



Changing Diminutions in Educational Empowerment among Women in Kashmir: A Sociological Note during Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown

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ABSTRACT

Education is the sustenance of the mind with knowledge and as such it helps in the formation of an integrated personality of an individual. Nowadays everybody is facing the same problem in education because of the global pandemic disease but before the spreading of this man-made disaster (COVID-19) India had made many strides in the field of education in the past few decades but still the fact is that our country (India) is the home to the largest number of illiterate population in the world. The rate of illiteracy is mainly high in rural areas; especially among women that can also increase with the spreading of this global pandemic disease as because of the shortage of facilities available. Women education is decisive to the overall development of any country wither developing or developed. In Kashmir female literacy rate is relatively low and stands at 65.48 percent according to the census of 2011. The present study examines impact of covid-19 on educational empowerment of women in Kashmir and seeks to address the challenges towards education during this critical condition. The study is based on reviewing of secondary sources of data like as articles, journals, newspapers etc.

Keywords; Social Challenges, COVID-19 Pandemic, Education, Empowerment, Feminism

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is a process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. Empowerment of women is also called as gender empowerment. There are many ways through which empowerment can be ginned to especially to those people who are less empowered or marginalized like as women who are considered as the second grad citizens of the society. The main reason for the women to become less empowered or second grad citizens of the society is that they are less conversant and are not linked to



this digital world as men are because of high level of illiteracy among them. Education is best way to empower women in all respects. Education helps in generating awareness among people especially among women who are considered as more marginalized section of the society about their political, social, legal, economic rights or requirements to fight against all kinds of social discriminations. It enables them to realize their abilities, upward skills, looking for employment and improving their health conditions. Therefore, educating women encourage not only their political involvement and financial self-determination but also improves their quality of life and through them of the entire family and then of the whole nation in a broader sense. Empowerment of women is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. In 1997, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reiterated that women's rights are basic human rights. Women's social condition and entrance to education, employment and health care are intimately associated to economic expansion. Women in many countries still lack the right to own land, to accede to property; girls are deprived of schooling, female workers normally face job prejudices; and women's sexual and reproductive health needs are widely abandoned. Women often face lawful and institutional barriers to financially viable activity outside the home, including laws or traditions that refute them the right to own land, establish credit. Advancing gender equality, empowerment of women and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development related programmes, 'according to principle 4 of the ICPD Program of Action. 'The Human Rights of women and the girl child are an incontrovertible, essential and inseparable part of the human right'.

National Policy For Empowering Women

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women has set certain objectives:

- 1) Equivalent access to partaking and decision making by women in political, social and economic life of the nation.
- 2) Equivalent access of women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment and safety, social security and public office etc.
- 3) Generating an atmosphere through affirmative economic and social policies for full development of women to facilitate them to comprehend their full potential.
- 4) Intensification legal systems aimed at the eradication of all forms of unfairness against women.
- 5) Building and escalation partnerships with civil society, predominantly women's association etc.

Mainly women education has two aspects; individual aspect and social aspect. Education is important for women, individually to bond her with the world outside. It helps them to enlarge their abilities to contract with the tribulations of their lives, their relations, their culture and the nation as a whole. 'Education means an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man; body, mind and spirit'. M. K. Gandhi

It is the fact that large number women from rural areas have missed education at different stages and in order to empower them there is a great need of providing opportunities so as to facilitate them to presume leadership



qualities. It is frequently assumed that the level of ambition of these women as a group is low and they are quite satisfied with what they have or with what they are. Nevertheless, in order to expand and elevate their level of ambition, ample educational opportunities are to be provided to them so that they can be aggravated to partake in the programs of development. The advancement and affluence of a nation and of the community are resolute by the level of education. This extraordinary potential of education needs to be realized by every entity or society and must go in for it (Ahmad: 1987). At the global level, attempts have been made at different congregations to spotlight on the aspects of education as a part of primary human rights. According to the Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):

'Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory... Education shall be intended for the full growth of human personality and to the intensification of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26).

No doubt women education in Kashmir has made significant improvement and also parents are showing curiosity to educate their daughters along with their male gays. But still their advancement in education is very slow. Still there exists a wide gap in between the goals enshrined in the Constitution and allied mechanisms on the one hand and the situational legitimacy of the status of women on the other. There is a need to take more stringent procedures for enhancement in education of women in Kashmir because education plays a significant role in raising the status of women. The planners, administrators and implementers involved must pay greater attention to guide the process of bridging the gender inequalities in education. Hence the greatest need of the hour is to raise social status of women. With the rise of feminism across the world, a new generation of feminists was emerged in India. Women have developed themselves according to the situations and have become advanced in various fields. They have become independent in respect of their reproductive rights. Modern Indian feminists are now fighting for and against: individual self-government, human rights, liberty, self-determination, tolerance, assortment, familial violence, sexuality, grievance, sexism, freedom from patriarchy, the right on abortion, right on divorce, equal pay and education. No doubt that there is less awareness regarding the feminism among the women in the rural areas of India like as in Kashmir. But the women in Kashmir can become conscious of all the modern movements related to their empowerment if they get education. It was the good opportunity for the women in Kashmir to become more active of using internet wither in education or in shopping, wither in consulting doctors or for registering any complaint against any injustice happened with them especially during these days when the use of internet is becoming more essential for the survival of the life because the people around the whole world are facing with a pandemic decease named as COVID-19 Pandemic and everybody is using internet in all respects. If the women from rural areas will become more active in using the internet then they can easily highlight their problems on social-medias that they are facing. Generally most of the girls face problems and sometimes the arguments from their parents of going outside for higher education or for any kind of education in offline mode but now that dispute from the parents can also fail



because now everything (education) is online. It was a good opportunity for the women facing domestic violence or any kind of psychiatric problem because of any violence against them if they once became more active in using internet then they can very easily highlight their problem on social-media and can also take the remedy or counseling from doctors around the world. No doubt there are many challenges facing the people both men and women in education which was the best way to help the women especially the women from the rural areas like in Kashmir to empower herself and to connect herself to the world outside or to fight for their rights. Along with a big issue of 2G network¹ in Kashmir which is shut down from 4 August 2019 for some political issue (abolition of Article 370-A) the guidelines of UGC in education system are also creating mental traumas for female students and teachers then the male category.

Here are the challenges that the universities or schools across the world are facing due to the COVID-19 outbreak:

Shifting From Offline Classes To Online Classes

Not only in Kashmir but over the world, many teachers and students have been thrilled by the move of the offline to the online delivery mode. Teachers/faculty outside the Kashmir valley have already begun preparing lesson plans to deliver online teaching to their students. Online teaching is not a new mode of delivery for many universities outside Kashmir. Many faculty members get guidance or training to use online learning platforms either as the only delivery mode or face-to-face teaching. The transition to online mode has raised questions for the teachers about their competence to deal with the accessible technology especially in Kashmir which is the rural territory of the developing country (India) where only 2-G network is available since a long time before the global pandemic decrease of COVID-19 Pandemic (4 August 2019). In addition, computers and IT equipment at home are now in heavy demand from parents, children, and other relatives who have to work from home. Thus, working at home is going to be a complicated task for the teachers or faculty. Also, many universities do not have adequate resources to facilitate online teaching with instantaneous effect in Kashmir. What about those students who do not have access to laptops and internet facilities at home? Is it possible to teach practicals and labs, music and art courses online? What will happen to those students whose courses cannot be taught online? The quality of online education is a critical issue that needs proper consideration. Extension of stay at home due to the COVID-19 Pandemic may cause a monetary problem. Many students during these days of pandemic may not have the correct setup such as books, computers and high-speed internet connection and may also affect the admissions of international students for the coming academic session. It is difficult to scrutinize how they are taking it online and to ensure that students are not cheating during online tests. Again lab tests, practical's, and performance tests are not possible to conduct through

¹ 2G or 2G is the short form for second generation cellular network. 2G cellular networks were commercially launched on the GSM standard in Finland by Radiolinja (now part of Elisa Oyj) in 1991.



online. In addition, students who do not have an Internet facility will suffer a clear disadvantage while participating in the evaluation process, which would adversely affect their grade point averages (GPAs). Primarily before the COVID-19 Pandemic had become spreading very fast in Kashmir, many students had not thought much about how it was going to affect them. The effect of this Global COVID-19 Pandemic has begun to have an impact in other aspects of student's career succession and lives.

UGC Guidelines Related To Covid-19 Pandemic

Some General Guiding Principles

1. All the universities may follow a 6-day week pattern to reimburse the loss for the residual session of 2019-20 and the next session 2020-21.
2. In view of the significance of 'physical distancing' universities may take indispensable steps to ensure that the students are given disclosure to laboratory coursework/ practical experiments through virtual laboratories, digital resources available for the purpose etc.
3. Every institute should develop virtual classroom and video conferencing facility and all teaching staff should be trained with the use of the technology.
4. The universities should prepare e-content/e-lab experiments and upload the same on their websites.
5. The universities should strengthen the mechanism of mentor-mentee counseling through a dedicated portal on university website to impart timely guidance and counseling to the students..
6. The universities may devise a proforma to record the Travel/ Stay history of the staff and students for the period when they were away from the university due to lockdown, so that necessary precautions may be taken in specific cases, if required.
7. In order to overcome such challenges in future, the faculty should be adequately trained for the use of ICT and online teaching tools, so that they complete about 25 percent of the syllabus through online teaching and 75 percent syllabus through face to face teaching.
8. In view of the present scenario and future uncertainties:
 - i. the universities may adopt and implement these Guidelines in a transparent manner by making alterations/ additions/ modifications/ amendments to deal with particular situation(s) in the best interest of students, educational institution and the entire education system,
 - ii. if the university faces difficulty in making admissions as per the existing policy, it may adopt alternative modes of admission process, if otherwise legally tenable, etc.

Many studies explain that education is the best way to empower the women who are considered as the marginalized section of the society.



Vivek Sharma, (2014) in '*Education and Women Empowerment among Gujjars, Bakerwals and Gaddis in Jammu Region of Jammu and Kashmir*', highlights that women's education in India has also been a major obsession of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country. Lubna Yousuf, Ouffee Maqbool' (2017) in their study '*Higher Education and Women Participation in Kashmir: A Trend Towards Change*', states that education is the measure by which the growth and development of a country can be measured and as such it has occupied an important place in the society. There is no denying the fact that education has an imperative role in the life of an individual as well as society. Titan M. Alon, Matthias Doepke, Jane Olmstead-Rumsey, and Michèle Tertilt (2020) in '*The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality*', states that the economic decline caused by the current COVID-19 outbreak has considerable implications for gender equality, both during the decline and the ensuing recovery. Compared to regular recessions, which affect men's employment more severely than women's employment, the employment drop related to physical distancing measures has a large impact on sectors with high female employment shares.

Pradeep Sahu (2020) in '*Closure of Universities Due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Impact on Education and Mental Health of Students and Academic Staff*', states in light of mounting concern about the present COVID-19 pandemic, increasing number of universities across the world have either delayed or canceled all the events. Universities are taking intensive measures to prevent and protect all students and staff members from the highly transferable disease.

CONCLUSION

Education to women is as indispensable as to men. It makes women to find the right way to develop. The main aim of education is to change the cultural norms and patterns of life of rural women to make them economically autonomous, to organize themselves to form strong groups so as to analyze their situations and conditions of living, understand their rights and responsibilities and to enable them to partake and contribute to the development of women and the entire society. Every work or we can say that all the struggles of feminists can only become successful when the women from rural areas like as in Kashmir can get education. Due to the rapid increase of COVID-19 cases worldwide (COVID-19 positive cases or deaths), universities should cancel or reschedule all events whether inside or outside for example, workshops, conferences, seminars, field works or offline research surveys, Botanical tours, supports tours or picnics or laboratory practical's for an indefinite period of time especially in the rural areas of some countries as like in Kashmir territory of India which is majorly dependent on the agricultural economy and also because of shortage of high speed internet connections the students are not able to attend the classes or any examination online. The universities or schools should avoid any meetings involving large numbers of staff or students unless it is very urgent and should give a relaxations in fees and should also give the relaxations in more working hours among the faculty or teachers because the spreading of this pandemic disease (COVID-19) and also because of the large number of the death rates per day people are suffering from different



types of psychological/mental traumas. It has by now become clear that the COVID-19 Pandemic is not only a global health crisis, but is also leading to a major global economic decline. Proper counseling services should be available to support the mental health and well-being of students as well as for faculty members around the world.

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