

“Women” as a Ghettoized Sex: A Critical Study of Women’s Social and Educational Position in Modern India

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Abstract

A Criticism of Women’s Social and Educational Position in the Modern Structure of India examines the contradiction between constitutional promises of equality and the lived realities of women in Indian society. Although the Indian Constitution guarantees equality irrespective of sex, women continue to experience social, educational, and structural discrimination in both private and public spheres. The paper argues that many policies framed in the name of protection and empowerment often create a separate category for women, thereby reinforcing their marginalization rather than ensuring genuine equality. It highlights how gender roles are socially constructed through family, culture, curriculum, and institutional practices, reducing women’s identity to fixed roles such as wife, mother, and daughter. The study further discusses the impact of poverty, child labour, illiteracy, corruption, and lack of awareness on women’s access to education and self-reliance. By critically reviewing existing policies and programmes, the paper advocates a model of co-education, equal curriculum, social awareness, vocational training, and human-centered democratic participation. It concludes that education is the most effective means to build self-dependence, dignity, and balanced social relations, and that true equality can only be achieved when women are treated not as a protected category but as equal human beings.

Keywords- Women’s education; Gender equality; Empowerment; Social discrimination; Patriarchy; Co-education; Constitutional rights; Women in India

INTRODUCTION

*“My heart is like a singing bird,
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple tree,
Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit...”*
— Christina Rossetti

With a view to establishing equality, it is necessary to eradicate gender discrimination, which has led to many challenges before that “gender” which is constantly made to choose between the role of motherhood and that of a feminist striving to establish an individual identity. Gender roles are social constructions. A baby is born simply as a child; it is people, or rather society, who place a doll or a gun in its hands on the basis of gender.

In Indian culture, where a wife is often called *ardhangini* of her husband, it becomes paradoxical that the same society assigns women primarily the role of giving birth to and rearing a child—a child who is equally the child of a man. Yet, when women attempt to assert their “sex” distinctly and independently, patriarchy often finds it easier to separate them into a symbolic ghetto.

OBJECTIVES

This paper seeks to appeal for a system of general education that enables an individual to play a constructive and independent role not based on gender. It examines the constitutional guarantee of social and educational equality and focuses on the issue of women as a sex often tagged as “protected” under the banner of so-called equality.

More specifically, the objectives are:

1. To make a passionate plea to women to achieve education and write exactly what they think, so that their voices may be heard—not merely in protest, but in spiritual cooperation.
2. To strengthen a new awareness of the concept of equality and to formulate it through the process of co-education rather than through the specialization of categories.

3. To impart the idea of “power” as suggestive rather than dominant, especially in decision-making and in the functioning of democracy.

WOMEN AND THE QUESTION OF EMPOWERMENT

In spite of the constitutional guarantee of the Right to Equality, irrespective of caste, creed, colour, and sex under Articles 14, 15, and 16 of Part III of the Indian Constitution, women, along with the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, are still marked as separate and unequal in many official and social structures. In various government application forms, for instance, women are distinguished from the “general” category, as if equality itself requires separation.

Having raised their voice for equal rights with men, women have often not been truly empowered; rather, they have been granted reserved positions that may inadvertently ghettoize them—such as ladies’ compartments in trains, 33% reservation in elections, and other such protective but separate arrangements. These are created apart from the so-called general category.

Moreover, the curriculum frequently presents women as ideal figures only in relation to womanhood or motherhood, assigning them fixed roles as wife, mother, and daughter. Such roles make women dependent upon men and reduce their individual identity to their relationship with male members of society. This reinforces a gender-specific ideology.

Women themselves often have very little leisure, being burdened by the social expectation of being the “angel of the house” or *ghar ki lakshmi*. As Virginia Woolf observed in *A Room of One’s Own*, a woman has no separate study to retire to, and much of her work is done in the common sitting room, subject to constant interruptions. This remains relevant in the Indian context, especially for middle-class women who are denied both physical and intellectual space to express themselves fully.

Because of long neglect, many girls and women have entered into competition with men in order to prove themselves, and this has often resulted in a series of feminist reactions. Yet, ironically, such developments have also pushed women into a distinct “ghetto” of women’s writing and women’s struggles, separate from the so-called mainstream.

The government, through various committees and programmes for women’s education, has introduced free distribution of textbooks and uniforms among poor girls, established primary schools in habitations with populations of 300 within a radius of one mile, and made provisions for central assistance and compulsory education. Nevertheless, many backward and illiterate parents fail to see any immediate economic return from investing in their daughters’ higher education.

Among the extremely poor in rural areas and urban slums, children are often viewed in economic terms. The greater the number of children, the greater the number of hands available for labour. If the child is a girl, she is often trained in household service because she is expected eventually to go to her husband’s home. Even in poor farming families where parents wish to educate their daughters, agricultural crisis and poverty often frustrate these efforts. As a result, girls lose interest in study and begin to consider marriage as a form of economic and social security.

In recent times, due to various forms of sexual oppression, abuse, and torture, women have increasingly accepted separate identity-based forms of state protection. Yet the notion of empowerment, which is rooted in the idea of “power,” should be understood as suggestive power in a democracy rather than power in a dominant or exclusionary sense. Democracy and sustainability both require balance.

If nature is the source of production in the environment, woman is the source of reproduction in human society. In India, women as caretakers and managers of household services have attained a position, but it remains an assigned one. At the same time, in many metropolitan cities, women now manage both household responsibilities and official duties. Many have become financial supporters of their parents and husbands. Many parents also willingly encourage their daughters to enter the military, police, and other professions.

Kiran Bedi, the first woman IPS officer in India, Mary Kom, and many others stand as outstanding examples in contemporary society. However, it remains difficult to accept that women still have to prove themselves within quotas and categories of gender, where they are judged on the basis of a curriculum and a social structure separately assigned to their sex.

POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

Policies

The government has taken certain measures to improve the condition of women and promote their education. Some of them are as follows:

1. National Council for Women’s Education
It recommends that women’s education should be treated as a distinct area requiring special care and protection.
2. Kanyashree Prakalpa
This scheme aims to prevent child marriage and improve the status of girls and women. It is available to families with an annual income below a specified level.
3. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
This programme emphasizes free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years. It also includes the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, which provides food free of cost to encourage school attendance and primary education.

PROBLEMS

In spite of several governmental measures, many problems continue to obstruct the educational and social advancement of women.

1. **Poverty**

Poverty remains one of the most serious problems in India. It drives many parents toward child marriage and child labour, despite knowing the long-term harm caused by both.

2. **Child Labour**

Though rooted in poverty, child labour has become a major concern in itself. Poor parents often prefer to send children to work rather than to school, as work appears to provide immediate relief. In some cases, illiterate parents even encourage begging rather than schooling.

3. **Corruption**

Corruption is another major obstacle hindering social development. In schemes such as Kanyashree and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, records and data are sometimes manipulated by beneficiaries or intermediaries.

4. **Lack of Supervisory Bodies**

Many programmes fail because of insufficient monitoring and accountability at the local and district levels.

5. **Lack of General Awareness**

A large section of the population is still unaware that girls and boys should be treated equally and should enjoy the same benefits. It is the responsibility of the government and society to ensure that girls are not viewed as the “weaker sex” or as something “special” and separate, but as equal human beings.

GENERAL REMEDIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The disparity between the education of boys and girls demands urgent solutions. Mixed schools and an equal curriculum, rather than separate educational institutions, can help reduce gender divisions instead of reinforcing them.

1. District-wise Inspections

Inspectors, especially women inspectors, should be appointed with at least graduate-level qualifications. This would inspire confidence among parents and encourage them to continue their daughters’ education. It would also strengthen self-awareness among women.

2. Training Centres

The government should widely establish vocational training centres offering courses such as tailoring, handicrafts, dairy, and poultry. Rural women should be encouraged to join part-time courses that provide both training and income. This would help them prepare for the future and strengthen their individual identity. Women in rural areas should also be encouraged to participate in agricultural support work.

3. Literacy Campaigns

Literacy classes and awareness campaigns should be organized in rural areas through schools, educational clubs, roadside cultural programmes, folk songs, and dramatization based on the roles of girls and women in society. Such campaigns can be effective in awakening social consciousness.

4. No Categorization, but Generalization

Though social inequalities emerging from class, caste, and home environment are difficult to eliminate completely, the excessive economic privileging of one category over another raises questions regarding the actual implementation of the Right to Equality. Equality must not result in the permanent categorization of human beings.

CONCLUSION

It may thus be concluded that education is a means of character formation. The moment a woman becomes self-dependent as an earning member of the family along with her parents or husband, the principle of “education for equality” is strengthened, and education becomes a lever for balancing society as a whole.

Since every individual matters in a democracy, the educational structure must be founded upon cooperation. It must provide equal opportunities to all and should develop human relationships, not merely man-woman divisions. Education should not reinforce social segregation but should instead create a balanced and dignified social order.

To conclude with Swami Vivekananda’s words:

“We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and raise the masses... Thus be moral... brave unto desperation.”

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