women is a boon, as it is a foundation for health and wellbeing. Higher education would ensure better job, good housing facility with safe neighbors and enhance our buying capacity for nutritive food and have a good diet. An educated woman can plan a better diet for her family and can take

any kind of life challenges with lot of ease.

Historical Background of Women's Education in Bengal

The importance of Women Education was not felt till the 19th Century until the Christian Missionary came into picture. Though the British Government took initiatives to establish schools yet till 1820s-1830s, no female students attended the schools. Women of reputed families were tutored at home only to read religious books and become "good mothers" and good wives". In 1835 the British Govt took initiatives for women education and in 1849 Bethune school was established by Drinkwater Bethune which was run in a secular approach.

Gradually in 1879 the first lectures for BA course was initiated in Bethun School, for two very bright students Chandramukhi and Kadambini Bose who later became the 1st women students to become graduate in 1883. Later Kadambini Bose became the first women to be a doctor in Bengal, which also marked a new beginning, when women's health issues were taken up seriously. Slowly the enrolment figures of women students in both school and college level kept on increasing and 1916-17 three more women colleges, Diocesan college, Bethune college and collegiate department of Loreto House came up in Kolkata.

The first Bengal women's education conference was held in 1927 which led to the formation of Bengal Women's Education league, to all discuss all the matters related to women's education.

Thus the issue of Women's Education gained recognition and many crucial step were taken for promoting it.

Eminent personality Abala Bose, Radhakanto Deb, Keshab Chandra Sen, Mrs Rokeya Hossien, and Latika Basu are some of the names who were instrumental in promoting women's education in West Bengal.

Understanding the status of Women's education in today's Bengal.

To understand the status of women education in our present society, a study was conducted by taking in depth case studies from Tribal, Rural and Urban communities of West Bengal so that we may be able to get an idea about the various issues and challenges related to women's education in this geographical area.

Case 1

Jyoti Murmu (Name changed), tribal girl, lived with her parents and two siblings in a remote village of Purulia District. Her father was a healer of the village, who used to treat people with herbs while her mother was engaged in making bamboo baskets. Jyoti was the third child of the family. Though she had an elder brother, but her parents never discriminated between the children. Though the family income was not enough yet Jyoti's parent could arrange just sufficient meal for the entire family, however none of the three children were sent to school. According to Jyoti her father was quite a respectable person of the village as he cured many villagers from serious illness and their

family was leading a happy life. However the problems began when Jyoti's mother conceived for the fourth time and she had some complication related to her pregnancy. Even her father failed to intervene, finally a NGO which worked in the area of Maternal and Child Health came to their village for an awareness camp on immunization, came to their rescue and suggested them to take Jyoti's mother to visit the nearest Health Care Centre. They had no other choice but to go to the nearby Health Care Centre for treatment. Unfortunately it was too late and her mother had a miscarriage and suffered from acute anemia.

It was during this period that the family, for the first time came in contact with a world which was different from their's. Though they had heard of modern technologies for treatment but they were seeing it for the first time. Jyoti, then a nine year old girl somehow got influenced by this and spoke to the NGO workers expressing her desire to learn the scientific and modern methods of treatment and then she was told that unless she starts going to school, and acquire education, she will not be able to fulfill her dreams. It was an eye opening experience for her father also, and realized his fault and decided to send all his children to the local school. This was how Jyoti along with her siblings started going to school. Though Jyoti's brother failed his class tenth examination, but she became the first to pass the examination, eventually she also cleared her Higher Secondary exams. Meanwhile she was asked to get married, but since she knew about the ill-effects of

early marriage and how it may ruin her physical, mental and social health, she decided not to get married. She wanted to continue her further studies for which she had to travel about 12 kilometers to reach her institution, but her father was not ready to send her that far, as the roads were not well connected and he found it unsafe. Thus that was the end of her education. However, today Jyoti is 24 and has become an ASHA Worker and today she is actively involved in promotion of better Health Care facilities within her community and sensitizes the community people about the importance of healthy and hygienic life.

Analysis

The story of Jyoti tells us, though there is no gender discrimination in the tribal societies, but still these communities are excluded from social development aspects, because of their own cultural beliefs and taboos. Even though we have so many schemes and programmes for the upliftment of the Tribal societies, yet these societies are lagging behind. Perhaps these people lack the information about various schemes particularly meant for promotion of health and education, and thus remain deprived. The Tribal communities are still unaware about the importance of education and good health, this may be because of the fact that there are very less primary schools in such remote areas and another possible reason could be non availability of study materials in local languages. It seems that there are hardly any colleges for higher education in these areas, and people do not find it

convenient to send their children, especially girls, outside for higher education. However, being educated Jyoti, not only maintains a good health herself, but is also extending health care service to the whole community.

Case 2

Imrana Khatun (Name Changed), a Muslim girl was from an affluent business class family from a rural belt of South 24 Pargana district of West Bengal, acquired her basic education from a local Government school. Soon after finishing her school her parents decided to get her married. Imrana was also very happy to know that she was going to get married. While discussing about her marriage plans with some of her close friends she came to know that they would start going to college for pursuing their graduation. Imrana became a little eager to go to college with her friends, not because that she would become a graduate, but to experience a new life, which she thought would be full of fun. She told her father about it, to which he agreed, but with the condition that the day her marriage shall be fixed she must quit the college. Imrana thus got the permission of her father and she joined the nearby college. Initially Imrana used to love going to college, but never concentrated in her studies, as she knew very soon she would be quitting the college and enjoyed herself with her friends. However one day while attending a lecture on "Women Empowerment" she realized her mistake, and understood the value of education. Her subject teacher played an important role in bringing about this transformation. That was a

turning point of her life. However her marriage was fixed and according to her commitments to her father, Imran left her college and got married to Yusuf, who was an engineer by profession. Imrana told her husband that she wishes to continue her education. Meanwhile her Mother -in- law, asked her to become a mother and start her family life. One day Yusuf told Imrana that she may still continue with her education through Open Learning Education System. Thus Imrana once again enrolled herself to the nearby Study Centre of an Open University and could fulfill her dreams without hampering her family life. Today Imrana has completed her Post Graduate and has joined a NGO, and works as a Project Coordinator. She feel very satisfied and accomplished, this has given her lots of confidence and mental peace as well. She feels education has given her a good life.

Analysis

Imrana belonged to a conservative family, and it is because of her socialization and cultural up bringing that she found it natural to get married at a young age soon after finishing her school. In this case we get evidence that it was due to the influence of peer groups that she thought of joining college, just to get a new experience. However she later was able to realize the importance of higher education when she came across such environment before. Though Imrana got married, but Yusuf, her husband was educated and he realized Imrana's point of view and enrolled her to an Open University. In this case the Open Distance

Learning system proved to be a boon and Imrana got the opportunity to complete her higher studies and became self-reliant and is psychologically at a peaceful state and we know being mentally healthy is also very important.

Case 3

The Affluent Basu family lived in the Golf Green area of South Kolkata. Riya (Changed name), was the eldest daughter of the two children of the family. She along with her sister went to one of the best school of Kolkata. Riya's father was a very successful businessman, while her mother who was not educated much was a homemaker. Things were going well, until when Riya's father met with an accident and lost his life. Riya was only seventeen years old then. The family now went through a crisis period, as Riya's mother who had no clue about the savings neither she knew much regarding the business, faced financial problems. It was then that Riya's mother decided to get her married. She found a suitable groom and thus Riya got married when she was in her twelfth standard only. Riya lost all her hopes and had no choice than to quit school and agree to her mother's decision. Fortunately Riya's mother-in-law, who was a teacher in a Government School, stood beside her and encouraged her to continue her further education. Riya saw a light of hope. She became a mother of twin boys but her mother in law fully supported her and completed her education, came out with flying colours in her Post Graduation Examination. She got a degree in B Ed. and she then she applied for a job in a

reputed school of Kolkata and got selected. Even after such difficult time in her life, Riya could establish herself and lives her life with dignity.

Analysis

From the above case we may observe that even in urban communities, child marriage became a reason for discontinuation of education of a seventeen year old girl. Riya was a victim of child marriage, due to an unpleasant situation. Riya's father, perhaps never disclosed anything to her mother about his financial matters, may be he felt that her mother would not understand much about it as she was not educated, but now after his death Riya's mother faced difficulties in managing the family. The important aspect which got revealed from the case is that there was no respect and mutual understanding in the marital life of Riya's parents. Therefore she thought to marry off Riya so that she may get rid of her responsibility. But it was her mother in law who played a significant role in Riya's life and helped her to pursue her studies and become established in her life and is definitely in a good state of mind.

Case 4

Rehana Bibi, (name changed), a residence of Basanti, District South 24 Pargana West Bengal, was a victim of child marriage and became the mother of two children by the age of 20years. She was educated only still grade 12. Rehana had some gynecological problem and visited her doctor. Her gynecologist, suggested her to go for ligation after the child was born. However she was not agreed to the

suggestion as her family would not allow this to happen. Rehana became pregnant for the third time, but this time her she had major complication and had a miscarriage. This incidence made her depressed and she became quite stressed. She was counseled by the health workers, and she was motivated to continue with her education. Rehana joined a short time course for nursing. She made friends and felt mentally relieved. In due course of time she became aware of ways to have good health and came to know about her health rights. Rehana then decided to meet her gynecologist for consultation and agreed to adopt a safe contraceptive measure. She could also convince her husband for the same. Rehana is now more conscious about the health of her family especially her children. She makes sure to provide nutritive food to her children and maintain their immunization record, which she missed in a few occasion.

Analysis

Rehana, was ignorant about her personal health and hygiene. She was perhaps happy with the way she was leading her life. She was not intended to change her way of life even though she was had health problems. However with right education she became aware about her health status and understood about her reproductive rights. This also prompted her to convince her husband who, went against of the traditional practice and decided to go for family planning measures. Education has made Rehana much responsible towards her children's health.

Results and discussions

The above four cases depicts the situations of four different communities. All the cases were unique and had different perspectives. It appears that it is not only due to gender discrimination or traditional practices which leads to hindrances for women's education but there are several other factors which may be responsible for it. There are less or no primary schools in the remote areas, moreover the teachers at times are not fluent in the local languages thus the teaching learning process becomes ineffective, which leads to increase in the dropout rates in the elementary level itself. Even though Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India have laid down several Schemes like scholarship schemes, hostel facilities for women tribal students etc, yet due to lack of information about these schemes most of the tribal women are deprived of higher education. In some instances we also found that at times the cultural background of some communities restricts women from taking up higher education. However we have also witnessed that in some cases, friends also influence each other for better future, and having a compassionate teacher can really bring about a positive change in our lives. Another interesting phenomenon which came into surface was that the cases of early marriage occur not only due to the cultural practices of a society, but it may also be due to economic reasons as well. But if there is a desire and strong will to achieve something, it can be achieved, as all the cases that we took up, had to stop their education due to some unavoidable

circumstances, but they were able to overcome it because of their self-determination and also because of the support of their relatives and friends.

While summing up we may say it is only after we become aware about our basic rights and develop capabilities to vouch for these rights we may be able to achieve anything in our life. Education is also our basic rights and it is that weapon that will help us to be self reliant and become capable to be independent and well established. It is also the most crucial tool to fight against any kind of injustice and promotes a better social relationship within the community, thereby enhancing our social health. Educated mothers knows how to spend judiciously on the health and food of the family. She is the best person to remember the medical requirements of each and every family member, further an educated woman knows much about various diseases and its causes and can use modern Health Care Services to deal with it. Thus all the cases clearly depicts that there is a close link between Education and Social Health.

Prescribing suggestions for promoting women education and Social Health

- Sensitize the communities for promoting education for both girls and boys.
- Promotion of education for improving the health care services
- The syllabus at the school level must cover issues related Health Rights.
- Formulating Gender sensitive school curriculum.

- NGOs must come forward to promote women educations.
- Introducing Counselling facilities to detect chances of drop outs
- Introduction of vocational courses right from the school level.
- Promotion of Open learning system and ICT support.
- Development of E-resources and online courses
- Inclusion of more women representatives in the Medical Council so that they may speak for women health rights.
- Introduction of courses which are related to development of indigenous skill and according to the interest.
- Awareness generation programme for health care.
- Involvement of ICDS, and Primary health care centres in dissemination of right information in the community.
- Schools must take initiatives in training the students about good health practices from primary level.
- Policymakers must formulate right based health schemes for promoting Physical and mental health.

Conclusion

The fruit of woman education is not just restricted within a family but for the complete society. Good health directly depends on education thus to improve overall social health of woman, education is must. The primary health care centres must have provisions for disseminating

required information so that woman are fully aware of their rights and know what is best for their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. We call for women's education which is not just restricted to primary, secondary or higher secondary level, but for higher level education. Women may choose whatever she desires to take up for her higher education according to her aptitude, skill and interest. We may also have Adult Education program for women who have never acquired any kind of Education. Therefore we may propose education for women, which is not only limited within the domestic sphere but it may be for the public sphere also. "Woman Education", shall not only ensure dignity for women but enable them to exhibit their capabilities and creative thinking for the social development and for a betterment of the entire society.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests that are directly or indirectly related to this research work.

Funding

We have not received any financial support from any organization to undertake this study.

References

- A Madeleine (1982) "Male Hegemony Social Class and Women's Education" in the *Journal of Education* Vol 164 No 1
- B Aparna (2013) "Empowering Women through Education: The story of Indrapastha School" in *Indian International Centre Quarterly* Vol 39 No3 /4
- K Malavika (1986) "Kadambini and the Bhadrak: Early Debates over Women's Education in Bengal" in *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol 21 No 17
- M Nandini (2003) "Contemporary Challenges to Women's Education: Towards an Elusive Goal?" in *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol 38 NO 43
- R Kristen (2012) "Roles of Women's Education institution in international contexts" Vol 64 NO 2 Springer Publication
- <https://bmcmwomenshealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6874-4-S1-S2>