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INTRODUCTION

Women, comprising almost half of the total population of India, continued to remain cyphers for ages together. They exist in the society as the invisible but indispensable members. Though they complement the life of the society as mothers, wives and sisters they are considered as the second class citizens, inferior to men and the vulnerable section in the male dominated society. Although their position has undergone various changes from Vedic to modern times, their development is still a misnomer. Women's education has received the least attention due to the social, cultural and economic conditions as well as the lack of clear concepts about aims and ideals of education. This was not the condition in the past.

1.1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION :

According to Altekar, one of the best ways to understand the spirit of a civilization and to appreciate its excellences and realize its limitations is to read the history of that civilization in relation to the position and status of women in it. The word status is ordinarily understood to be the status regarding the position of home, in society and in the observance of religion chiefly.

In defining status, the International Encyclopaedia of social Science as quoted by Rekhadevi Raju mentions;

Age, sex, birth, genealogy and other biological and constitutional characteristics are very common basis of status. Until about 1920 the term status was most commonly used to refer either the legally enforceable capacities and limitations of people or their relative superiority and inferiority (P. 2).
Moreover, the National Committee on the status of women as quoted by her observes:

*Status is realised through roles. This brings into focus the rights and opportunities provided to women by the state and socio-cultural institutions to perform these roles which may not necessarily re-inforce each other. Processes of change are responsible for divergence between the expected and the actual role behaviour.* (P.3)

With this background, turning over the pages of history reveals that in the Vedic periods, a woman used to be free as a man to choose her life-partner, to have deliberations on the scripture and take part in the deliberation on the religious concepts and philosophic ideas of the age. Notwithstanding the inherent biological difference between the male and female, in Vedic times, woman was not for the hearth only nor was the man only for the field. There were women like Gargy, Maitreyi, Lopamudra and many others who excelled in all spheres of life for their wisdom, learning, wide vision and high valour as occasion offered or duty demanded. A girl was an asset to the family and a period of eight years of education was universal for all.

Even at the advent of Buddhism and Jainism there were a large number of women saints like Sanghmitra and Dhammedimna in their religious organisations. The status of women depicted in the epics of the Ramayan and the Mahabharat, though not every inch ethical, reveals that they were having a say even in the affairs of state administration. They were not merely Pramodas (Commodity of enjoyment) nor the seducer of men as had been alleged by Manu (the great code-giver of the Hindus). They had their personality as women of status and all character assassination of these women by alien authors was but a partial view of their character forgetting
the profound influence they exerted on the male folk during their times.

During Muslim dominion, the status of women degenerated because of their aggressiveness and using women as commodity of enjoyment. This made the Hindu society conservative and was responsible for non-education of women. They were not allowed to attend the pathasalas (Vernacular Schools) even for elementary education because of the fear of being molested or ill-treated by the ruling community. In order to maintain chastity and purity, early marriage was introduced. Marriage became inescapable for women and on the death of her husband, in many cases, a woman was forced to immolate herself on the pyre of the deceased husband. Although Manu had declared, as quoted by Meena Sen in 'Position of women in Ancient India; that,

Father protect her in her childhood, husband in her youth and in her old age she is protected by her sons. A woman should never be independent, the spirit of it was followed literally during the Mahamadian rules. This resulted in increasing the sense of inferiority and dependence in women. Gradually men dominated all affairs of life and began to hate women so much so that parents having female child were deemed unfortunate and cursed. Consequently due to ignorance she was subject to various forms of exploitations and was suppressed by the male dominated patriarchal society. There existed a superstition that a girl if taught to read and write would become a widow soon after her marriage.

This state of affairs continued also during the British rule. Modern education for men was accorded by the East India Company's Act of 1813.
The policy of imparting English education to Indians known as 'Filtration theory' started from upper classes, believed to form a group of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, morales and intellects who might pass their policy to the lower strata of the society. Behind all these, the inherent aim of education was to facilitate conversion to Christianity (Basu, 1931).

Before Britishers came to India, indigenous education was common for both boys and girls, but educational policy of the British Government, aimed at the education of boys of India. There was no reference relating to women's education in any of the despatches of the Government. Women's education was ignored in fear of unfavourable reactions from the natives against such effort of authorities.

The origin of modern education of women in India as we know it today can be traced to the effort of Hon'ble John. E. Drinkwater Bethune, a member of the Council of Governor General and President of the Council of Education in Bengal. He, as the first torch-bearer, focused the education of women for the first time by establishing the Hindu Valika Vidyalaya (Hindu Girls' School) for the education of girls of high class Hindus at Calcutta in May 1849 in face of stanch opposition of the people. Lord Delhousie supported to the initiative work of Bethune and wanted that open patronage of the Government should be extended to the cause of female education in India.

Wood's Despatch of 1854 appeared as 'Magna Carta' of English education in India. It supported the promotion of female education and remarked that the importance
of female education in India can not be overrated. This opinion was supported by Satnley's Despatch of 1859.

The social position of women was very unfavourable then. Among Hindus, the system of purda (Veil), Child marriage, poor marriage law, lack of property rights, rite of sati, forbidden remarriage, asceticism for widows, absence of divorce, custom of Devadasis were depriving women from education. In upper classes of society, people were reluctant to expose their females to strangers by sending them to a public school. In the lower classes, the females were engaged in earning livelihood. It was not desirable for them to waste time by going to school, and to be exposed to observation. (Mathur, 1973).

Indian Social reformers took a lead in improving Women's education. Notable among them were Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Annie Besant, M. G. Ranade. After various efforts, though the number of girls increased, there were only forty-six girls for every 1000 boys at schools and while one adult male out of sixteen was getting education, one adult woman in 434 was doing so (National Committee, 1959). There existed a big gap between the education of males and females to be bridged up.

The Indian Education Commission 1882, deplored the extremely backward condition of women education and recommended that public funds of all kinds, local, municipal, provincial should be granted in an equitable proposition to girls as well as to boys. The Commission felt the need of fostering women's education in every legitimate way.

But in fact, it was only the primary education of girls which had a good progress by 1881. The secondary
education had just its beginning but with respect to higher education, the doors of Universities were tightly closed for women till last quarters of eighties. Because some girl students seeking permission for the Entrance Examination of Calcutta University were refused by the syndicate showing the reason that in the act of incorporation, they had no power to admit any female to a university examination (Dayal, 1955). It was only the period from 1882 to 1902 when all such obstacles were removed and the women entered into the threshold of universities for the first time. The first two women of India were Kadambini and Chandramukhi Bose of Bethune School, who received their degree of graduation from Calcutta University in 1883, the silver jubilee year of Calcutta University (National Committee, 1959). This created a new era in the history of women's higher education. It focused as a beacon in the dark path of women's education and gave a lead to the Indian Universities as well. After this, the universities changed their regulations and kept their doors open for the admission of women students. Prior to 1882, the Bethune College was the unique institution exclusively meant for women with an enrolment of six students. After this establishment of separate women's colleges was started.

The Government of India Education Resolution Policy 1904 expressed dissatisfaction with the progress of girls education and suggested that Government should spend more funds on girls education. A memorandum on women's education was presented to the Right Hon'ble J. Austen Chamberlain, M. P., His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for India in Council on 12th October, 1915, expressing anxiety over the male and female disparity.

Dr. D. K. Karve, a professor of Mathematics in the Ferguson College, Poona was the pioneer for his commendable contribution in the field of women's education. He founded a Hindu widows' Home in 1896. He realised that opportunity must be provided to women to enable them to take an active part in equal footing with men in the affairs of the home, the city and the nation. He established a university exclusively for women, with its own curriculum to suit the needs of women. Thus the first Indian Women's university was inaugurated in June 1916 and was considered as the landmark in the history of women's higher education in our country.

In 1917, the Calcutta University Commission suggested to establish a special board of women's education in the Calcutta University in order to safeguard the interests of women with regard to education which would emphasise to organise teaching in women's colleges, especially for the teaching of teachers and preparation for medical courses (Lakhar, 1987).

The Resolution of Government of India on 1st. October 1919 suggested to accord free student-ship, scholarships, stipends and more grant-in-aid to girls.

In 1921, the Non-co-operation movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi was a call for the emancipation of women. His strong support to women's education made the educated women conscious and confident regarding their social status and education. The first All India Women's Education Conference held in 1928 demanded the same type of education for women as men received (Nayar 1993). Moreover the enactment of Sarada Act in 1929 fixing
the age of marriage of girls at fourteen built up a favourable milieu for women's education. Hartog Committee in 1929 stated that;

The education of women especially in higher states will make available to the country a wealth of capacity that is now largely wasted through lack of opportunity (P. 151).

However, during this period there was an all-round increase in the number of institutions and enrolment. Girls were continuing in schools and were going for higher classes with good results (Progress of Education in India, 1927-32).

Another noticeable feature of this period was the praiseworthy attempt of providing women teachers in some universities to take careful note of the needs of female. During 1932-37, two women teachers, one in the department of English and another in the department of History of the Dacca University were employed (Mathur' 1973).

During 1921-47, the number of girls per one hundred boys in the schools was thirty. Female literacy was 6% in 1946-47 as compared to 0.7% in 1881-82.

As a result of all such efforts, women's education received an upward trend.

1.2 THE CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT FOR WOMEN

Now gone are those days when education of girls and women was not accepted. The significance of women's education was realised more and more. Gandhiji said that educating a man is educating an individual, educating a woman is educating a family. Exploring its vitality in the society the Unviersity Education Commission (1948) stated that;
There can not be an educated people without educated women. If general education had to be limited to men or women, that opportunity should be given to women, for then it would most surely be passed on to the next generation (P. 393).

Also, on this issue, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India said that;

To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, village moves and the nation moves (University News, 1989, P.34).

After independecnce in 1947, there had been a constant effort for improvement of women's education. The University education commission (1948), the Education Commission (1964-66), the National Policy on Education (1968), Report of the Committe on the status of women (1974), the more recently the National policy on Education (1986) and the National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000 A.D) have all stressed the need and importance of women's education. But the women population continue to trail behind men at all levels of education.

The National Policy on Education (1986) accorded Education for Equality by removal of factors which result in discrimination of women at all levels of education. It considered education as an agent of basic change in the status of women; to develop new values through redesigned curricula, text books, training and orientation of teachers, decision - makers and administrators as well as to encourage educational institutions to take up active programmes to further the development of women. It also suggested to lay major emphasis on women's participation in vocational, technical and professional education at different levels and intended to pursue the policy of non-discrimination vigorously to eliminate sex stereo-typing in vocational and professional courses
and to promote women's participation in non-traditional occupations as well as in existing and emergent technologies. It further stressed empowering of women in all spheres of life; research and women studies as a critical input to promote better understanding of women's contribution to social processes within social, technological and environmental change and universalisation of elementary education. Interalia, it outlined a plan of action and recommended for setting up of separate women's cell and women's studies centres in national level organisations and in the states for providing the necessary institutional structures which can monitor the progress of girls' education and focus on women's issues and special requirements of girls. These cells can help in orienting and sensitizing administrators, teachers, teacher educators and enlist support from the people and the media. But practically, all the efforts were only partially successful in improving the status of women, because of the lack of awareness among women about themselves. Only a small section of women population has been able to raise their status. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in his welcome address to the world congress of women at Moscow in June 1987 said that;

The status of women is a barometer of the democratisation of any state, an indicator of how human rights are respected in it (University News, 1989, P.34).

It has been realised that an equalitarian social order ensuring involvement and participation of all people in the process of country's development is possible only when the traditional social values governing the life pattern of Indian women are replaced by more modern equalitarian ones. In order to provide new equations in social relationship between men and women the
constitution of India granted equality to women in all spheres. Among other fundamental rights it ensures equality before law and equal protection of law (Article 14), prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15); guarantees equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment at any office of the state (Article 16) and forbids discrimination on the basis of religion, caste and sex in matters of emplpyment or appointment to any office under the state. Also Article 15(3) empowers the state to adopt protective discrimination measures for neutralizing the cumulative social, economic, educational, and political disadvantage of women and to make special provision in violation of the fundamental obligation of non-discrimination on the basis of sex.

A number of Acts have been enacted not only to protect of women from excesses and evils but also to improve status as well as to provide new status. The act passed have been ammended from time to time to make them more broad based. The labour laws related to women are :

1. The Minimum Wage Act 1948 : Fixation of a minimum time - rate; minimum piece - rate of wages; a guaranteed time-rate of wages for different occupations; localities or classes of work for adults, adolescents, children and apprentices.

2. The Factories Act, 1948 amended in 1949, 1950, & 1954 prohibited employment of women between 7 P.M and 6 A.M. Regulated working hours, contained provision for safety; fix the maximum load to be shifted by women, open creches etc.
4. The Factories (Amendment Act 1976) : Establishment of creches where 30 women are employed.
5. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

In addition to these, the provision of social laws that has been the hallmark of the decades includes:
1. The Hindu law of inheritance (Amendment) Act 1929.
2. The Hindu Women's Right of Property Act 1937.
5. The Hindu Code bill of 1955-56 : legalised monogamy, rights to mother to be natural guardian of the child, rights to share property, to maintenance, to adopt a child, to divorce.
9. Indian Penal Code. (Amended in 1983) - punishment for rape, shifting of onus of proof of innocence from women to men.
10. Family Courts : - to dispose of cases faster and to encourage more women to come to court of law for redressal of their grievances.
11. Law against the indecent representation of women 1986.
12. Sati Prevention Act of 1829 & 1987: Act was passed again after 1829 on Roop Kanwar case at Deorala.
17. Law against Amniocentesis
18. Married Women's Property Act

But though there is a plethora of Acts, most of the women are not aware of it, that is why they are incapable of knocking at the doors of law courts to vindicate themselves and these objectives of constitutional rights are not fulfilled.

1.3 IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION

The objective of women's improvement could not be achieved as per efforts because there exists a wide gap between what is to be done according to U. N. declaration on human rights, provisions of Indian constitution and the five year plan drafts demand and what is actually done. There must be a close link between human rights and social and economic development. About 50 per cent women of the global community are the poverty stricken groups of landless agricultural labourers, unpaid family workers, migrant labourers, workers in unorganised informal sectors of economy, construction
workers and urbanslum dwellers who are known as marginal women. Most unfortunately women and children constitute 80 per cent of the marginalised group. This group particularly is the victim of numerous problems because of the gap between policy and practice. The education system does not reach them, nor does the system attune to their needs and problems. The educational programmes, the text books mainly propagate the urban and upper class culture and totally ignore the marginal women's ethos.

Women due to want of education usually lack in technical knowledge and the skill derived out of training. Due to increased mechanisation, modernisation of industries, ruthless competition, their plight becomes worse. In addition to this the women workers either get support from male dominated trade unions, nor their problems are rightly emphasised by political parties and policy makers.

The economic policy and the high price of essential commodities press the women hard. Since their productive works are unrecognised, they are more seen as reproductive machines than the producers. Mary Shireen Khemchand (1995) discussed that structural adjustment rather than structural transformation is more required for women. Because, structural adjustment implies to feminisation of poverty and sharing of hunger between men and women where as structural transformation is based on redistribution of wealth and property with equal rights for women and abolition of patriarchal structures and values.

No doubt that women's roles in achieving the demographic goals are essential but the demographic goals must not be taken as synonymous with family planning.
Because population growth is a direct consequence of increasing inequities and dispossession among the majority. The population rise has much relevance to the economic and social structures and policies which need change. Women should understand that their health should not be subordinated to population goals, nor restricted to reproductive matters. They should also be aware of the fact that their education should not be linked only with the goal of family planning.

In the present day society, violence against women physical and mental has become more a recurring phenomenon than an exception. The root cause of the gender-based oppression is the patriarchal social order which forms the mainstream family model of India. Now everyday, every newspaper is over-loaded with over-whelming innumerable banner news of dowry death, bride-burning, suicide, rape case, eve-teasing, female infanticide, abduction, sex-determination test of foetus, and abortion of female foetus, sati-burning, child rape and abuse, sexual assault at work place as well wife-battering. Violence against women as violence against human rights has been recognised by the Vienna conference for the first time, which the women should be aware of. They should be able to place this violence before others to be viewed as a community problem than as women's problem.

In India, today at times secularism versus commnalism and women are the worst hit in its consequences. The women have to understand sufficiently the difference between political action and party policies. They should not be divided and weaken themselves but be united to encounter the radical social change which challenges the existing structure and power relations. As half of
the world's population, they should demand equal justice in human rights and protection.

Among multi-roles of women, their political participation should also be viewed as essential. This will not only strengthen the functions of democracy but also crucial to their struggle against oppression. Social actions and political actions are simultaneously important for them. Corruption, criminalisation and communalisation have crept into present day politics which threaten and restrict women's participation in politics. Their fight and protest against their deprivation and dispossession make them scapegoats of criminal intimidation. That is why the women in general hesitate to participate in politics. Realising the importance of women's participation in politics, the seventy third constitutional Amendment Act provided for a thirty (30) percent reservation for elections to panchayats. And as such thirty three (33) percent reservation in the Panchayat elections has been accorded by the Government of Orissa. In some states the figure has gone upto fifty (50) percent.

Under all such circumstances the women have to strengthen themselves to actively participate in politics and to protest against the policies that fail to protect them and give fillip to criminalisation.

The role of women is no more confined to the four walls of home. On account of the rapid growth of industrialisation and urbanisation, development in the field of transportation and communication, improvement in the realm of science and technology new social norms, values and roles have emerged. Economic hardship, favourable socio-cultural situation, job opportunities outside home demanded their participation in gainful
works. This will not only enhance the status of women but also the country's prosperity. The committee on the status of women (1974) in its support reported that women should be given equal freedom of choice with men in various economic activities. Their role in the country's development was considered as an important precondition for the advancement not only of women but of the country as well. Economic independence is quite essential to raise the status of women.

Training of women to fulfill their special social roles of child-bearing and child-rearing, self-realisation of values of life, and equality, should be the aim of women's education (Seth, 1969).

Uneducated people do not cater to the objectives of democracy, rather they are dangerous. If half of the population will not be properly educated they will fail to use their voting rights in a rational way.

Apart from this, the minimum age of marriage of girls has been accepted as eighteen (18) years and after the age of eighteen (18) years one is acknowledged as a major. The minimum age of schooling being 6+, a girl can at best complete the intermediate or +2 education only by eighteen years. It means that before entering the field of higher education a female goes for marriage which is no doubt an indication of the backwardness of a country.

From these considerations it can be said that education is the only panacea to all such problems and dilemmas. It is the miracle through which women can stand erect exercising all rights equally with men in this society. It can only liberate them from bondage and enable these educated to provide leadership to the
marginal women of the society. It is only education by which the women can give the society a better, novel and desired stand because education makes a man 'a man' and a women 'a women'. It has been perceived as the most significant fundamental factor influencing all round development of mankind material and spiritual. It is as the chief determinant of individual and social development through knowledge, skill, attitudes, values and capabilities should be acquired by all irrespective of sex, caste, creed and colour. But in almost all corners of the world, women have been considered as second class citizens, inferior sex and are underestimated by men. Where there is human habitation, there exist injustice, inequality and discrepancy for them.

Women are not women by their attempts, but by biological accidents for which they are not responsible and therefore should not be victimised for such accident.

India as a democratic and egalitarian country has pledged equal rights to education to all. However, it has been recognised that inorder to achieve success in various developmental plans and programmes female education has to be made democratic need - based and change-oriented (Desai, 1991) and as such, there has been a constant effort for integrating them into the mainstream of development by increasing their access to education. Thus it has become main thrust of both national and international concern.

But education of women suffered from numerous setbacks such as early marriage, poverty, gender-discrimination, house hold chores, unproductive labour, social role expectancy and such others, which need an understanding of the total gamut of social and political
dynamics to conceive of any meaningful strategies of intervention. In this context education of women is seen as a catalyst to enable them to challenge the constraints encountered by them.

Realising the significance of women's education, the National policy on Education (1968) recommended to emphasise education of girls not only on ground of social justice but also for rapid social transformation. Education of women has been reiterated in all the national plans and programmes and has been listed as top priority in National Policy on Education (1986), Eighth Five year Plan, National Perspective plan on women (1988-2000 A.D.) But even the commitment of universalisation of elementary education is not likely to be achieved by 2001 which was targeted to be attained by 1960. Because the progress of female literacy has been steady since independence but not phenomenal enough to keep pace with the literacy rate among males and with the growth of population. In India, the female literacy rate has increased from 18.44% in 1971 to 39.24% in 1991. It is still behind the male literacy which increased from 39.51% in 1971 to 64.13% in 1991. Only 52% of total number of adults can read and write. (Pillai, 1995)

Education for women will help solving their life-problems and will give education a practical bias. The notion that man is a responsible being should be discarded and instead, only the educated person is a responsible being should be acknowledged. Women should develop intellectually, morally, physically and psychologically to enrich their lives. This is what our country requires today in the present age of technology and space inventions. Education is very much needed for cultivating culture, acquiring knowledge, improving one's personal qualities, manners and behaviours.