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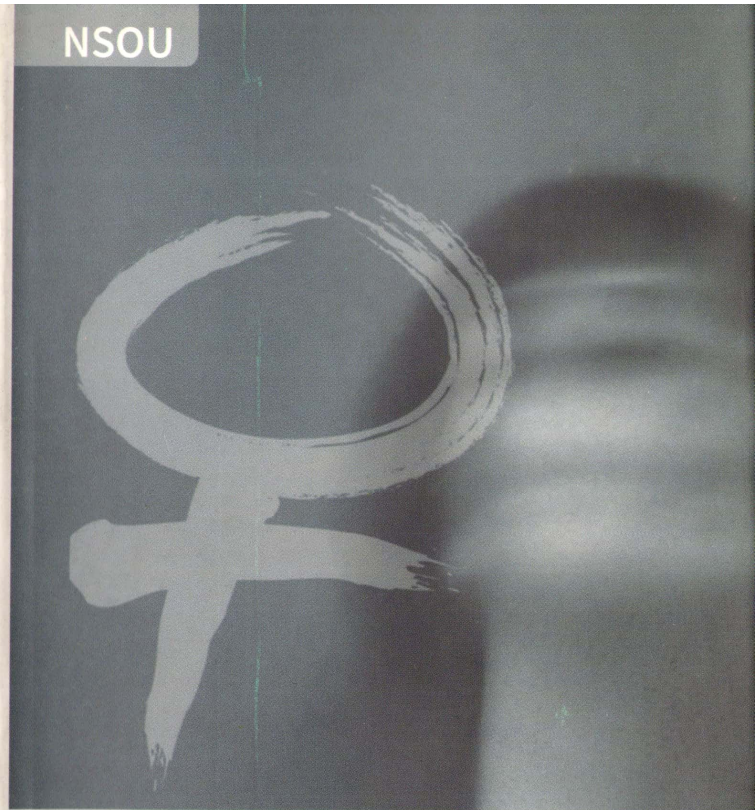
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Gender Sensitisation, Women Empowerment
 and Distance Education: History, Society and Culture
 Edited by
 De • Basu • Mukherjee



NSOU



Gender Sensitisation, Women Empowerment and Distance Education

History, Society and Culture

Edited by
Professor Kajal De • Dr Chandan Basu • Srideep Mukherjee

**Gender Sensitization,
Women Empowerment
and Distance Education:
History, Society and Culture**



Netaji Subhas Open University

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Gender Sensitization, Women Empowerment and Distance Education: History, Society and Culture

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MESSAGE

It gives me immense pleasure to learn that a new edition on Gender Sensitization, Women Empowerment and Distance Education etc. is going to be published by N.S.O. U. At present these are the burning issues in the society. I highly appreciate that the institution like N.S.O. U. is taking an extremely significant role in generating consciousness in the society regarding women empowerment sensitive issues and other

On behalf of the Women's Commission, West Bengal I wish every success of your esteemed organisation.

Sunanda Mukherjee

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Message from Editor-in-Chief

It is my pleasure to write the foreword to this prestigious publication titled *Gender Sensitisation, Women Empowerment and Distance Education: History, Society and Culture*, which is a follow through to the workshop on 'Gender Sensitisation and Women Empowerment: Issues and Challenges' that was organised by the Women Harassment Prevention Cell (WHPC) of Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) on 27th February, 2013. To my mind, a full fledged publication that follows an event is always proof of the seriousness with which the event has been viewed; so I take this occasion to thank all contributors and to congratulate the editorial team for their sustained efforts.

The intrinsic worth of an Open University lies not just in imparting curricular education to a chosen few, but in seamlessly disseminating relevant knowledge to all sections of society in ways that can positively impact lives, especially of those sections that for diverse reasons have not been properly integrated into the fold of conventional educational pedagogy. Educating the masses is all about empowering them to take on life. So as a major entity in the field of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), it becomes incumbent upon us to relate all our pursuits towards the uplift and betterment of disempowered and hence marginalised sections of all hues. There are many angles to such education with a mission; for the present, it is women empowerment and the issue of gender sensitisation that we are talking about.

A realistic consideration of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) figures in our country well into the sixth decade of independence still reveals that there is no scope for complacency in the field of higher education for women. Needless to say, the indices of educational enrolment are a major parameter in analysing developmental trends in any society. At a time when we dream of 'knowledge societies', such stilted figures are a great consternation; they call for pragmatic measures. It is a matter of hope that of late, people have been realising the power of the Open and Distance Learning mode in bringing about this change, owing mainly to the flexible learning conditions it offers, without compromising on

quality. My perusal of enrolment statistics over the years at NSOU reveals a very significant trend – women from minority communities, among others, have taken to the benefits of the ODL mode in a big way. This lends credence to our motto of 'Reaching the Unreached'.

In such a scenario, I sincerely feel this publication, which looks into myriad aspects of women empowerment, embellished as the volume is with vital inputs from a wide ranging variety of scholars, will be a very timely intervention that can be looked upon as a vital extension of our core academic pursuits. The individual sub-sections into which the editorial team has divided the book are very well thought out, each of the contributors has addressed the issues from indigenous points of view and the overall impression it gives me is that the volume will go a long way in making inroads into the gender issue(s) in their broadest perspective. I am at one with the editors in hoping that this will mark the beginnings of a long encore!

At NSOU, we believe that charity begins at home. The constitution of the WHPC with the primary objective of gender sensitisation in keeping with the UGC mandate, is only the first step to renewing our commitment to building an egalitarian work atmosphere at the University. I am aware of further initiatives of the Cell that are in the pipeline and I congratulate its chairperson and the members in particular and the entire University staff in general for their thoughtful activities in this regard. It is my sincere belief that sensitisation is not just about 'prevention' of gender based injustices of sorts, but also spreading awareness about gender equality. In times when several cases of gross injustices against women have been rocking the foundations of human values and the very belief in the venerated status of women that our Indian cultural ethos stand for, it is my earnest hope that the WHPC at NSOU will take up such outreach programmes that will give it a signature identity not just at the level of educational institutions but also in society at large. I take pride in the collective abilities of my colleagues and am confident that like all other branches of this University, this Cell will also live up to the commitments of open learning.

I sign off with wishing a thought provoking reading for every reader of this volume.



(Prof. S.S.Sarkar)
VC, NSOU

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Introduction

The growing global awareness in the struggle for the development of libertarian philosophy of women is the basic thrust behind the present volume. It is a collective effort of addressing the women question. The essays of the present volume have been carefully selected to explore not only the different aspects of the recovery of an independent gendered self from the control of patriarchy; they attempt to integrate the question of women liberation with the notion of gender sensitization and transformative role of education, especially the open and distance mode of teaching-learning process. It is an undeniable fact that the women liberation movement gained a new momentum since the decades of 1970s, with the publication of 'Towards Equality'. It became clear after three decades of the nation's independence that majority of women had to live with the status of second class citizens, and were faced with formidable challenges in expressing their creativity and capability independently. Consequently, social scientists and policy-makers have come to take increasing cognizance of the heterogeneity of issues related both to the liberty of women and their gaining coequal status as citizens of an independent nation. The rapid integration of the Indian economy with the global capitalist forces in the decades of 1990s made the situation more complex. It is still not clear whether the women became comparatively more capable than the past after the opening of the economy, or if theirs' has been an even more staggered growth story coupled with newer complexities. Indeed much more orchestrated and interdisciplinary research is required to assess the differential impact of the liberalization of the Indian economy since the 1990's.

One basic point that has been accepted both by social scientists and policy-makers in this context relates to the abject necessity of democratising education and giving it a truly wide outreach. It is our contention that the establishment of open and distance learning (ODL)

Mapping Gender Sensitization, Women Empowerment and Distance Education – A Critique From Within

Chandan Basu*

The Starting Point

The impetus for this Paper[#], I must clarify at the outset, came from my close association with the activities of the Women's Harassment Prevention Cell (WHPC) of Netaji Subhas Open University in general and the organisation of the Workshop on 'Gender Sensitisation and Women Empowerment: Issues and Challenges' in particular. In this Paper, I am wont to deliberate upon the bilateral relations between Gender issues and Education: how prevalent inequalities underlying the former have in a large way influenced the opening up of new channels of epistemological engagement in the latter; and also to interrogate how deep such engagement wily nilly cuts into the problematic dynamics of gender equations.

My specific focus in this entire endeavour will be on the role of Open and Distance Learning, which inherently has the

* Assistant Professor of History, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Netaji Subhas Open University

[#] I am extremely indebted to two of my colleagues at NSOU - Professor Kajal De, Director, School of Sciences and Chairperson, Women Harassment Prevention Cell (WHPC) and Sri Srideep Mukherjee, Assistance Professor of English- for their wholehearted support in writing this paper. I must mention that Sri Srideep Mukherjee has substantially revised the draft version of the present paper. His effort in fact gives an all-together new shape to it. Without their cooperation, I could not have written it. I have also received encouragement from my other colleagues at NSOU.

potential to reach the hitherto unreached. To begin with, I therefore posit the hypothesis of ODL as a marker of social change, the paradigm under consideration being the remission of and the addressing of Gender inequalities.

The Articulation of a Question

The rise of women's studies and gender questions within the syllabic mode of university curricula is generally perceived as being beyond the linear rationale of quantifiable academic practices related to teaching-learning, being examined and throwing hats in celebration of the conferment of degrees! It was, so to say, more of a societal need that warranted a broadening of the horizons of thought out of the conventional frontiers that the Social Sciences and the Humanities had broadly inscribed as its' parameters. The women's movements, which were mostly the outcome of dynamically evolving social matrices, created compelling conditions in these domains of learning, making it imperative to categorize Woman as subject or maker of historical change. The spurt in research activity on the woman question in all its hues and the upsurge of Gender studies globally, is organically related to the articulateness that women's movements for securing their basic human rights have come forth. In terms of India as a post-colonial nation that has emerged as a major force in the global economy, this holds great veracity. It is important to take cognizance of the assertion of scholars like Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid¹ who preemptively remind us that there is hardly any scope of complacency for an India, which is supposedly heading towards a more equal India. Rather, there are reasons for heeding the warning signals - the picture is indeed bleak and depressing as there is still a steady stream of patriarchy, and its offshoot - repressive attitudes towards women in post-colonial India. This unabated violence towards women that continues to take myriad forms, overt or covert, is an area of grave concern for scholars and activists alike. It goads them to start fresh thoughts about the overarching nature of patriarchy, the role of the state and civil society therein; and to reassess the historical evolution of women's