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A STUDY ON WOMEN EDUCATION: EDUCATE AND EMPOWER

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ABSTRACT

Education is the key to women's empowerment. When education gets denied there isn't much to happen in her life. As usual she gets married and have children at a young age, work in unpaid or low-paying jobs, and rely on economic support from their husband or family. Without education, their future and their family's future gets limited. According to the Malala Fund, there are over 130 million girls worldwide who are not in school. Has anyone thought about them or their future? There might be an unpolished gem among them. Studies have found that if every girl completes 12 years of education, child marriage would drop by 64% and health complications from early pregnancy, like early births and child deaths, would drop by 59% and 49%, respectively. Educating women and girls also improve the economic status of a nation, which will reduce the risk of war and terrorism and can be a better harbinger of future. There are still many barriers preventing girls and women to pursue and complete their education like fees, distance or lack of transportation, being forced to work and provide for their families, being forced to marry and have children, or conflict in their hometown or country. The most difficult obstacle is the mentality of the family towards a girl child. They are denied education only because she is born as a girl. The United Nations found that as girls reach secondary school, their enrolment rates decline significantly. Only 39% of the countries have equal proportions of boys and girls enrolled in secondary education. In developing countries, 35% to 85% of girls are forced to stay at home from school to take care of their younger siblings and to manage the house while their brothers are provided with higher education. To reach the competition level and to expand their professional opportunities, women need the same experiences and skills, making post-secondary education an essential part of women's empowerment. Higher education instils them with the knowledge, competence and experience that are necessary to get involved in government, business, or even in a civil society. With higher education, women and girls have better access to health information and other beneficial services which in turn will only help the family or generation to grow and develop. We need more and more sheers to be the torch bearers of future.

Key words: Empowerment, Post-secondary education, Shero, Professional opportunities

“You educate a man; You educate a man.

You educate a woman; You educate a generation”-Brigham Young

We are living in a highly competitive world where survival is the only mantra to be focused. Such a fast growing world hardly differentiates between men and women. Education is the only key factor that brought towards such a change. Even when women have access to education, there can be many other factors that can make it difficult for her to take full advantage of those opportunities. It's women who still carries the cultural burden of being the primary homemakers and caregivers. This unpaid “second shift” means that they have less time and energy to dedicate to their studies. Family responsibilities doesn't become burden for them but that is the prime factor that is delimiting them from their higher education or carrier growth. When women become the sole providers for their families, they need to fulfil it with many other factors like being victims of domestic violence, threats like financial and from profession which becomes much more difficult for them to handle. The immense pressure that she is handling becomes worthless when it is labelled under the synonym ‘mother’ or ‘wife’. Today's era has witnessed a lot of change when it comes to single girl child nuclear family. Deciding voices are only that of their parents. Thus providing wings for them to fly high and capture their aim. Their dreams can't be in fetters and who knows there might be an unpolished gem that is being soiled. Women in India have been treated with utmost respect and dignity since time immemorial. For a nation to advance, empowering women is crucial. India was blessed with visionary women who broke the fetters of gender norms in every sector. Its long back we heard about the denial of education to women. A girl child was considered curse than a boon. Never to live in a world where mothers and sisters are dragged out of their homes and raped. Wherein she becomes both the victim and accused and its said by “them”, it's all because of her “out of the box” attitude that caused her this. Is this the caring that we need to give to our sisters, rather than rending a helping hand? We can't even skim through the news heads that is going on these days. What if such an accusation comes out, it needs to face a frequent trail from the social medias and channels who will make them even worse? Is the only solution, to remain silent and bear the tragic effects or to have a prolonged grudge and to end up in depression throughout the life? It's an open ended question towards the secularist nation. Here I would like to quote the famous wording of Michelle Obama,

“When girls are educated, their countries become stronger and more prosperous”

Let the nation realize her power of golden touch. She is to succeed where ever she goes, don't curtail her from her doing what is right. Listen to her inner voice that itself will keep the nation going. We do respect our mothers and all woman is an incarnation of her, our mother Earth. Its only she who can protect, provide, love, sacrifice selflessly. Split of the moment can we see her incarnations of a loving Sita, ready to sacrifice everything for her love and family, Durga the fearest of all who battle against evil for good. For us this is our mother, both deities in one, who loves and cares us with one hand and get furious with another. Still we love her and keep no grudges. Then how can we ever think of harming her. Where has our brains and minds gone, ready to stab the same womb from where we came? Is this what we call progression? Are we the real citizens bearing torches for a future developing nation? How can we sustain by spiting on our own veins? When will all these quires be dissolved? The only solution for all this is only education, it opens the eyes to a new world of realities and hopes for a better nation. It's clearly evident that the only means to attain empowerment is through education. Change should begin from her and its only she who can bring changes. Here I would like to cite the story of Rani Padmini a legendary 13th – 14th century Queen (Rani) of the Mewar kingdom of present day India. She was the wife of King Ratan Sen, captured and imprisoned by Delhi's sultan Alauddin Khalji. Alauddin Khalji became enamoured with Padmavati's beauty and decided to siege Chittor to obtain Padmavati. Before Chittor was captured they had to face defeat against Khalji, she and her companions committed Jauhar (self-immolation) thereby defeating Khalji's aim and protecting their honour. Coupled to the *Jauhar*, the Rajput men died fighting on the battlefield. Throughout the novel *Padmini: The Spirited Queen of Chittoor*, Mridula Behari tried to explain the immense beauty and knowledge that Padmavati possessed. It's only because of her education and knowledge, she had the courage to face such a situation where her husband the Rana itself was helpless. She was bold enough to convince everyone and to equip them for a war against the evils. There are many instances in the novel where we find her indulged in reading the ancient scriptures and getting mesmerised by that. It's the education that

brought her into a new world where she understands that action speaks more than words. There is always an urge for action than mere talks, that won't lead you anywhere. Education delimits the boundaries of caste, creed, gender, finance and what not. How true it is to quote Malala Yousafzai's wordings here,

"If one man can destroy everything, why can't one girl change it?"

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on the launch of the expanded 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' (March 8, 2018): "Daughters are not a burden but the pride of the whole family. We realise the power of our daughters when we see a woman fighter pilot. The country feels proud whenever our daughters bag gold medals, or for that matter any medal, in the Olympics." This is the time only when we think oh! are they capable of bagging a gold and that too for the nation? When they come to lime light we find applauds and cheering from all over the nation. But have ever we imagined the trials or pains that they have gone through to achieve that? Same is the case with the other gender, but they are always on safe side of the scrutiny eyes of the society. It's a boy, no matter if he is alone or late to home or traveling late or alone. The world is always open to him than to her. We need more Sheros to be an inspiration and to motivate others to come out from their shells that is encircling them towards darkness. Engaged in a combat to the march for equality with our sisters and mothers, let us understand the theme of Women's Day: "An Equal world is an enabled world: realizing women's power." After the adoption of the Beijing Agenda for Action, UN has set the year 2020 as a key year for assessing international progress towards achieving gender equality and human rights for all women and girls. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has much triggered up their progression under the leadership of PM Modi in providing equal opportunities. It is with immense happiness we can say that due to the Swachh Bharat Mission, 14,67,679 schools now have a functioning girl's toilet, an increase of 4.17 percentage points in comparison to 2013-14. The impact of the mission has resulted in an increase in enrolment of girls by 25 percentage points in 2018-19 from 2013-14. These figures get dimmed in a society which is indulging much more in a political game for their sustenance. We living in the safe shelters haven't ever thought about our sisters who is being victimized and marginalized. Minister of Finance Nirmala Sitharaman applauded the performance of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao in her speech on the budget: "Gross enrolment ratio of girls across all levels of education is now higher than boys. At the elementary level it is 94.32 per cent as against 89.28 per cent for boys, at the secondary level it is 81.32 per cent as compared to 78 per cent and at the higher secondary level girls have achieved a level of 59.7 per cent compared to only 57.54 per cent." The MHRD has approved 5,930 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, which are girls' residential schools and have an enrolment of 6,18 lakh students, to increase equality of access and opportunity for girls. The National Incentive Scheme for Girls for Secondary Education has approved an incentive sum of Rs 8,56 crore for the 28,547 beneficiaries. According to the scheme Rs 3,000 is being deposited under the age of 16 in the name of deserving unmarried girls and entitles them to withdraw it along with interest in reaching 18 years of age and passing Class X. Besides an improvement in the girl's gross enrolment rate in schools, the educational outcomes and accomplishments have also improved.

Let's go ahead with this initiative for our sisters than to get involved in the cheap political drama that is being happening in our nation. There is considerable evidence that women's education and literacy tend to reduce the mortality rates of children. It's indeed true what Malala Yousafzai pointed out:

"We realize the importance of our voice only when we are silenced"

In accordance with the celebration of India's success in improving gender equality in the education system, much greater and collective efforts are needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of eliminating gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations. History of Indian women is full of pioneers, who broke gender barriers and worked hard for their rights and made advances in politics, arts, science, law, etc. Let us cite few examples of our pioneers who made us think beyond Anandibai Gopalrao Joshi, who became the first Indian female physician in the year 1887. She was also the first Indian woman who get training in Western medicine and the first woman to travel to the United States of America. Arunima Sinha, is the first female amputee to climb Mount Everest. She is also the first Indian amputee to climb the Everest. She was a national level volleyball player who in 2011 was pushed by

robbers from a running train as she defied them. After meeting this accident, one of her legs was amputated below the knee. Arati Saha became the first Indian and Asian woman to swim across English Channel in the year 1959. She also became the first female sportsperson awarded with Padma Shri in 1960. Mother Teresa founded many Missionaries of Charity, a Roman Catholic religious congregation, giving her life to social work. Indira Gandhi became the first woman Prime Minister of India and served from 1966 to 1977. Indira Gandhi renowned as the "Woman of the Millennium" in a poll which was organised by BBC in 1999. In 1971, she became the first woman to receive the Bharat Ratna award. Justice M. Fathima Beevi became the first female judge to be appointed in the Supreme Court of India in the year 1989. In her autobiography she had said about the immense suffering that she had faced to reach such a highest peak. Her father was the only person who supported her thorough out her journey. Kalpana Chawla, the first Indian woman who reached in space. As a mission specialist and a primary robotic arm operator, she went into space in 1997.

We can move to our present Sheros starting with Mithali Raj, the first woman to score a double hundred in Test Cricket against New Zealand at Wellington, 2004. She was the first to achieve this landmark in the world. Pratibha Patil became the first woman President of India and held office from July 2007 to July 2012. Kiran Bedi, joining Indian Police Service (IPS) in 1972, she became the first woman officer in India. Moreover, later in 2003, Kiran Bedi also became the first woman to be appointed as the United Nations Civil Police adviser. Anjali Gupta is the first female flying officer in the Indian Air Force to be court martialled. She used to work for the Aircraft Systems and Testing Establishment unit in Bangalore. Anjali completed her Masters of Philosophy in Sociology from the Delhi University and was first posted at Belgaum in 2001. Sania Mirza, a professional tennis player, became the first ever Indian woman to win the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) title in 2005. Later in 2015, Sania Mirza became the first Indian woman titled as rank number one in WTA's double rankings. Saina Nehwal became the first Indian women to win a medal in Badminton at 2012 Olympic Games. Later in 2015, she became the first Indian woman to secure no. 1 position in world rankings. Mary Kom, is the only woman boxer who has won a medal in each of the six World Championships. She was the only Indian woman boxer who qualified for the 2012 Olympics and became the first Indian woman boxer to win a gold medal in Asian Games in 2014. Cited just a few but more hands of achievements are behind which are yet to be recognised and appreciated. They have set a model for us to think and act beyond.

Our government has also taken much initiative for protecting the rights of education for girls. India Post or Department of Posts, the postal system of the country, offers several savings schemes with different interest rates. The **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana**, one such savings scheme offered by India Post, is a deposit scheme for the girl child that can be opened in any of the leading banks and post offices across the country. In such schemes the child is getting the benefit for future education and for her marriage or future life. There is a platform called WE, that is an empowerment program through which woman are trained to form self-organized and self-managed savings groups, each consisting of 15-25 members. Their aim is to develop individual empowerment and increase their access to financial resources which is the prime element for eradicating poverty. All the members meet weekly to make decisions and interact in life-skills training, discuss various issues of mutual interest. They not only give a platform for awareness but also make an effort to join together and take action to improve their lives and communities. We too need to make more and more efforts than *ME TOO* to raise our voice against the inhuman oppression and injustices that is happening worldwide. Amendments to laws are must as Judiciary is the ultimate power which we believe and rely on. For a common man judiciary is the only hope or last and final resort. We all need to respect our law than fearing it. If the administrators of law are more channelized and less corrupted, we don't have to wait for justice. It's absolutely true to say the famous phrase "Justice delayed is justice denied". Let us be the harbingers of a brighter future that initiates the slogan justice and tranquility. Let the coming era witness a world devoid of corruption, discrimination, poverty, illiteracy.

"Empower yourselves with a good education, then get out there and use that education to build a country worthy of your boundless promise"

-Michelle Obama

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