

Reflective Thoughts of Women Education in India

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Abstract

Education plays a very significant role in the socio-economic development of a country. Every strata of society, including the marginalized people who are deprived in our society, must get an educational opportunity. In the 19th century and 20th century, the primary impetus was brought in the expansion of women education in Indian society by various social reformers. They first made the realization that the child's first teacher was his/her mother, so it would be very important for the mother to be educated. Yet in the 21st century, the span of women education was not free from constraints. The high dropout rate, priority to son's education compared to daughter's education, lack of an adequate number of female teachers, gender bias in curriculum and stereotypical thinking acted as major impediments to the expansion of women education in our country. As a result, the education of women has not yet encouragingly developed in many segments and fringes of our country. Throughout the era, women were in a more miserable condition in society than men. In the light of the 19th century and 20th century Renaissance rationale, women's equal rights claims had been recognized. Before the 19th century and 20th century, there was no well-thought-out social view on the problem of women's subjugation and women's emancipation in society. It was assumed that the women's community was and will always be subject to men. However, at present through various social reformations and governmental initiatives, awareness about women education across society and various communities has been increasing. Women are now progressing shoulder-to-shoulder in a male-dominated Indian society. The present paper was a brief discourse about the contribution of some of the social reformers of the 19th century and 20th century in the promotion and expansion of women education. The study also sheds light on various plans and programs for the expansion of women education in the 21st century and its reflection on society.

Keywords: equity, inclusion, Indian society, social reformers of 19th century and 20th century, women education

Introduction

“Prioritize the education of women and allow them the autonomy to express their needs, and they will subsequently articulate the required reforms” – Swami Vivekananda

Education is a supreme tool for man-making and forms a very basic indicator for women's equality and empowerment these are- female literacy, gender gaps in literacy levels, and enrollment and dropout rates at the primary school level are relevant indicators (Margaret, 2017). To strike a social equilibrium and sustainable development, men and women need to be educated first. But through ancient times, women education was always neglected, persecuted, deprived, downtrodden, and also covered by social prejudice (Saefudin, 2021). In the 19th century and 20th century, social reformers made significant contributions to the liberation of women from all of these oppressions and

prejudices. Education has been regarded both as an end in itself and as a means of realizing other desirable ends (Sharma, 2012). In the 19th century and 20th century, and before this period, status and education for women were hindered by two major forces. The first force was related to religious and cultural prejudice, apathy, and orthodoxy prevailed in the society. And the other one was the influence of foreign invaders in the society. Many reasons that triggered the deterioration of the status and education for women in India were the patriarchal joint family system, polygamy, the Practice of *Sati*, forced widowhood i.e., denial of the right to remarriage after widowhood, denial of the right to divorce, child marriage, and the *purdah* system (Purkait, 1992). Both child marriage and the *purdah* custom led to a low literacy rate among women. As a result, the social honor of women, dignity, and right to education deteriorated. In these circumstances, many social reformers emerged as saviors for women and engaged themselves in the protection of the honor, dignity, rights, and entitlements of women. They realized that the mother was the child's first educator. Nelson Mandela Said: "Education serves as the most potent tool at your disposal for transforming the world" (Karan, 2017, p. 70). Therefore, women need to be well educated. Otherwise, it will be impossible to educate the next generation. Consequently, some great social reformers put their best efforts into the expansion of women education and prepared the bases for women education in the 19th century and 20th century. Therefore, the contribution of 19th century and 20th century social reformers in improving the education of women is unforgettable (Saefudin, 2021). In the 21st century, the introduction of various opportunities for women through governmental initiatives and increasing educational awareness has enabled society to further expand the path of women education (Bamrungsin, 2022). Education is a very important factor for the development of every nation and human resources (Nagaraja, 2018). In the present juncture, the attitude of women has changed remarkably; they have realized the importance of education as well as the impact and empowerment of women which is brought about largely by education. This study focused primarily on the situation of women education in society during the 19th century, 20th century, and subsequently the society of the 21st century.

Research Questions

RQ₁: What was the contribution of social reformers towards the progress of women education in the 19th century and 20th century?

RQ₂: What are the various plans and programs for the expansion of women education in the 21st century?

RQ₃: How far has society realized the expansion of women education and what are the ways for more improvement in women education?

Objectives

O₁: To review the contribution of social reformers towards the progress of women education in the 19th century and 20th century.

O₂: To reflect various plans and programs for the expansion of women education in the 21st century.

O₃: To analyze the present position of women education and recommend for improvement of it.

Methodology

The research was historical in nature. Qualitative information was used in this study, which was based on theoretical investigation. Content analysis was done on the available documents through secondary sources. Information was collected from different types of available books, journals (including e-journals), articles written by great authors, and websites as secondary sources. The study was delimited to the 19th century, 20th century, and the 21st century Indian women education. A few selected social reformers were considered for this study.

Findings and Discussion

The research questions in conjunction with the objectives framed were investigated and interpreted in the subsequent sections below:

RQ₁. What was the contribution of social reformers towards the progress of women education in the 19th century and 20th century?

- **Thoughts of Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833):** Raja Rammohan Roy was the pioneer of the modern *Renaissance* (The important aspect of the *Renaissance* was the recognition of individual worth. *Renaissance* in its essence is a humanist movement. The humanist outlook led to the abolition of the old practices of 'Sati', 'child marriage', and 'widow remarriage' came into vogue as a mark of humanism) of Bengal (Purkait, 1992). His deep-rooted lifestyle, in the spread of women education through a humanitarian approach and a rational mindset, filled the light of social reformer, reasoning, and analysis (Bhattacharjee, 2015). He realized that real education is needed to bring people back to the right path of life in society. That is why he tried to reconcile the East-West culture. In that era, there was no such support in Hindu society for women education. New books were translated into Bengali and new journals were published focusing on Western ideas and thought (Samachar Darpan is the first Bengali journal published by the Serampore Baptist Mission in 1818) (Purkait, 1992). He conducted to run two weekly magazines, 'Sanbad Koumudi' (1821) (It was edited by Raja Rammohan Roy), in Bengali and 'Miratul Akbar' (1822) in Persian. He was passionate about expanding women education to strengthen the infrastructure of the society. He firmly believed that the practice of Western literature and the spread of women education would make India's life superstitious.
- **Thoughts of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891):** Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar played the most important role in spreading women education in Bengal. He realized that the real improvement of the society and culture of Bengal would not be possible if women education did not improve (Bhattacharjee, 2015). Vidyasagar established a 'Hindu female School' in Kolkata under the initiative of Drinkwater Bethune. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was acutely aware of Hindu society's way of life, including their hesitation to enroll girls in schools (Paul, Chatterjee, & Das, 2023). It is the first female school in India. Vidyasagar was the editor of this school. It is now known as 'Bethune School.' In 1857 he established a school for girls in the Burdwan district. He established 32 female schools in Nadia, Burdwan, Hooghly, and Midnapur districts in May 1858 with a personal initiative. About 1300 female students studied in this school (Bhattacharjee, 2015). He was also a social reformer. He strongly opposed child marriage and polygamy. In his attempt, the widow remarriage act was enacted in 1856 (Paul, Chatterjee, & Das, 2023). Not only did his tireless efforts to spread primary education, mass education, and women education not only induce the education of Indians, but they also influenced education policy in particular. He sought to revive national traditions by abandoning the prejudice and illiteracy of this country through the spread of women education (Paul, Chatterjee, & Das, 2023).
- **Thoughts of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902):** Swami Vivekananda believed that women, like men, should have equal education opportunities. Swamiji conveyed that "considering the well-being of the world is inconceivable unless the status of women is enhanced, as it is akin to expecting a bird to soar with only one wing" (Karan, 2017, p. 70). The thirst for knowledge is equal to both. So Swamiji opened a school for women in the villages and asked them to do it. He urged women to teach religion, arts, science, home science, cooking, sewing, and health. Swamiji was asked to form a group of 'Brahmacharini' who would teach women from village to village. He proposed setting up women institutes and adjoining schools to promote women education. He said: "It is in the hands of educated and pious mothers that great men are born" (Sharma, 2012, p. 128).
- **Thoughts of Swami Pranabananda (1896-1941):** Swami Pranabananda believed that women, like men, should have equal access to education. The overall welfare of the society is not possible if one part of the society is weak. However, he did not support progressivism in the name of women education. Pranabananda wanted to create ideal women like 'Sita', 'Savitri', and 'Dmayanti' (Sharma, 2012). So even though he was a supporter of women

education, he did not so much interest in their higher education. However, he did not oppose higher education in the field of competent women.

- **Thoughts of Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883):** Swami Dayananda Saraswati's contribution to the wideness of women education in the 19th century was very important. According to him, women and men have equal rights in education (Sharma, 2012). However, the curriculum of women will be somewhat different from that of men. Swami Dayananda Saraswati emphasized the importance of women in their study of domestic science with religion, grammar, mathematics, practical arts, and education.
- **Thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941):** Rabindranath Tagore was one of the leading men in spreading education in the 19th century and 20th century. In his view all people are equal. He said that men and women should be given equal opportunities to receive education (Singh, 2022). Empowering the women nation to eliminate and prevent social prejudice of the 19th century and 20th century through the spread of women education. He established various schools and colleges in the field of women education and also wrote various books for the awakening of women's power (Singh, 2022).
- **Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948):** Mahatma Gandhi was one of the 19th century and 20th century personalities. He said: "Education one man, you educate one person, but educate one woman, you educate a whole civilization" (Karan, 2017, p. 70). He wanted everyone to live their lives freely (In as much as the spring of all Gandhiji's thoughts and actions is non-violence, he has naturally pointed the way of 'Ahinsa' as the way of freedom for women not only from their shackles but for the permanent removal of the world's ills.) (Sharma, 2012). He emphasized mainly the independence of women. He spoke out fearlessly against enforced widowhood, purdah, the dedication of girls to temples, prostitution, early marriage, the dowry system, economic bondage, and maternal slavery of women (Sharma, 2012). He also spoke against the prejudice of women against social prejudice, child marriage, polygamy, and so on.
- **Thoughts of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831):** Derozio was a thoughtful, well-educated, poet, and true country lover. The young Bengal movement, led by Derozio, had aroused a raft of rationalism and truth in this country. As a result of freedom of thought, society was liberated from many superstitions. Derozio and his followers campaigned for the promotion of women education and placed individual freedom above all. Pyarichand Mitra and Radhanath Sikdar published a monthly magazine for women education. He had brought remarkable improvement in women education (Sharma, 2012).

RQ2. What are the various plans and programs for the expansion of women education in the 21st century?

- After the 20th century, in this 21st century, various five-year plans were developed to expand women education. Five-year plans have taken a huge initiative on women education. The 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th plans are mentioned in the 21st century.
- During the 1st and 2nd five-year plans, the government regarded the problem of population control as a long-term objective that depended as much on 'improvement in living standards and more widespread education, especially among women as on making the people adopt methods for family planning' (Sharma, 2012, p. 3).
- The 4th five-year plan special nutrition program for preschool children, expectant and nursing mothers has been designated as the Integrated Child Development Program (ICDP) (Sharma, 2012).
- In the 9th five-year plan period, universal lower secondary education is considered as the main goal. In this plan, the education campaign was identified as one of the major efforts in the field of education.
- The 10th five-year plan emphasized vocational training. During the scheme, the number of drop-outs is reduced and the number of female teachers is increased.

- In the 11th five-year plan, the Education for Women's Equality project was introduced to enhance the education system of women and it is spread in different states. Under this project, multipurpose activities are carried out which have helped women in their education (Bamrungsin, 2022).
- The 11th five-year plan was given special importance to women in pursuing higher and professional education. Especially, the backward classes have been asked to pay close attention to the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (Sahoo, 2016).
- National programs of women's education and "Kasturba Gandhi Girls' School" have been emphasized in the 11th five-year planning program (Sahoo, 2016).
- The Govt. of India has implemented a range of welfare initiatives and policies aimed at empowering women in the 21st century, operating at both the State and Central levels. Some notable programs include the 'Swyamsiddha Program' (2001), 'Swadhar Scheme' (2002), 'Kishori Shakti Yojana' (2007), 'National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education' (2008), 'Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana' (2010), 'Priyadarshini' (2012), 'Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme' (2012), 'CBSE Udaan Scheme' (2014), 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme' (2015), 'Sukanya Samridhi Yojana' (2015), 'Mahila E-Haat' (2016), 'Ujjawala Scheme' (2016), and various others (Ghorai & Sahari, 2020).

RQ3. How far has society realized the expansion of women education and what are the ways for more improvement in women education?

In the present society, the recommendations of various commissions and committees to make women education, prosperity, and implement these recommendations are adopted in different five-year plans. In this context, by reducing women education, various opportunities, various laws, different projects, social superstitions, and ethnic problems proceed to expand the path of women education. In all aspects of girls' schooling, the availability of women teachers is salient as both instrumental and a product (Singh & Nayak, 2010). Nevertheless, if we evaluate the status of women in society throughout society, then the image that is getting in society, despite taking many steps related to women in society, women do not get equal status to men in the family, yet women are still kept behind the scenes of women, women are still nourished, women are less prone to study at school due to lack of economically weaker, tendency of school dropout, anaemia, child marriage, maternal age at birth, and various superstitions are the cause of their death (Sharma. 2012). The position of women is not good in progress all aspects, but to solve these problems the law is protected to protect women's rights, although, in reality, it remains on paper perfectly. A large number of women in this country have not yet come forward to overcome the darkness of superstition and ignorance (Singh, 2022). Religious bigotry and fanaticism are major obstacles to women education in our country, particularly because of the rigours of '*purdah pratha*'; many Muslim women have not been able to come forward in education despite their desire. Besides, the deterioration of the law-and-order situation, lack of social security and extreme poverty are a barrier to women education (Reddy, Kumar, & Nalini, 2005). Women teachers are hard to find in rural areas, particularly in the interior with low enrolment, attendance of girls, and high dropout rates, even though the spread of minimal literacy among women is relatively negligible (Singh & Nayak, 2010). The important line is that we do not have the huge initiatives, programs, and organizational structures needed to bring a large number of women into the world of institutional education. There is no doubt that it can take several years for all of them to come to light of the traditional trend of increasing the rate of education (Jain, Agarwal, Billaiya, & Devi, 2017).

Final Thoughts

After the 19th century and 20th century, various steps were taken to spread women education in the present society system, which resulted in an important place in society. Despite taking various steps in the present society to bring women society to the light of education in the modern era, it was not possible to complete the implementation of women education (Jain et al., 2017). To break the religious

barrier of social prejudice, so that women can be exposed to the light of education, it is necessary to make special education as well as special education plan. The lack of female teachers is another potential barrier to women education (Illakiya & Ratnam, 2018). In this case special steps like recreational education programs, work-oriented education programs etc. Need to be taken through radio, TV etc.

- To ensure social security, the school-going female student does not suffer in any way. To take appropriate steps for their smooth journey in the educational institutes and to introduce a special transformation system if necessary.
- Women help to gain knowledge about the contribution of 19th century and 20th century social reformers in spreading education, social respect, and dignity.
- Our society needs to change views regarding women education. We should establish that education is as necessary as food, clothing, and housing (Jain et al., 2017).
- The public is made aware of the importance of women education.
- It helps to identify and prevent the various superstitions of the present society.
- Taking practical steps to ensure the primary education of every woman is a step towards a universal primary education program. Therefore, as a preliminary program, the number of small schools required for village-level students should be established, which is not too far from home. There will be a separate school for girls in the conservative area (Saefudin, 2021).
- Govt. of India should evolve a national policy on women's development in light of the constitutional directives and pledges made to the women of this country and to the international community from time to time (Sharma, 2012).
- To control the tendency to spend extra to construct the government's allocated money infrastructure in the education sector, steps must be taken and supervision to exploit the expansion of women education (Singh, 2022).
- Establishment of women education movement across the country. Retired school teachers are specifically assigned to this task and provide special allowance to those needs.

Concluding Remarks

The educational system is the only institution that can counteract the deep foundations of the inequality of the sexes that are built in the minds of men and women through the socialization process (Sharma, 2012). Education for women is the most powerful instrument for changing their position in society (Illakiya & Ratnam, 2018). The thoughts of the 19th century and 20th century social reformers have been nurtured widely in society to promote women education. Consequently, the 21st century is a century of logic, science, consciousness, and world-class friendship in the promotion of progress, and also progress in a democracy where women become self-dependent and well aware of their role in society (Reddy, Kumar, & Nalini, 2005). But still many rural villages in our country women education has been neglected and female feticide is practiced. To get a stable society and to spread the light of women education we all need to consider women as equally important parts of society as men (Jain et al., 2017). Women also need to come forward as human beings to overcome religious barriers and social prejudices. For ages, women who have not received a tear of the eye, the women have been used as play puppets of '*antapur*', in modern society; women have to stand as educated, elegant, enlightened men (Saefudin, 2021). Only then will the dignity of women return to society. In this case, there is no alternative to women education. When a woman is educated the next generation is bound to be educated hence education has many folds' impacts on the social and economic development of any nation (Illakiya & Ratnam, 2018). If properly implemented, educated, and empowered women can truly uplift the Indian people and indeed all humanity of our world (Illakiya & Ratnam, 2018). A significant facet of the 19th century social reform movement in Bengal involved collective endeavors aimed at advancing women's status (Paul, Chatterjee, & Das, 2023). The state of women education has generally been positive since the 19th century. However, during the medieval period of the 20th century, it faced some challenges. Nevertheless, in the 21st century, it has improved significantly

(Ghorai & Sahari, 2020). Today's women are highly aware of their progress in social, economic, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects.

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