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Higher Education for Women in India: Choice and Challenges

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Abstract:

The word Education is derived from the Latin root *Educatum* which means “to train,” *Educere* which means “to lead out or draw out” and *Educare* which means “to bring up or to raise”(Faiyaj). Broadly it refers to drawing out the innate tendencies, capacities and inherent powers in each child or man and to develop them to the full. Education is a life long process of acquiring knowledge, moral values and wisdom. It helps man to stay civilized during the course of his life on earth – in other words it makes a man – a man. Since education plays a very important role in the life of man many philosophers, sages, saints, educators have defined it in various ways. In the Upanishads, education has been regarded as a part of life-activity. It has been considered beyond definition, the nature of education being unspeakable. It is abstract, a thing that can only be felt but not expressed, is managed without management and even without a system is systematic. The Gita regards the knowledge of the Brahma or the knowledge of the soul as education, the aim of education being “Nishkam Karma,” remembering God at all times while doing your daily work. According to Buddhist philosophy the main aim of education is to develop in the individual the highest ability so that he can achieve the knowledge of the world and the universe through his search for truth.

This research paper highlights the education system in ancient India, change in the outlook of people towards education in modern India, the opportunities for women in higher education, the present status of employment opportunities in colleges of Dehra Dun.

Keywords : Education, Guru, Shishya, Gurukul, self- actualization.

Education has always been an important part of all civilizations throughout the world. The Indian civilization, as proved from the ruins of Indus Valley Civilization in Harappa and Mohanjodaro is thought to be the oldest civilization. It is also believed that while all other civilizations came to an end after a definite period and they had no connection with their modern civilizations the Indian civilization because of its educational system was an exception. During

the Vedic period the Gurukul or forest educational system prevailed. The Gurukuls were the homes of the Acharyas or teachers situated in the forest. The Government had no control and influence on them. There were various kinds of Gurukuls. “Tola” were Gurukuls providing higher education in language and literature only; “Ghatika” were Gurukuls providing special knowledge in language, literature, religion, philosophy and ethics; “Charana” were Gurukuls where special parts of the Vedas were taught; and “Chatuspathi” were Gurukuls where all four scriptures (Philosophy, puranas, grammar, and politics) were taught. The education was free and was usually for a duration of eight to ten years. Every student lived like a family member performing many activities connected with kitchen and home. The pupil or shishya led a simple and hard life following the rules and regulations of the place. The student had to serve the Guru and keep the Gurukul tidy. He slept on the ground and ate simple food. He begged for alms, organized and burnt holy fire, gathered other necessities for rituals, grazed the cows, and guarded the Guru, the Gurukul and the animals. The student had to keep himself away from worldly attractions and concentrate on achieving the ultimate knowledge of the Absolute. The education given made the student physically and spiritually strong. It was religious and spiritual. It aimed at inculcating kindness, forgiveness, perseverance, nobleness and other good qualities in the students. All round development, knowledge about the soul, the universe and God was obtained. The education system had three stages. Students learnt Vedic rhymes; the Vedic rhymes were explained to them discussed and clarified; and lastly research work and oral dissertation of Vedic principles. After finishing the domestic work the student studied Vedas daily. The methods of teaching included the logic method; the story telling method; explanation and illustration method; statement demonstration and practice method; question answer, discussion and debate method. The Guru or teacher was the parent and guide. Devotion to him was a compulsory aspect of education. Infact it was not something thrust on the student but a feeling that was present in the student, born out of respect for his teacher. He had faith in him and was obedient and willing to be led by the Guru on his quest for the supreme truth through independent thinking and meditation. The Upanishads describe the teacher as unique, one who presents Brahma Gyan to his students. Possessing qualities like fatherly affection, discipline, humbleness, truthfulness, simple living and high thinking, the Guru forsook all worldly pleasures and had full control over his mind and senses. He was always ready to help his disciple and was busy in search of the Ultimate Truth. At the end of the education the Guru was given Guru Dakshina-

some present according to the student's capacity. In the Vedic age the relation between the Guru and the Shishya was like that of a father and son each loving and devoted to the other. Everyone was allowed to gain higher education irrespective of caste or creed. The Yajurveda and Rigveda contain instances where the father is Vaishya, the son a Vedic poet and the mother is a labourer. The rich and the poor both were treated alike in the Gurukul but there was no provision for the education for those lacking moral qualities. "According to Dr. A.S. Altekar, "Home, of course, was the main center of education of girls in the domestic science"(Pathak 43). Women took part in every ritual with their husbands. Girls who received higher education were called "Brahman Vadini" and achieved the status of "Rishika." Some of the women were regarded as "Devis" and they even composed hymns. Apala, Romasha, Shashpati, Ghoshala, Mamata etc. were notable among Vedic scholars. Women were also given practical and useful education such as spinning, weaving and milking the cows. Vedic education helped in the all round development of the student- physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. After gaining knowledge about self, the soul, the world, nature and God the student knew and accepted the fact that God was omnipresent. He lived his life keeping in mind that whatever he got was God's gift to him and he was always grateful to Him. He believed in self sacrifice and working for the good of others.

The 6th Century B.C. saw the rise of Buddhism and Jainism as a revolt to the heightened materialism that had crept into the life of the people. During the Buddhist period monasteries were the centers of sacred and secular education. The education had two levels – the primary (worldly or materialistic education) and the higher level. Religion, philosophy, military science, medicine etc were taught at the higher level. The standard maintained was so good that students from Korea, Tibet, Java and other countries came to the monasteries. The system of education became institutional as several universities of Taxila, Nalanda, Ballabhi, Vikramshila, Odantpuri, Nadia and Jagdalla were established. The relationship between the teacher and the taught was the same as in the Vedic age. Both led disciplined lives and fulfilled their duties. The religious syllabus taught included the four Vedas, Buddhist and Jain literature. Material education included subjects like Sanskrit, grammar, philosophy, astrology, astronomy, medicine, music, script writing, arithmetic, religious discussion law and ethics. Apart from these spinning, weaving, printing, dyeing, knitting, stitching, sculpture, art, agriculture, surgery and animal husbandry were taught. Women in this period occupied a place inferior to men as they were considered as the source of all evils. Initially they were prohibited from joining a Sangh.

However at the request of his foster mother and aunt, Krishna-Gautami, Buddha allowed the formation of a community of nuns. Many rules and regulations were imposed on them and they were not given any permanent post in the Sangh. As time passed separate monasteries were established for women. Sanghmitra even went to Ceylon to propagate Buddhist faith. The main aim of Buddhist education was attaining “Nirvana,” a perfect state of tranquility. Education was a life- long process for self improvement. Primary education was free but a certain fee was charged for higher education which guaranteed that the students would study seriously.

In the Muslim or Medieval Period, education began at the “Maktab,” a primary school located in mosques. These were mostly single teacher institutions. For higher education the students joined “Madrasas,” which were multi - teacher institutions and private or state owned. The teachers of these institutions were well paid. Apart from the maktab and madrasas the other institutions that imparted education were Khankah, Dargah, Quran schools, Persian schools, Arabic schools, and Pathshalas. The main aim of education was imparting knowledge, preservation and spread of Islamic Culture, muslim religion, development of character and morality, education of arts, skills and vocations. Girls were forbidden from entering madrasas. Only one madrasa meant only for girls was established in Sarangpur. Few people sent their daughters to school as the purdah system was compulsory. Common women had no access to education and only the rich and affluent parents could afford to educate their daughters at their homes. Some of the women scholars were Gulbadan Begum, the daughter of Babur who became an authoress; Salima Sultan, the niece of Humayun who became a poetess; Noorjahan, Mumtaz Mahal and Jahan Ara who became Arabic and Persian scholars.

The education system under the British rule ignored the diverse rich cultural heritage of India, the main aim of it being to keep Indians at a low educational, economic level and change their tastes, opinions, ideas, morals. They must remain Indian by birth and blood but become English in all other respects. Under the British rule the vernacular system of mass education through Madrasas, Tots and Pathshalas nearly disappeared. Charles Wood’s Despatch of 1854 is considered to have laid the foundation of modern system of education in India.

After independence the five year plans gave education a boost as education was considered an important activity. Literacy rates improved and access to education improved. Among the significant developments were the establishment of the Central Advisory Board of

Education (CABE) in 1920 and its revival in 1935; the establishment of University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1945 which bears on its shoulders the responsibility to enhance the quality and relevance of university education; the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training. According to the *Selected Educational Statistics 2004- 05* conducted by the department of higher education in the Ministry of Human Resource Development (India) the number of colleges for general education increased from 370 in 1950-51 to 10377 in 2004-05 and the number of universities from 27 in 1950-51 to 407 in 2004-05. The number of professional education colleges increased from 208 in 1950-51 to 3,201 in 2004-05 (III). The statistics show that enrollment increased at college and university stages from 10% in 1950-51 to 38.9% in 2004-05 (X). The enrollment of girls at different stages of education also improved from 1950-51 to 2004-05 and an increasing number of girls stayed in the education system, constituting nearly 40% in undergraduate courses. Also the number of women who joined the teaching profession increased. According to AISHE (the All India Survey On Higher Education 2016-17) from the year 2012-13 to 2016-17 the female enrolment has increased from 13.5 in 16.7 and the number of universities has increased from 667 to 864 (Ministry of Human Resource Development 6-7). Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of colleges (Ministry of Human Resource Development 14). However it is very difficult to ascertain if the quality of education has improved over the years. In India it is observed that 11 to 17 million children work. Girls are kept at home to do domestic chores. A major hindrance to education are the education related costs. It is difficult to provide even basic education to children.

Different educationists in India and abroad, most of whom are philosophers have held different views about the aim of life. For the idealists, as the aim of life is spiritual development, education is a spiritual process which leads to self –realization. For the pragmatists education is a process of social progress. S.S. Mackenzi defines education in the narrow and broader sense. “In the narrow sense, education may be taken to mean any consciously directed effort to develop and cultivate our powers”(Singh 4). It is an effort made to maintain and develop the inherent intellectual, emotional and spiritual powers. “In the broader sense, it is a process that goes on throughout life, and is promoted by almost every experience in life”(Singh 4). Mahatama Gandhi defines it as “By education, I mean the all round drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and soul”(Singh 5). He emphasizes the physical, intellectual, emotional and

spiritual development of an individual through education. Addison has rightly remarked “Education when it works upon noble mind, draws out to view every latent virtue and perfection which without such help are never able to make their appearance”(Barnard 16). John Dewey asserts that education is a tripolar process with the teacher, student and the curriculum, the source of which is the society, as its three poles. It has two aspects the psychological and sociological. According to some educationists, education is a purposeful activity which aims at achieving something. Indian educationists emphasize thinking, meditation, research, the knowledge of the soul, the knowledge of self and the knowledge of the entire universe as education. Education is defined in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as “a process of teaching, training and learning especially in schools or colleges to improve knowledge and develop skills”(Hornby 488).

According to Dr. Radhakrishnan, along with possession of knowledge and efficiency education should include programmes related to cultural values, community and social responsibilities. Vinoba Bhave asserts that a person should be educated through activities of life.

According to Swami Vivekananda, Education is a life-building, character making assimilation of ideas. It involves the heart because God speaks through the heart.

The education that does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out the strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy and the courage of a lion – is it worth the name ?

We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one’s own feet. (12)

Further he feels that a teacher should consider herself or himself blessed and teach or educate only as a form of worship – to help and serve the children of God. The teacher is a living example of character before his student. In India knowledge had always been imparted through men who had renounced the world. In the old system of education in India knowledge was thought to be so sacred that no man could sell it. Teachers used to take students without charge and only accept gifts from them. A true teacher was one who knew the “spirit” of the scriptures and one who could make the student understand. Purity, love, obedience, truth, unselfishness, self-restraint, patience, endurance, a real thirst for knowledge and perseverance were the

qualities which the students were required to have. The student must have faith, humility, submission and veneration in his heart for his teacher. Swami Vivekanada holds that women are the same as men. Female education must be spread with religion at the core.

It is only in the homes of educated and pious mothers that great men are born.

If the women are raised, their children will by their noble actions glorify the name of the country; then will culture, knowledge, power and devotion awaken in the country.

(59-60)

According to Sri Aurobindo, “The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use” (21)

The sphere of education has evolved through time - From Gurukuls to schools and colleges; Gurus to teachers, professors; Shishyas to students and classes to smart classes. The teaching profession has been transformed. As Bertrand Russell very truly observes in his essay, “The Functions of a Teacher,” a teacher in the modern world who is inspired by the ideals of his predecessors “is likely to be made sharply aware that it is not his function to teach what he thinks, but to instill such beliefs and prejudices as are thought useful by his employers. (124)” He is forced to work for people who do not understand the importance of his role. Russell feels:

The teacher, like the artist, the philosopher, and the man of letters, can only perform his work adequately if he feels himself to be an individual directed by an inner creative impulse, not dominated and fettered by an outside authority. It is very difficult in this modern world to find a place for the individual. (135)

Therefore with development the respect for the Guru has declined, the relationship between the teacher and taught has degraded and attitudes to the teaching learning process have changed. The essence of what is being taught is lost. The principles of education have taken a back seat. What a Guru without degrees and qualifications taught back then, sitting under a tree, is difficult to replicate today even in the presence of all the new technical assistance and methodologies.

If we compare the ancient education and the modern education system we find that now girls have more opportunities than before. But though the number of the qualified girls with

degrees in higher education has increased the quality of the qualified has decreased. We have forgotten our moral values and are just caught up in a mad race to prove ourselves better than the other. The practical and materialistic aim of education has overpowered the moral, spiritual and religious aim of education. People are collecting degrees by hook or by crook to add to their paper profile so that they can make themselves qualified for high posts. The colleges in Dehra Dun are limited and there are less employment opportunities. Presently, most of them are more concerned with short term gains and exploiting the professors by not issuing appointment letters, making them work long hours and not giving timely remuneration. Under qualified teaching staff is being recruited. The result is that rather than being absorbed in higher education highly qualified people have become dissatisfied and stopped joining colleges. They are now looking for jobs with dignity. So most of them have either turned to schools or have left the city to join professionally run colleges. The students have to suffer because of lack of permanent qualified faculty. The need of the hour is to stop looking at education as a business. We have degraded the word by only looking at it from the materialistic point of view. I sincerely hope that this endeavour of mine would open eyes and make people realize the importance of education. It is not just something you do to get a good job, a status and live a comfortable life but it is something that helps you make your life more meaningful.

To sum up in the words of Rabindranath Tagore:

We in our home sought freedom of power in our language, freedom of imagination in our literature, freedom of soul in our religious creeds and that of mind in our social environment. Such an opportunity has given me confidence in the power of education which is one with life and only which can give us real freedom, the highest that is claimed for man, his freedom of moral communion in the human world. (*Tagore*, “Ideals of Education” 328)

He had absolute faith in morality and that in every human soul there was an urge to do good and attain perfection. This faith helped him through his educational mission. “ I try to assert in my words and works that education has its only meaning and object in freedom – freedom from ignorance about the laws of universe, and freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world.” (*Tagore*, “Ideals of Education” 329)

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