

Education And Empowerment: Study Of Sudha Koul's Memoir The Tiger Ladies

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Abstract

Women across the globe are often considered as a secondary sex whose main objective in life is to serve their husbands. The society has developed a stereotypical image of women whose lives are mostly bounded within four walls of the house. This thinking is prevalent in almost all parts of India as well and thus women education becomes a taboo here. This present work will focus on the gender sensitization and women education in the region of Kashmir, India with special reference to a memoir *The Tiger Ladies* by Sudha Koul. Koul through this book traces her journey in Kashmir where she struggles a lot but finally emancipates herself by becoming the first lady I.A.S officer from Jammu and Kashmir. Koul's book is an inspirational book which helps to motivate young girls to achieve their goals by focusing on their career rather than marriage only. It also develops a positive attitude which can be used to change the behaviour of society and especially the family towards women education.

Keywords Gender sensitization, Kashmir region, Secondary sex, Stereotypical image and Women Education

Introduction

Education and Gender sensitization has become an issue of global concern. Gender sensitization according to Shailly Barodia (2015) in an article "Gender Sensitization and Education" is, "about changing the behaviour and instilling empathy into the views that we hold about our own and the other sex" (p.109). Women are usually considered as a secondary who is believed to be a weak sex to their counterparts. Barodia is strictly against the notion that a stereotypical image is given to the women which consider her weak and incapable of taking decisions for her own. She strongly holds the view that women education is important like male education as women are equally capable like men at intellectual levels. Education is one of the chief factors for the women empowerment as it develops awareness among the women regarding their rights. The

Indian government has formulated different laws and rules for the women education so that the women in India can get an education without any hindrances. Gender sensitization focuses on developing a positive attitude towards women education. But mostly in India, women education is not given much importance and it is often considered that money gets wasted if spent on women education as the primary role of women is not earning but to serve her husband and family by compromising and sacrificing her own wishes and desires.

This paper explores the issue of gender sensitization in Jammu and Kashmir in regard to education focussing on a memoir by Sudha Koul (2003) *The Tiger Ladies* where she talks about women education in Kashmir. Kashmir is a patriarchal society where the literacy rate of women is very low as compared to the male

literacy rate. According to an article "Empowering rural women through education in Jammu and Kashmir", Dr. Kavita Suri (2016) gives a statistics of women education in Kashmir. She states that, "according to the Census 2011, the literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir is 78.26% for males and 58.01% for females . . . there is a large gap in the male literacy rate" (Suri, 2016).

Fayaz Ahmad Shah, Fouzia Khurshid and Nazmul Hussain in their article (2011) "Gender Disparity and Policies of Inclusion: A Case Study of Women's Education in Jammu and Kashmir" focus on the plight of women education in Jammu and Kashmir. They hold the view that women empowerment is very important for the nation to flourish and for that woman should be involved in social, political and economic activities. They assert that women education is one of the main issues of the global concern by giving reference from the Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which focuses on the equality of education. They stress on the fact that education will make women aware of their social, political and economic rights and will make them self-dependant and fight against the evils prevalent in the society against women. They later focussed on the plight of the women education in Jammu and Kashmir and state that it is also similar to other parts of the country where women education is still a taboo. "The educational status of women in Kashmir like their counterpart elsewhere in the country is also depressing and quite dismal. Women in the traditional Kashmiri society were generally subjected to discrimination, inequality and oppression" (p.138). They explored that the literacy rate of women in Kashmir is very low as compared to the men. They explored that government is taking steps by keeping issues regarding women education at priority and appreciated the schemes and programmes which are working to improve the women education like Sarva Shiksha Abiyan (SSA), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary

Level (NPEGEL) and Kastura Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya (KGBV).

Sudha Koul in *The Tiger Ladies* (2003) traces her journey where she narrates that how difficult it was for her to achieve her aim of becoming an IAS officer in J&K state. She strongly believes that it is not only the society who is against this women education but the parents have also developed a mentality where they teach or brainwash their daughters to focus only on marriage rather education.

Nusrat Pandit (2016) in her article "Enhancing Women's Empowerment: Reflections from Jammu and Kashmir" explores that women face different issues like women violence, women education, improper health facilities and many more which make her feel secondary to their counter sex. Pandit holds the view that education is one of the most important things for women emancipation but unfortunately, the literacy rate of women in this state is not up to the mark. She states that:

Literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir has considerably remained unsatisfactory. The low literacy rate of the women folk is growing and snaring at the policy programmes launched in the state where the focus has been the gender (female), similarly the women's participation in work force as compared to men is still very nacent. (p.72)

This is what Sudha Koul has also focussed in *The Tiger Ladies* (2003). She strongly believes that women education in Kashmir is still a sensitive issue and people are more inclined towards getting their girls prepared for marriage rather than education. Koul discusses that her mother used to think only about her marriage. Her mother

started collecting her trousseau when Koul was in the school only. She hardly cared about her daughter's dream and wanted to get her married as soon as possible. This thinking should be stopped and especially the mothers should encourage their daughters to study and become aware of their rights so that nobody can oppress them. This should be the main focus of gender sensitization where not only the society but most importantly the parents should maintain equality among their children and should educate their daughters.

Sudha Koul was very happy on completing her university with flying colours but it hardly made any difference to her mother. It was a thing that her mother should be proud of but instead started worrying more about her daughter's marriage. "In their eyes, prior to marriage we are just waiting for our real home and it is getting really late for us. My accomplishments do not impress my mother, she thinks I take it all seriously and is rather embarrassed by my resilient bachelor status" (p.141). This is hypocrisy on the part of her mother. She was not able to sleep at night because her daughter was not yet married. This education made her aware of her rights and she realised that marriage was not her ultimate aim in life instead of her mother saying it all the time. Showkat Ahmad Bhat, Aashfaq Husain Bhat and Dr. P. Chinnathurai (2016) in their article "Educational Status of Women in Jammu and Kashmir with Special Reference to Rural Area" strongly believes in the encouraging women education. They assert that women education makes them independent and aware of their social, political and economic rights.

Education helps women in lightening the burden of a tradition of ignorance and strict seclusion within the home, in equipping them with the expertise and knowledge required to play modern roles, in

widening their horizons and in raising their general status in society. (p.178)

This is how Koul also survived in her home. Her mother would always want her to get married as soon as possible but the writer was focussed towards her dream and finally became the first female I.A.S officer from her state.

After the results are announced it is pointed out to me that I have become the first Kashmiri woman to be selected to the Indian Administrative Service. The news is greeted with skepticism by my parents; I seem to have taken another step toward open unconnected space, out of their enclosure. They do not know what this could lead to, but I have made up my mind to join the service. (p.147)

This is the common thing prevalent in the Kashmir region. If a woman dreams something in her life, she is hardly given any support especially from the family and when she achieves that, her family gets more worried as a career is often considered to be a barrier in the way of women marriage. But Koul through her story wants to motivate women to achieve those dreams and overcome all the barriers that stop women from being independent and emancipated.

The Tiger Ladies (2003) not only talks about education as a taboo but it is an inspirational book that narrates the journey of women empowerment. As it is a memoir, Koul recalls her memories from her college time. Her college used to be a place where widows were kept and were supposed to live a secluded life after the death of their husbands. Sudha Koul explores that the widows from the high-class families were kept here and it was called a Bungalow. They had to

spend their rest of the lives there without any connection with the society and if they resisted then, they were made to believe that living in that secluded house was better than the tradition of Sati Pratha which was conducted in other parts of the country. But with the passage of time, things are trying to change and women are fighting to achieve their emancipation. Women to some extent have achieved it but still, have miles to go. Like the 'Royal Bungalow' which used to be the hub of widow women where they lived a secluded life has now become a college for women in Kashmir which is commendable. "The widow's palace, which is how the college is still referred to, has become a beehive of women's emancipation, abuzz with studies, classes, books, plays, song, dance, fashion, and debates" (p.98). So, where women were kept out of the society to live alone and a miserable life has now become a place where they are taught to live a free and independent life. Koul explains that how she still gets a chill thinking about those women. All the girls in the college are sacred but they hardly talk about those ladies. "We do not talk about the ladies, though their spectres haunt the college. How can we forget them? But no connection can be made between unmarried girls and widows; it's bad enough that we study in a house of ill-fated women" (p.104). It is definitely scary to study in that place but still, women were struggling as it is a source for their education and emancipation.

Koul has talked about a girl named Izmat in this book who she considers an important influence in her life. Izmat was the daughter of the peddler. She was a very intelligent and hardworking girl belonging to a middle-class family. Koul was very much impressed with Izmat's father who supported her daughter all her life. Kashmir is often considered to be male dominated area and women education is not much appreciated there. But Izmat's father was proud of her daughter and supported her in all aspects. He appreciated her more than her sons and this was the reason he

named her Izmat which means 'Honor'. "'I have a daughter who is smarter than my sons', he says to me one day. 'Izmat is her name and she is as old as you'" (p.12). Izmat knew that she was the dream of her father and she indeed brought honor to her family by excelling in education and everything she does. "Izmat lives up to her name and brings home honor every time examination results are announced or a debate is to be won" (p.105). Sudha Koul was very fascinated towards her and her father and through the story of Izmat, she is trying to encourage and inspire the fathers to support their daughters in all the fields of life especially education which is a stepping stone towards women emancipation.

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, it is explored that Kashmir is a patriarchal society and women education is mostly not encouraged in this part of the country. The emphasis is put on the women marriage rather than education and women also have mostly accepted it as their fate. Only a few women like Koul dared to dream of their lives and achieve their goals. Koul through this book discussed both the positive and negative aspects of women education in the Kashmir region. She discussed that the attitude and behaviour towards women education is changing but still it is at a very slow pace as the main concern of parents for girls is still the marriage and not education. Career is still not taken in a positive aspect and marriage is considered as the ultimate goal of a girl. It clearly points out that the behaviour of the society especially the family should be changed towards the women education and parents should encourage their daughters to study and dream in their lives. Koul has shown that if the attitude of the parents towards women education changes than girls can also do wonders like boys as she gives the example of Izmat whose father supported her and as a result, she excelled in her life. This book is definitely a motivational one which favours women education and Koul proves

to be an inspiration for young girls to achieve their aim in lives.

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