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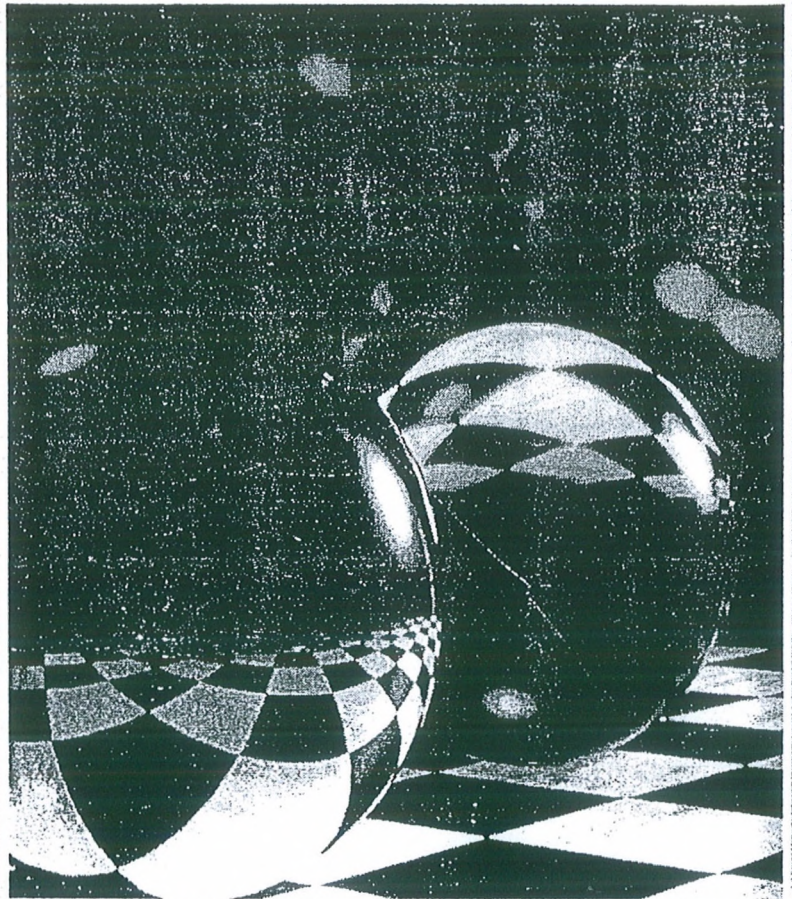
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REFLECTIONS OF THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Educating girls is one of the most powerful tools for women's empowerment as it provides them with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence they need to seek out economic opportunities. Girls with education are better equipped to participate in the economy, either directly through their own work or indirectly through their support of family members. The schools should offer effective guidance and counseling to girl students. Career guidance is often neither available, nor are there facilities for counseling related to the specific needs of girls. The schools should organize counseling teams amongst the teachers as well as peer counseling teams to create awareness in girls about the prospects of education and offer possibilities of overcoming the hurdles of life. The management of schools should look beyond core curriculum to examine the co-curricular and personal development activities for girls. Girls should be encouraged to pursue equal career choices with boys. A major component that contributes significantly to the success of the girls' empowerment activities is through the mutual co-operation among women.

INTRODUCTION

Women's economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to the strengthening of women's rights and enables them to have control over their lives and exert influence in society. They can attain economic independence by harnessing vitality to confront several adversities that hamper them from the path of progress. They should primarily improve their understanding of the need to be economically empowered and obtain the skills needed for such empowerment. Educating girls is one of the most powerful tools for women's empowerment as it provides them with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence they need to seek out economic opportunities.

Girls with education are better equipped to participate in the economy, either directly through their own work or indirectly through their support of family members.

The enrolment of girls in schools should be made mandatory by the government in the realm of compulsory education. The Ministry of Education both at Centre and State level work out strategic steps to stop firmly the ongoing high drop-outs among girls specifically in rural, tribal and slums areas with the severe involvement of voluntary organizations in each and every locality to recognize zero drop-out among girls. The female child in every single Indian family irrespective of socio-economic status should be moulded to overcome the challenges of inferiority subservience and domesticity by severing the limitations on her education and development.

The governmental and non-governmental organizations should expand opportunities for rural adolescent girls to attend secondary school. The schools also have a great role in uplifting the condition of girl students. They should collect and maintain records of the progress of the students in terms of enrolment, attendance, achievement and drop out, as well as data on teacher's participation and performance. The database of the background details of each student is useful to trace the academic performance of the students. They should identify the poverty stricken families by means of appropriate study and necessary poverty alleviation services should be provided to strengthen the income and thereby allow the families to send their children to school.

Effective steps should also be taken to remove tuition fees and other financial and non-financial barriers to access to primary education as part of a comprehensive national plan that provides for adequate financial allocations to offset direct and indirect costs of schooling for the poor. The disadvantaged girls in the rural and urban areas should be given bursaries that cover their educational costs and personal needs. Apart from this, financial incentive like special scholarship award, tuition loans and other financial grants can be specifically granted to women in order to check talented and promising females from drifting away from education.

The increase in girls' enrolment and completion rates can be successfully attained by providing adequate incentives to parents to keep girls in school to help offset needs. Moreover, schools should provide friendly atmosphere to girls including increasing safety standards, improving educational facilities, and employing more female teachers in rural areas to support completion of primary and secondary school. Key measures include building schools close to remote communities, ensuring that schools have quality teachers and adequate sanitary facilities, and that they are safe places for girls. The schools should offer more boarding facilities for girls where there are not secondary schools in easy walking reach of all communities.

The Midday meal scheme and other educational supportive services like free of charge text books, note books, free uniforms, totally free bus, and so on can be provided in all states and union territories to lift up the literacy level among girls. In addition, adequate learning materials and facilities such as science and computer laboratories, libraries and resource centers should be provided to girl students in all rural and urban areas. The lack of learning materials can impede students' participation in class. Learning of science subjects without adequate materials and facilities is a great obstacle to good performance. So steps should be taken to ensure the appropriate supply of books to each school.

The literacy camp method is an effective strategy for coping with women's chronic problem of low and irregular attendance at non-formal educational centres. The process of organizing residential training courses in which a conducive and supportive learning environment is encouraged through group learning, ensuring a high teacher student ratio will

encourage women to generate their own texts as well as promote a continuous learning environment including games and songs with an educational purpose.

Skilled staff with the right knowledge, understanding and experience is required in order for governments to implement successful plans for girls' education. These staff needs to ensure access for girls from all backgrounds, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or disability. Subsequent efforts should be taken to improve the quality of teaching and relevance of rural school curriculum. The policy of employing more female teachers, and providing them with relevant in-service training on topics including gender sensitization, child-centred methodologies especially focusing on science subjects and mathematics, computers, guidance and counseling will ensure that girls have equal educational opportunities.

The development of effective reformative policies will bring about changes in the curriculum that was formulated by the predominantly male and gender biased textbooks, course contents and examinations will bring about a considerable transformation in the condition of education. The segregation of the curriculum according to fairly strict and traditionally accepted gender boundaries is considered as a persistent problem in education. Women are still concentrated in the so-called 'soft subjects', qualifying them for low paying and low status jobs. The reformed curriculum should address the limitations and contradictions of formal education and foster a critical re-examination of the social, political and economic system, as it affects the situation of women. This is being done through an array of innovative strategies in learning which go beyond the conventional definitions of empowerment.

The full involvement of women in formulating and censoring board of the curriculum will help to detect and remove possible gender bias that rises in the curriculum. The well-designed vocational training leads to better paid work, and unprejudiced curriculum that does not concentrate women in low-wage and low-skill work or reinforce occupational segregation between women and men. It is important to establish more training programs for women on technical skills and managerial, entrepreneurial and leadership skills so as to equip them to function beyond the informal sector. The training in leadership, financial literacy and marketing studies will enrich their knowledge of entrepreneurial skills. It increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets and helps in creating just and equitable societies.

The policy makers should initiate several measures to equip rural adolescent girls to be entrepreneurs, workers, and managers in the rural economy and beyond. They should incorporate practical knowledge and skill-building programs into both formal and non formal rural economic development initiatives and education. Develop and promote time-saving technologies so girls can both attend school and focus on skill development. There is a need to provide appropriate technology for easier and more efficient production, to alleviate the work burden of women, and to increase their productivity and income.

The schools should offer effective guidance and counseling to girl students. Career guidance is often neither available, nor are there facilities for counseling related to the specific needs of girls. The schools should organize counseling teams amongst the teachers as well as peer counseling teams to create awareness in girls about the prospects of education and offer possibilities of overcoming the hurdles of life. The management of schools should look beyond core curriculum to examine the co-curricular and personal development activities for girls.

Girls should be encouraged to pursue equal career choices with boys. A major component that contributes significantly to the success of the girls' empowerment activities is through the mutual co-operation among women. These clubs offers activities for building self-esteem and

confidence and developing the leadership qualities of girls. The clubs has a component of community mobilization and sensitization to gain family support for the girls' education. The parents and teachers association and school boards also have a significant role in the progress of the condition of women.

In the process of developing and improving the education system to make it more responsive to the needs of girls, those responsible should make the girl-child the focus of decision-making in educational planning and administration and clearly define, quantify and monitor targets in the context of the national development plans. The schools should re-admit of 'mother-girls' into the formal education system and should also allot provisions of non-formal educational opportunities even if they are beyond school age. They should recognize the girl-child as the focal point in all activities and assess the disparity between boys' and girls' education and develop and implement strategies to redress such disparity within a given time frame orient head teachers towards recognizing school factors which hinder girls' education and measures which need ensure that the proportion of females on the staff in all schools is no less than 50 per cent provide in-service training opportunities for teachers in remote areas monitor and evaluate the school system periodically to determine the extent to which it is effective in achieving its goals and on the basis of the results of the monitoring and evaluation exercise, plan and introduce changes to improve the functioning of the system

The government, nongovernmental organizations and public spirited individuals must intensify efforts to change stereotype attitudes, images and expectations of men and women that are inimical to progress. Posters, fliers, circulated so as to disseminate the unquantifiable benefits of female education. Press releases, radio and television jingles must be adopted to debunk and demystify some of the unprogressive norms prevalent in our society. The combined effort of civic, social and religious leaders will empower in physical, mental, economic and social dimensions of life. The interventions of the organizations in implementing the policies in developing countries like India enables in the successful raising of female enrollment and completion rates.

Education is recognized worldwide as the fulcrum around which the quick development of any nation revolves. It is also the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women. In the economic sphere, most women engage in small scale or large scale businesses. Also, women who are married to entrepreneurs and big time businessmen will be able to help such husbands if educated; they will be able to converse with such husbands intelligently and offer useful advice to them concerning their jobs. The potential contribution of educated and trained women to labour force and the importance of their education in the improvement of family welfare and planning are factors still under-estimated in national development. The rapid discrepancies should be surmounted by starting a massive publicity campaign extolling the virtues of educating a girl and the benefit that might accrue to her family in the form of monetary gain once she starts earning and status and prestige in the community.

The benefits derivable from education of women include the following: enhancement of the quality of living-food, housing, health, clothing, transport, communication, entertainment and gainful use of leisure. If the vast majority of our women folk are educated, their personal development can be enhanced remarkably. Women are likely to have more confidence in themselves and their ability to contribute effectively to national development. The improvement of society could be effected through the development of the potentialities of the women folk. Increasing educational opportunities for women boosts equity and foster national development.

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