



The Role of Education in Empowering Women: An analysis in the context of Indian Society

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Abstract

Human society, biologically, is divided into two categories, male and female. Though biologically male and female are different, it has been scientifically proven that both of them possess same intellectual capabilities. In Indian Society since ancient period intellectual capabilities of women have been either denied or neglected. Women are restricted to certain social roles by social masters. Since the role of women in Indian society is mainly restricted to take care of family members and nurturing children, their importance is usually confined within the boundaries of family and home.

It has been observed that women's capabilities are often judged from the perspective of their abilities to nurture their families. Thus, in spite of having same intellectual capabilities, society has constructed the gender role of men and women differently. As women are often perceived as care giver, the necessity of their intellectual development through proper education is less emphasized. It has been observed that in rural area or in a poor and lower middle-class family of urban area, the education of female child is considered as less important than a male child. If women are denied proper education, they would not be able to strengthen their economic and social security by themselves. They will also remain ignorant about their equal social rights to men. So, it is important for women to come out of the darkness of ignorance, to establish gender equality. Hence, in this paper I want to shed light on the role of education in eradicating the gender inequality. In this paper my effort would also be to reinvent the truth that only proper education can empower a woman in real sense and help them to gain equal social status with men.

Keywords: Women, India, Society, Education, Equality

Introduction

Since the dawn of the human civilization, male and female have been an integral part of it. However, in the patriarchal structure of the society, women have often remained deprived and tortured by her male counterparts. Patriarchy has shown greater respect to men as the bread earner but at the same time the vital role of women in constructing a healthy society have been forgotten by the social masters. In the patriarchy, the role of women is mainly confined within the boundaries of her family and home. The intellectual capabilities of women are often denied. Women are mainly perceived as a tool of giving birth to a child and nurturing the family members. The independent role of women in the field of economy and politics are not accepted by the social masters.



After the industrial revolution women have come out of the boundaries of their home to ensure livelihood but they faced unequal treatment with men regarding wages¹ (Shefali Maitra, 2003, p21). Frederik Engels in the book 'The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State', had clearly pointed out that the production system in capitalistic society was based upon the division of gender. According to Engels in the capitalistic society, Industries and personal properties are owned by the male. These male owners used to appoint male labour in the industries. Thus, role of women in the production system was ignored and they were considered as a mere tool for obtaining human resources only² (Engels 1884; Kalyan kumar Sarkar 2019 p 20). In the eighteenth-century, Mary Wollstonecraft in her book 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' had first protested against the secondary role of women in the society and her confinement within the boundaries of her home³ (Wollstonecraft 1792; Sarkar 2019 p-21). In the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill in his individualistic theory of human upliftment had mentioned about the importance of freedom of women from the bondage of male dominance⁴ (Sarkar 2019 p-22). French feminist and thinker Simon De Beauvoir in the twentieth century, through her book, 'The Second Sex', had spread awareness among people about the secondary position and deprivation of women in the society⁵ (Beauvoir 1949: Sarkar 2019 p-31). This book helped a lot in spreading the awareness about the social and economic rights of women with their male counterparts. Beauvoir's book also helped in assuring the unique position of women in the male-dominated society. Thus, with the help of these thinkers and social reformers the concept of feminism came forth in the European society and ensured the necessity of women empowerment. Later, the concept of feminism through certain evolution has got its present form and vastly affects the human thought process. Hence, we can say that the modern feminism first emerged from the European society and later spread over the whole world.

Feminist movement against gender inequalities took place in two different ways, Liberal and Radical. According to Liberalism, there should be principles or rules independent of gender disparities. On the basis of these principles, gender equalities could be achieved. These kinds of principles must be justified by valid logical argument. They have tried to find out such imperatives which are independent of gender inequalities to establish justice within the society⁶ (Shephali Maitra, 2003, p-42). On the other hand, radical feminism had tried to establish gender equalities by spreading awareness against the negative features of patriarchy. According to the radical feminism, gender disparities occur due to the hierarchy system of power. In a patriarchal society, people with more power to fulfill their self-interests have kept women deprived of all justice. Liberal feminism put emphasis upon the individual existence of each and every woman, whereas radical feminism conceptualized women as being related to all other persons in society. According to them, in spite of being related to others, women can raise their voice in support of individual demands.⁷ (Shephali Maitra, 2003, p 48)

In India traditionally, women are confined within the boundaries of home and family. It could be said that the position of women in the Indian society went through several changes. In the early Vedic age women in India were equally treated with their male counterparts. Women usually got the opportunity for proper education during that time. They also got the scope of making independent social and economic decisions along with men. It has been observed that during ancient period marriage was not considered as the one and only goal of women. Women could remain unmarried as per their wish. Even if a woman wanted to get married, she could choose her life partner independently. Freedom enjoyed by women in the early Vedic age got restricted later on. Since the time of later Vedic age, women started to lose their freedom of getting education and making decisions of their own due to male dominance. Middle age, under the authority of Muslims, could be considered as the dark era for Indian women. As mentioned by Rukhsana Iftikhar, "Indian women faced many miseries in the form of customs, traditions and taboos of the society. But in the social,



cultural and political matters they had an equivalent share before the establishment of Turkish rule in India”⁸ (Iftikhar, 2016, p 17).

According to Ruksana Iftikar, several reasons were responsible for the decline in the position of women in India. Gender division in the field of agricultural labour forced women to be left behind men. Male dominance in agricultural as well as industrial production was a pertinent factor of gender inequality. Gradually restrictions were also made for women regarding the personal ownership of wealth due to this societal hierarchy. In the Muslim era, different social sanctions were imposed upon the women, which led to their inferior position in the society⁹ (Iftikhar, 2016, p 18).

In the British era, the position of women in society remained unchanged, though during the independence movement women took active part against British colonialism. During the period of nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some social reformers had tried to free women from different societal rigidity but constructive movement to establish gender equality was not initiated by them. The importance of economic and social independence of women were ignored by the societal system of that time. During the period of British colonialism, social reformers protested against several Hindu customs which were alarming for women, but they did not initiate any movement in support of overall freedom of women from gender hierarchy. After Independence, Indian Constitution ensured the ideologies of Democracy, Socialism and Secularism but social inequalities in the name of Gender remained unchanged. Though in the Indian constitution Article 14 and 15 state the equal legal treatment for men and women, these laws failed to bring any visible changes in the patriarchal structure of society. In modern times, due to the development of communication technology we easily come to know about the atrocities against women, so that different female communities could initiate movements against those incidents. Modern Indian society also considered the issue of women empowerment with great importance, but it could be said that even in the post-modern period, Gender equality in all spheres of society is yet to be achieved.

In this paper my aim is to analyze the Role of education in women empowerment since proper education can help a woman to realise the power of her inner self. Hence, to diminish the patriarchal structure of society each and every Indian woman’s demand of getting educated must be fulfilled. In this context discussion would also be made on the present situation of female literacy in India. India is worshiped as Holy mother but the position of women in this country is getting worse day by day. This contradictory situation could be resolved only by spreading awareness about the importance of treating men and women equally. Hence, this paper will also try to shed light on the significance of education to spread awareness about the inclusive treatment to both male and female.

Objective of Paper

The role of education in human civilization is very important. Education used to enrich us by providing information regarding different fields of studies. Education is also helpful in uplifting the moral valuation of human beings. Proper education helps a person to become aware of the strength of inner self and enables him or her to differentiate between right and wrong. In modern days significance of proper education is confined within the boundaries of livelihood but its relevance is very deep rooted. So, the objective of this paper is to find out how proper education could be relevant in empowering women, besides it being a lucrative option. Another objective of this article is to shed light on the fact that negative perspectives of gender role could be eradicated only by spreading awareness through education. The aim of this article is to show that gender stereotype is harmful both for men and women.



Research Methodology

This article is mainly based upon analysis of secondary data about feminism and women empowerment. Secondary data are collected from different books and online Journal articles. The views of famous socialist Kamla Bhasin on Gender have also taken care of in this paper. Different Government data are collected from several websites to show the present societal situation of the women in India.

Different stages of Women Education in India

In India, Women's right to education has gone through different phases. In the early Vedic Age women belonged to the higher state. During that time women had their independent identity. Most of the women used to get the opportunity of education. They could take part in the Brahminic rituals also. Some women during that time were known as '*Brahmagyani*'. Marriage was not considered as the only destiny of women. Women could live a life of their own choice. So, women did not need to get married at an early age. They could have enough time to complete their education first. In early Vedic age, educated women also got higher respect in the society.

This scenario of the early Vedic age started to change in the later Vedic age, which was considered as age of '*Manu*'. According to the principles of Manu, women should be confined within the boundaries of home and family. In this age Women were deprived from participation and performing religious rituals. Women's right to education was denied in the principles of Manu. Women were instructed to live under the dominance of her father or husband or son. Women in this age lost their own social and economic identity. According to Manu's principles, the age of the marriage of women fell to 10 or 11. For this reason women education lost its importance.

In Buddhist age, women were denied renunciation by Lord Buddha, but afterwards on the request of his disciple Ananda and his aunt Gautami he accepted the proposal. Though Buddha accepted the participation of women as '*Vikshuni*' in his *samgha*, they had to follow strict principles in buddhist monasteries. According to the instructions of Buddha, women had to complete their education under a '*Vikshu*', who under the watch of superior '*Vikshu*' could deliver his lecture to women disciples¹⁰ (Chattopadhyay, Sengupta, 2021, p12). Besides this, women of the '*Vikshuni Samgha*' had to follow certain principles, like not living with Buddhist monk, avoiding male touch, not roaming alone, not crossing river, not hiding sin¹¹ (Chattopadhyay, Sengupta, 2021, p 13). In spite of strict restrictions, many Buddhist nuns revealed their creativity through unique write-ups. '*Therigatha*', the famous write up of that time, comprises spiritualistic revelation of buddhist nun. The name of some nun could be mentioned here, who lived a spiritual life by maintaining celibacy throughout their lives. They are Bishakha, Subha, Anupama, Sumedha, etc ¹² (Chattopadhyay, Sengupta, 2021, pg 13). In Buddhist age, women were considered to be in the lower strata of society but their position was better than the Brahminic Age.

In the middle age under the authority of Islam, women education was neglected and sometimes denied due to the rituals of '*Purdah*'. However, in some aristocratic families, women got the opportunity to learn Islamic religious rituals. Since during this period several social sanctions were imposed upon women, they were forced to live under siege within the boundaries of their family. In this age women of specific society got fame as poet and writer but education of common women was neglected due to certain religious superstitions and social sanctions.



In the British era, the progression of women education took place under the Charter Act (1813)¹³ (Chattopadhyay, Sengupta, 2021, p 16). In this era with the help of Thomas Babington Macaulay, Lord William Bentinck and Raja Rammohan Roy, women education got back its importance in the Indian society. In 1850 Lord Dalhousie also encouraged and supported the issue of women education. Due to his encouragement, in 1854 Wood's dispatch came to the fore --- 2600 primary schools, 81 secondary schools and 15 teacher training centre for women were established within 1870 to 1882¹⁴ (Chattopadhyay, Sengupta, 2021, p 17).

In 1882-83 Hunter Commission had recommended some provisions regarding women education. In the British era, women got the opportunity to study medical science too. In 1904 Lord Curzon approved Government grant for women education. In this year Annie Besant established 'Central Hindu Girls' College' in Varanasi¹⁵ (Chattopadhyay, Sengupta, 2021, p 18). The period between 1921 to 1947 could be considered as important phase for women education. During this period, under the influence of Nationalist movements and first World War, awareness regarding the importance of women education spread all over India.

After independence people of India started to take more interest about women education. During 1948 to 1949, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan restructured the education system of Universities and recommended new provisions for the betterment of education system. During this period the issue of women education got much importance. The Government of India constructed a committee for women education under the supervision of Smt Durgabai Deshmukh¹⁶ (Chattopadhyay, Sengupta, 2021, p 20). Different committees for women welfare started to spread awareness regarding the necessity of women education even in the rural areas. The Government of India constructed a commission under the supervision of Dr. D.S Kothari to identify the obstacles of education system. This commission was known as Kothari Commission and provided recommendations to improve women education during that time. In 1971 'Committee on the status of women' had been constructed on the collaborative effort of both Social welfare and Education Ministries. Dr. Phul Renu Guha was selected as the chairperson of this committee¹⁷ (Chattopadhyay, Sengupta, 2021, p 22). In 2001, SSA or Sarva Siksha Abhiyan started to ensure elementary education for all. The aim of SSA was to provide basic or elementary education to all Indian citizens between the age group of 6 to 14, within the year 2010.

Nowadays women have become more aware about the importance of education. Modern women have realized that education is the only weapon with the help of which they can attain freedom from the dominance of patriarchy. The Indian Government has taken several initiatives to enhance the female literacy rate. As per a report published in the internet edition of a renowned newspaper, presently, the female literacy rate in India has increased up to 68% since independence (18) (Hindustan Times 15 March 2023).

Different Concepts of Education and its Role in Women Empowerment

Education plays an important role in empowering women. Proper education can ensure both the internal and external development of human beings. Education can show a way of light to overcome the darkness of ignorance. It can enhance the moral values within us. Proper education can broaden the mind set of human beings to overcome all kinds of meanness to others. In this context two perspectives of education could be mentioned here- 1) Broad and 2) Narrow. In the narrower sense, education helps us to gather information regarding different fields of study. In this sense the method of education often conceived as formal instructions are provided by teachers in different schools, colleges and Universities. In the narrower sense, education is considered as the medium of getting higher degrees to achieve livelihood. But in the broader sense, the scope of education is not exhausted within the limits of getting higher degrees and attractive livelihoods, rather it helps to develop both the outer and inner personality of human beings. In broader sense, education helps people to get a balanced personality. In this sense education could be a source of holistic development of



human beings which will help people to understand their strength of inner self and can show a way towards the path of humanity. If a state is to reach the pinnacle of human development, it must ensure equal access of education to all its citizens.

In a patriarchal society, women are often deprived of proper education. But women education is necessary to eradicate illiteracy in an absolute sense. Since women used to take care of children within the family, if she became educated, she could make her children aware of the importance of education in life. It can be said that to educate a woman means to educate a Nation.

Education can be imparted in informal or formal or non-formal way. Since childhood people learn several things, which is considered as informal ways of learning. People used to put much emphasis upon formal education though the lessons a child gets from the surrounding society and family have a great influence on life.

The method of formal education comprises specific curriculum, boundaries of class rooms, and specific teaching and learning methods whereas non-formal education is freed of certain restrictions of formal education. The non-formal educational institutes used to follow flexible curriculum which could be followed by all. The names of some non-formal educational institutes are IGNOU, NSOU etc. In these educational institutes people can get education at any time and at any age. These institutes also conduct distance education which is very much useful for people who live in rural and remote areas. In non-formal ways of education, seminars, workshops, TV and radio broadcast, Social media and Print media could also play an important role to educate people about the positive and inclusive ways of life.

Education either informal or formal or non-formal, play an important role in women empowerment. Since childhood girls should be educated about getting equal importance in the society through their family members. Family members should take the responsibility to make a girl child aware about the importance of education instead of getting married, so that the rate of child marriage and early marriage could be prevented. Education will enable women to take decisions regarding the right time of marriage and conception. In India conception at an early age is often responsible for the mortality of both young mother and child. Through proper education women could be made aware about the importance of taking care of her health and hygiene also.

Education can also enable women to take part in the economic development of a state. Formal method of education plays an important role to make a woman economically independent. Formal education can also make women aware about her social, political and economic rights. Indian Constitution ensures certain rights to women along with men. These rights are, right to get education, right to health and hygiene, right to vote, right to employment, right to get equal salary and wages and many more. Women cannot exercise these rights without proper education. Several Acts which have been passed in the Parliament in support of women empowerment, can also be mentioned here, Special marriage Act (1954), The Hindu Marriage Act (1955), The Hindu Succession Act (1956), The Suppression of immoral traffic of women and girl Act (1956), The Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), The Maternity Benefit Act (1961), The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (1971), The Equal Remuneration Act (1976), The Criminal Law Amendment Act (1983) and Domestic Violence Act (2005)¹⁸ (Halder, 2021, p 199). Besides these Acts, some Articles and government policies could also be mentioned, which are beneficiaries of women Empowerment.

Article 16 has ensured the Equality of Opportunity in matters of Public Employment while Article 42, which holds that the State shall make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity



relief. National Education Policy of 2020 aims to bring transformational reforms in schools and higher education systems including universalization of education. The Indian Government has passed Acts to ensure the physical safety of women against sexual harassment in workplace also (2013) --- Criminal Amendment Act in 2013 was renamed, Nirbhaya Act to protect women from rape ¹⁹ (Women's Rights in India, National Human Rights Commission) The Central Government has introduced several schemes like *Beti bachao Beti padao*, *Pradhanmantri Matru Vandana Yojna*, *Kishori Shakti Yojna*, *Haryana Kanya Kosh* etc, to ensure not only the empowerment of women but these schemes also take care of women education. In West Bengal Chief Minister Smt.Mamata Bandopadhyay has also introduced certain schemes to prevent school dropouts among women. Those schemes are *Kanyasree Prakalpo*, *Rupasree Prakalpo* etc. In West Bengal, the state Government has started *laxmi Bhander Prakolp* to ensure the economic liberty of under privileged women. The women from unprivileged sector can take advantages of these Government schemes to complete their education. There are several Government and Non-Government institutes of non-formal education which would also be helpful to increase the rate of women literacy. Since these kinds of institutes are offering distant education with flexible curriculum, the women from rural and remote areas can complete basic education to make themselves socially aware and independent.

Proper education can enable women to understand the significance of women empowerment. Education can help women to realise that male subordination is not her destiny, rather she can achieve freedom from all oppressions by themselves. In this post-modern era, formal education can help women to secure leading positions in the fields of politics, economics, sports, literature, science, technology. The name of some famous women who have made a distinct position in India could be mentioned here, Ms. Pratibha Patil, Ms. Draupadi Murmu, Ms Sania Mirza, Ms. Arundhuti Roy, Ms. Jhulan Goswami, Ms..Nirmala Sitaram, Ms.Medha Patkar and many more.

Significance of Gender equality in Indian society

The three ideologies present behind Indian Democratic Government, are, Independence, Equality and Fraternity. Among these features of Democratic ideals, the most important one is the ideal of equality. This ideal of equality is conceived in the absolute sense for India. It has been stated in the Constitution of India that all Indian citizens should be treated equally, irrespective of class, caste, creed and gender, so that holistic development of human society could be achieved. The present scenario of Indian society differs from this view. Though the position of women in India has improved in some respect, till date women have not been getting equal respect like men. In the post-modern era, a superficial improvement of the position of women is seen everywhere, but in the true sense, the attitude of Indian society towards women remains unchanged. Even in this post-modern period male child are more wanted in the family than female child. The incidents of female foeticide are still happening though the rate differs in different states. It has been observed that this rate is higher in the states like Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujrat. Due to the higher rate of female foeticide, the sex ratio in India also suffers. According to National census held in 2011, only 914 females exist for every 1000 male. Due to this higher rate of female foeticide, India will be going to face bridal crisis when it comes to marriage very soon. Indian Government implemented PNDA Act to prevent female foeticide in 1994. But this Act failed to prevent the decline in the sex ratio. So, this Act was Amended in 2003. But till date several illegal process of sex determination and abortion are still happening in our country. Even in this post-modern era, women are regarded as commodity of sexual enjoyment only. Often the sexual consent of women is ignored and sexual relationship with her is made forcibly. The incidents of rape and juvenile assaults are increasing day by day. Women are thus denied of the ownership of her body also. Several incidents of heinous crime against women could be mentioned here --- 2012 Delhi gang rape, which was known as Nirbhaya case



later on, the sexual assaults of Manipuri native women, and recent incident of rape and murder case of an intern Doctor of R.G Kar Hospital in West Bengal. All these incidents are indicating that though Indian men used to worship different goddesses, in reality, they lack of showing proper respect and care to women. Women are often glorified as mother, sister and daughter but they are facing humiliation, both in the public and private spheres. In this respect it could be concluded that Indian society is maintaining a double standard regarding the attitude towards women.

India is planning to reach 16 sustainable goals within 2030, among which 5th SDG is gender equality. The Indian Government has decided to fulfill certain targets to reach the goal of gender equality. The focus of these targets is mainly on showing non-discriminative attitude towards women and girls, eliminating all forms of violence against women, ensuring equal access to technology of information and communication to promote women empowerment, encouraging woman's leadership in the field of economy and politics, etc. But to fulfill these targets the patriarchal mindset of Indian people need to be changed. Unequal treatments to women give rise to different social conflicts also, which in course of time serve as a hindrance towards the prosperity of the state. If India wants to achieve a holistic development of society, the improvement of the societal, economic and political position of women through adequate system of education is needed.

Conclusion

Since eighteenth century women have protested against their deprivation in the male dominated society but these movements were not structured properly. In twentieth century these movements became much more organised. Since 1970 a whole new theoretical discussion called 'Feminism' which was exclusively about women's demand, came to the forefront¹ (Shephali Maitra, 2003, p21). The main source of women deprivation is discriminating treatment regarding gender identity. In the human society each and every person bear their sexual and gender identities. Sexual identity of male and female are determined by nature, but their gender identity is determined by social order. It has been observed that most of the time the gender identity of male and female is constructed in accordance with their natural qualities. Male persons by nature are aggressive, strong, rigid, whereas females are much more compassionate, flexible and possess a careful nature. These natural differences between male and female influence a lot in constructing their gender role. Men are assumed as capable of working outside and women are confined within the boundaries of family. With the progression of time, women started to protest against this over simplified construction of gender role. They have come forward with the demand of economic independence along with men. When women started to seek their economic independence along with their male counterparts, they also started to realize the importance of getting proper education. Women faced several unequal treatments from society while demanding their right to get education. Since long society could not accept women's intellectual existence besides men, but nowadays several feminist movements have helped women to become economically, socially and politically independent through proper education.

The approaches of two types of feminist movements, as mentioned earlier, were different but the main goal of these two approaches were to ensure the freedom of women from the shackles of male dominance. In this respect the concept of women empowerment came to the fore to ensure their holistic development. This theory does not put emphasis only on the economic development of women, rather wants to ensure economic as well as social and political developments too. Hence, it could be said that the broader perspective of education could be more effective than narrow perspective in empowering women.

Women empowerment and feminism are interlinked in conceptualizing women as leading performers in the fields of education, culture, science, religion, politics, entrepreneurship and administration. Women



empowerment could be considered as the end and Feminism and Feminist movements are the means to achieve this end. Through a holistic system of education women could be made aware about their economic, political and psychological capacities. Empowering women through proper education can ensure their freedom of thought, so that they can make decisions surrounding their life by themselves. Educational method, which can enlighten women from within, can show a way towards self-independence. Self-independent women can realize in the true sense the value of getting freedom from patriarchal system of society.

Feminism has tried to introduce a new concept of gender role and has protested against all kinds of gender stereotype. In our society the gender roles of male and female are conceived in a specific way and violation of this fixed way is not accepted. Since feminism has protested against this specific role of men and women, the conflict with the prevailing rules of society has become obvious. Feminism by protesting against any kind of gender stereotypes has reconstructed the gender role of both men and women. Feminism is not about any hierarchal theory of power, rather it puts emphasis upon the absolute equality of all human beings. This theory has tried to view the gender role in a reverse manner.

Traditional social values have envisioned men and women as possessing certain nature and any opposition to it is not accepted by Indian society. For this reason, women with masculinity and men with femininity are condemned by society. The sexual orientation of humans is also specified by social order. Heterosexuality is accepted by the society, whereas homosexuality is not. Feminism discusses the rights of all these categories of human society. Feminism has shown respect to all kinds of perspectives of an individual. This kind of inclusivity is not only necessary for the freedom of women but for all those individuals who wants to live a life of their own way. This theory does not judge individuals from the perspective of any pre-established societal rules, rather it accepts all humans independent of any social norms and rules. This kind of humanitarian attitude is very much useful to prosper in a positive way.

For India, to reach the sustainable goals, equal opportunities should be provided to all. Gender equality will not be achieved if opportunities are denied to the specific section of human society. As a part of human society all are equally entitled to live a worthwhile life. An adequate system of education can make people aware about the values of human lives. It is not enough for women or any downtrodden section of society to gain only economic liberty to bring changes in the patriarchal structure of society. People with the help of education should strengthen their inner power to become self-resilient. Women empowerment is not enough to ensure the freedom of women, rather individual vision towards gender role should be changed. Modern perspectives of gender role can pave the way towards absolute freedom from patriarchy for all downtrodden sections of society along with women. A proper educational method can only make people aware about the positivity of feminist approach. So lastly it could be concluded that without the holistic method of education gender equality is difficult to achieve in Indian society.

Human Rights Commission). The Central Government has introduced several schemes like, *Beti bachao Beti padao*, *Pradhanmantri Matru Vandana Yojna*, *Kishori Shakti Yojna*, *Haryana Kanya Kosh* etc, to ensure not only the empowerment of women but these schemes also take care of women education. In West Bengal Chief Minister Smt.Mamata Bandopadhyay has also introduced certain schemes to prevent school dropouts among women. Those schemes are *Kanyasree Prakalpo*, *Rupasree Prakalpo* etc. In West Bengal, the state Government has started *laxmi Bhandar Prakalp* to ensure the economic liberty of under privileged women. The women from unprivileged sector can take advantages of these Government schemes to complete their education. There are several Government and Non-Government institutes of non-formal education which would also be helpful to increase the rate of women literacy. Since these kinds of institutes are offering distant education with flexible



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India is planning to reach 16 sustainable goals within 2030, among which 5th SDG is gender equality. The Indian Government has decided to fulfill certain targets to reach the goal of gender equality. The focus of these targets is mainly on showing non-discriminative attitude towards women and girls, eliminating all forms of violence against women, ensuring equal access to technology of information and communication to promote women empowerment, encouraging woman's leadership in the field of economy and politics, etc. But to fulfill these targets the patriarchal mindset of Indian people need to be changed. Unequal treatments to women give



rise to different social conflicts also, which in course of time serve as a hindrance towards the prosperity of the state. If India wants to achieve a holistic development of society, the improvement of the societal, economic and political position of women through adequate system of education is needed.

Conclusion

Since eighteenth century women have protested against their deprivation in the male dominated society but these movements were not structured properly. In twentieth century these movements became much more organised. Since 1970 a whole new theoretical discussion called 'Feminism' which was exclusively about women's demand, came to the forefront¹ (Shephali Maitra, 2003, 21). The main source of women deprivation is discriminating treatment regarding gender identity. In the human society each and every person bear their sexual and gender identities. Sexual identity of male and female are determined by nature, but their gender identity is determined by social order. It has been observed that most of the time the gender identity of male and female is constructed in accordance with their natural qualities. Male persons by nature are aggressive, strong, rigid, whereas females are much more compassionate, flexible and possess a careful nature. These natural differences between male and female influence a lot in constructing their gender role. Men are assumed as capable of working outside and women are confined within the boundaries of family. With the progression of time, women started to protest against this over simplified construction of gender role. They have come forward with the demand of economic independence along with men. When women started to seek their economic independence along with their male counterparts, they also started to realize the importance of getting proper education. Women faced several unequal treatments from society while demanding their right to get education. Since long society could not accept women's intellectual existence besides men, but nowadays several feminist movements have helped women to become economically, socially and politically independent through proper education.

The approaches of two types of feminist movements, as mentioned earlier, were different but the main goal of these two approaches were to ensure the freedom of women from the shackles of male dominance. In this respect the concept of women empowerment came to the fore to ensure their holistic development. This theory does not put emphasis only on the economic development of women, rather wants to ensure economic as well as social and political developments too. Hence, it could be said that the broader perspective of education could be more effective than narrow perspective in empowering women.

Women empowerment and feminism are interlinked in conceptualizing women as leading performers in the fields of education, culture, science, religion, politics, entrepreneurship and administration. Women empowerment could be considered as the end and Feminism and Feminist movements are the means to achieve this end. Through a holistic system of education women could be made aware about their economic, political and psychological capacities. Empowering women through proper education can ensure their freedom of thought, so that they can make decisions surrounding their life by themselves. Educational method, which can enlighten women from within, can show a way towards self-independence. Self-independent women can realize in the true sense the value of getting freedom from patriarchal system of society.

Feminism has tried to introduce a new concept of gender role and has protested against all kinds of gender stereotype. In our society the gender roles of male and female are conceived in a specific way and violation of this fixed way is not accepted. Since feminism has protested against this specific role of men and women, the conflict with the prevailing rules of society has become obvious. Feminism by protesting against any kind of gender stereotypes has reconstructed the gender role of both men and women. Feminism is not about any



hierarchical theory of power, rather it puts emphasis upon the absolute equality of all human beings. This theory has tried to view the gender role in a reverse manner.

Traditional social values have envisioned men and women as possessing certain nature and any opposition to it is not accepted by Indian society. For this reason, women with masculinity and men with femininity are condemned by society. The sexual orientation of humans is also specified by social order. Heterosexuality is accepted by the society, whereas homosexuality is not. Feminism discusses the rights of all these categories of human society. Feminism has shown respect to all kinds of perspectives of an individual. This kind of inclusivity is not only necessary for the freedom of women but for all those individuals who want to live a life of their own way. This theory does not judge individuals from the perspective of any pre-established societal rules, rather it accepts all humans independent of any social norms and rules. This kind of humanitarian attitude is very much useful to prosper in a positive way.

For India, to reach the sustainable goals, equal opportunities should be provided to all. Gender equality will not be achieved if opportunities are denied to the specific section of human society. As a part of human society all are equally entitled to live a worthwhile life. An adequate system of education can make people aware about the values of human lives. It is not enough for women or any downtrodden section of society to gain only economic liberty to bring changes in the patriarchal structure of society. People with the help of education should strengthen their inner power to become self-resilient. Women empowerment is not enough to ensure the freedom of women, rather individual vision towards gender role should be changed. Modern perspectives of gender role can pave the way towards absolute freedom from patriarchy for all downtrodden sections of society along with women. A proper educational method can only make people aware about the positivity of feminist approach. So lastly it could be concluded that without the holistic method of education gender equality is difficult to achieve in Indian society.

¹ Maitra Shephali (November 2003) "*Noitikota o Nareebad*", New Age Publishers Pvt Ltd, Kolkata, p-21

² Sarkar Kumar Kalyan (2019) "*Nareebad o Linga Rajneeti o Nareer Khomotayon*", Aveneel Press, Kolkata, p-20

³ Sarkar Kumar Kalyan (2019) "*Nareebad o Linga Rajneeti o Nareer Khomotayon*", Aveneel Press, Kolkata, p-21

⁴ Sarkar Kumar Kalyan (2019) "*Nareebad o Linga Rajneeti o Nareer Khomotayon*", Aveneel Press, Kolkata, p-22

⁵ Sarkar Kumar Kalyan (2019) "*Nareebad o Linga Rajneeti o Nareer Khomotayon*", Aveneel Press, Kolkata, p-31

⁶ Maitra Shephali (November 2003) "*Noitikota o Nareebad*", New Age Publishers Pvt Ltd, Kolkata p-42

⁷ Maitra Shephali (November 2003) "*Noitikota o Nareebad*", New Age Publishers Pvt Ltd, Kolkata p-48

⁸ Iftikhar Rukhsana (2016) "*Indian Feminism*", Notion Press, Chennai, p-17

⁹ Iftikhar Rukhsana (2016) "*Indian Feminism*", Notion Press, Chennai, p-18

¹⁰ Chattopadhyay Kumar Mihir & Sengupta Madhumala (April 2021), "*Naree Shiksha*", Rita Publication, Kolkata, p-12

¹¹ Chattopadhyay Kumar Mihir & Sengupta Madhumala (April 2021), "*Naree Shiksha*", Rita Publication, Kolkata, p-13

¹² Chattopadhyay Kumar Mihir & Sengupta Madhumala (April 2021), "*Naree Shiksha*", Rita Publication, Kolkata, p-13

¹³ Chattopadhyay Kumar Mihir & Sengupta Madhumala (April 2021), "*Naree Shiksha*", Rita Publication, Kolkata, p-16

¹⁴ Chattopadhyay Kumar Mihir & Sengupta Madhumala (April 2021), "*Naree Shiksha*", Rita Publication, Kolkata, p-17

¹⁵ Chattopadhyay Kumar Mihir & Sengupta Madhumala (April 2021), "*Naree Shiksha*", Rita Publication, Kolkata, p-18

¹⁶ Chattopadhyay Kumar Mihir & Sengupta Madhumala (April 2021), "*Naree Shiksha*", Rita Publication, Kolkata, p-20

¹⁷ Chattopadhyay Kumar Mihir & Sengupta Madhumala (April 2021), "*Naree Shiksha*", Rita Publication, Kolkata, p-22



¹⁸ Halder Chaitali (September 2021) "Role of Education in the Empowerment of Women" in 'Women Education and Empowerment, Indian Perspective' (Ed) Dr. Birajlaxmi Ghosh, Dr. Shyamsundar Bairagya, Prof. Jayanta Mete, INSC International Publishers, Karnataka p-199

¹⁹ Women's Rights in India: An analytical Study (2021), National Human Rights Commission, New Delhi <https://nhrc.nic.in>

^{xx} Maitra Shephali(November 2003) "Noitikota o Nareebad", New Age Publishers Pvt Ltd, Kolkata, p-21

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