



Men, their rights, and nothing more; women, their rights, and nothing less.

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Educate, emancipate



I was recently at an educational institution that imparts education to girls of rural and semi-rural locations. The city continues to prefer sons over daughters. And if the current trend continues, the day is not far when the state faces an imbalance of a kind when all 'to-be-wives' girls will have to be non-Indians (a fact that has already come true in some places!).

The future

With this awareness in mind, I addressed the girls. Before me clearly stood society's future generation, which I am convinced can reverse the prevailing negative trend if it is determined to do so. I felt I could begin by spreading awareness, giving a reminder, and perhaps even offer a direction.

I wanted to explain the challenges that lay ahead of them, particularly in a society which has historically been controlled by men. Women may be breaking free here, but, by and large, all major decisions in society are taken by men. I thought I could educate them so that these girls take informed decisions in the future.

Advice, instructions

I tried to give them an exhaustive explanation as to what 'complete' education meant while alerting them on the following issues:

a) Not to cut their studies short for marriage, whatever the temptation may be?

Ageing parents or older brothers, for various reasons, prefer to see their daughters/sisters get married the moment they think they have found

the right groom. Then, they insist that she accepts their choice. Their college is only a stop gap option till a match is found. I alerted them that education can rarely be completed after marriage, despite assurances at times. There must be no illusions about it.

Shouldering responsibilities

b) Think for themselves: If at any stage of their life they are to fend for themselves, would they be able to provide enough for themselves and their parents, who may be dependent on them? For how long will daughters keep away or be kept away from turning into sound social security for their parents, at par with sons? Sooner or later, daughters will have to begin shouldering their responsibilities. Are they preparing? If not, then their education has not been complete!

c) Insist on avoiding ostentatious wastage. Or acceding to demands from prospective in laws. If your parents or brothers want to give something to you, let them place the assets for you as a fixed deposit. This could act as a life long security. You may earn or otherwise, but you will always have a security of your own to fall back on. You must not let it dilute for that is a personal insurance for you. Have the confidence to ensure this... if you do not, then again your education has been incomplete.

Deciding to be a mother

d) Become a mother only when you are physically and psychologically ready: Do not become

Education is key to solving many social evils. It is also compulsory if women in the country are to stand on their feet and shoulder social responsibilities.

one because others insist or to rescue a marriage. Remember, your life will change completely once you are a mother. You have a responsibility of another life to shoulder then! If you lack the confidence to decide for yourself, education has been incomplete.

e) Marriage is for respect, support and companionship — not subservience:

In no case should you tolerate violence or unacceptable behaviour for the sake of buying peace for the family and yourself. You must ensure that you enjoy full respect, acceptance, space, freedom of communication and responsible choices. If you reconcile with self esteem and allow enslavement then again your education has been incomplete.

Finally, grow up to be assets for your community, for your society and your country! Those of you who come from villages and are graduates consider taking up the responsibility of administering your own villages by becoming *panches* and *sarpanches*. Villages are in desperate need of educated grassroot leaders.

I told the teachers that in order to instill community leadership spirit, girls and students must be inspired to serve. The way to begin would be to initiate the process through summer projects. National Service Scheme (NSS) is inculcating this in colleges across the country.

Teachers can also guide them while learning about laws and practices themselves. Rural or city management requires a whole new generation of energy to break through fossilised and feudal controls. This generation is our hope.

Only if they are determined too...!

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