



Condition of Women Education in India- A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

“You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation.”

-Brigham Young

Women are at the heart of most societies. Regardless of whether they are working or not, mothers are very influential people in children's lives. Educating girls is one of the most important investments that any country can make in its own future. Education has a profound effect on girls' and women's ability to claim other rights and achieve status in society, such as economic independence and political representation. Education for women is the best way to improve the health, nutrition and economic status of a household that constitute a micro unit of a nation economy. In this context, it can be argued that lack of woman education can be an impediment to the country's economic development. In India, women achieve far less education that of men. As per the Census report 2001, the literacy rate of women is 54.16 per cent and that of men is 65.38 per cent. There has been a sincere effort to improve the education attainment of women by both government and voluntary organizations. The changes in the policies and infrastructural supports on primary, secondary and higher education reflect the initiatives of the Government of India towards women education. This paper examined the trends in women education, the investments on education and infrastructural supports in India. In sum, the study revealed that there have been concerted efforts to encourage girls to attend schools, which would lead to higher literacy in future. The study also revealed that there are several infrastructural barriers to women education in India. The study calls for focused approach towards increasing women centered educational infrastructure so as to reduce the women drop-out rates and to improve female literacy levels in India. In this paper an attempt has been made to critically examine the reality and also to look for solutions.

INTRODUCTION

Emmaline Pankhurst once said that freeing a woman is freeing a half of the human race because they represent a half of the population. On the other hand Nellie McClung advised the society never to underestimate the power of a woman. Education a woman can be likened to educating the whole family because of the role they play in families.

Women education in India plays a key role in the social and economic development of the country. Educating a woman uplifts her life as well as the quality of her life and her entire family. It is a fact that any educated woman will definitely support the education of her children especially a girl child and provide a better guidance to her children. An educated woman will easily imbibe an independent and progressive outlook in her children. More importantly, an educated woman

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in a society like India will assist in reducing the infant mortality rate and control the blossoming of the population. Education for women plays an important role in women empowerment.

India is the second largest country in the world so far as population is concerned. But so far as education is concerned it is a backward country. In past, women did not receive any education at all. They were not allowed to come out of the four walls of their houses. Domestic works were their only education.

During the British rule in India some noble social thinkers of the time paid their attention to the education of woman in our country. Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar was famous reformers who gave emphasis on the education of women. They put forth a very strong argument.

Man and woman are like the two sides of a coin. Without one, the other cannot exist. They help each other in every sphere. So education should be given to both man and woman. Further, women are the mothers of the future generation. If women are uneducated, the future generations will be uneducated. For this reason the Greek warrior Napoleon once said, "Give me a few educated mothers; I shall give you a heroic race." Because of the negative perception of women in India, this article examines reasons behind the neglecting of women education, importance of women education, importance of women education in India and what the Indian government is doing to reverse the situation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has following objectives

- To study the status of women education in India.
- To analyze the available schemes for women education in India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive in nature. In my study I have used secondary data for the purpose of this research paper. The main sources of secondary data are annual general reports, journals, magazines, newspapers and concerned websites

STATUS OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

The Indian government has expressed a strong commitment towards education for all; however, India still has one of the lowest female literacy rates in Asia. The Indian government's commitment to education is stated in its constitution with an article promising "free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14". The National Policy on Education, which was updated in 1992, and the 1992 Program of Action both reaffirmed the government's commitment to improving literacy levels, by providing special attention to girls and children from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Literacy Levels Improving Over Time although literacy levels are low, there has been progress in improving educational attainment for both sexes in India over the last several decades.

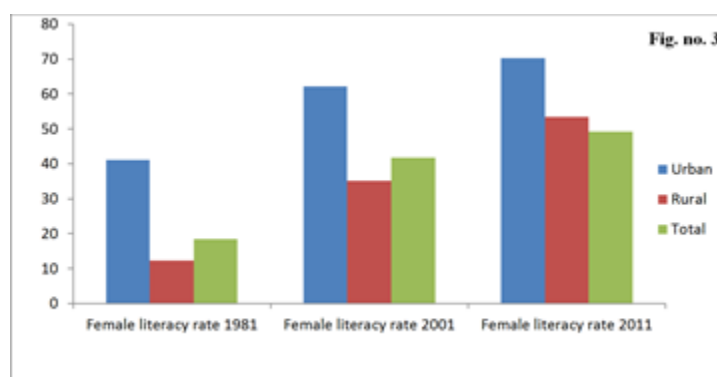


Table 1. Literacy rate in India

Year	Persons	Males	Females
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
1961	24.0	34.4	13.0
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	62.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Registrar of Census, provisional population table

In 1971, only 18 percent of women and 39 percent of men were literate. In 1991, 39 percent of women and 63 percent of men were literate. By In 2011, 65 percent of women and 82 percent of men were literate. Thus; there has been a large increase in the proportion of women who are literate in just 20 years. Despite the improvements in literacy, there continues to be a large gap between the literacy levels of men and of women. For India as whole, the gender gap in literacy has been decreasing since 1981; in some states, however the disparity in literacy between the sexes has been growing.



There are dramatic differences in literacy rates by place of residence, with rates in rural areas lagging behind rates in urban areas. Large Differences in Literacy among the States. The differences in literacy rates among the states are also extreme. Kerala has the highest female literacy rate, with over 91.98 percent of women literate in 2011. The state with the second highest female literacy is Mizoram, where nearly 89 percent of women are literate. On the other hand, there are several states that have literacy rates of less than 60 percent, including Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the two most populous states. These literacy levels are highly correlated with the health status of the population. Kerala has the lowest infant

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mortality rates and the highest life expectancies of all the states. Conversely, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have some of the lowest life expectancies found in India. As with India as a whole, many states have large rural-urban differences in female literacy.

Source: Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 2011

Gender Gaps in University Education Currently, a very small proportion of both men and women have a college education, just over 3 percent of men and 1 percent of women. Although a very small proportion of the Indian population attends college, women account for a third of the students at this level. This sex ratio is found for most fields of study except: 1) engineering and commerce, where women account for a much smaller proportion of the students; and 2) education, where women account for nearly half of all students.

Alternative Education The Non-formal Education (NFE) program was created by the Indian Government in 1979-80 to reach children that were not in the formal education system, particularly girls and working children. Classes are held at times that are convenient for the students, and the curriculum is adapted to their needs. The teacher is a local person who has been trained to run the NFE center and the classes are held either in the teacher's home or after hours in already-existing schools. In 1994, there were 255,000 centers serving 6.4 million children. Approximately 40 percent of the centers are exclusively for girls. While the NFE program has the potential to solve many of the problems with access to education, as with any type of education program, the quality varies from location to location.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

POVERTY- There are several reasons for the low levels of literacy in India, not the least of which is the high level of poverty. Over one-third of the population is estimated to be living below the poverty line. Although school attendance is free, the costs of books, uniforms, and transportation to school can be too much for

poor families. Poor families are also more likely to keep girls at home to care for younger siblings or to work in family enterprises. If a family has to choose between educating a son or a daughter because of financial restrictions, typically the son will be chosen.

NEGATIVE PARENTAL ATTITUDE-

Negative parental attitude toward educating daughters can also be a barrier to a girl's education. Many parents view educating sons as an investment because the sons will be responsible for caring for aging parents. On the other hand, parents may see the education of daughters a waste of money because daughters will eventually live with their husbands' families, and the parents will not benefit directly from their education. Also, daughters with higher levels of education will likely have higher dowry expenses as they will want a comparably educated husband. However, education sometimes lowers the dowry for a girl because it is viewed as an asset by the husband's family.

INADEQUATE SCHOOL FACILITIES-

Another barrier to education in India is the lack of adequate school facilities. Many states simply do not have enough classrooms to accommodate

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all of the school-age children. Furthermore, the classrooms that are available often lack basic necessities such as sanitary facilities or water. In Uttar Pradesh, a recent survey found that 54 percent of schools did not have a water supply and 80 percent did not have latrines. Lack of latrines can be particularly detrimental to girls' school attendance.

SHORTAGE OF FEMALE TEACHERS-

India Has a Shortage of Female Teachers Lack of female teachers is another potential barrier to girls' education. Girls are more likely to attend school and have higher academic achievement if they have female teachers. This is particularly true in highly gender-segregated societies such as India. Currently, women account for only 29 percent of teachers at the primary level. The proportion of teachers who are female is even lower at the university level, 22 percent of instructors. These proportions reflect the historic paucity of women with the educational qualifications to be teachers. However, the proportions are likely to change in the future as women currently account for nearly half of those being trained as teachers. Again there are differences among the states; the states with the highest literacy rates are also the states with the highest proportion of female teachers.

Gender Bias in Curriculum Still Exists As long ago as 1965, the Indian government agreed to rewrite textbooks so that men and women would not be portrayed in gender stereotyped roles. However, a study of Indian textbooks done in the 1980s found that men were the main characters in the majority of lessons. In these lessons, men held high-prestige occupations and were portrayed as strong, adventurous, and intelligent. In contrast, when women were included they

were depicted as weak and helpless, often as the victims of abuse and beatings. These depictions are strong barriers for improving women's position in society

EFFECTS OF WOMEN'S LOW LEVEL OF LITERACY

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

-Michelle Obama

This low level of literacy not only has a negative impact on women's lives but also on their families' lives and on their country's economic development. Numerous studies show that illiterate women have high levels of fertility and mortality, poor nutritional status, low earning potential, and little autonomy within the household. A woman's lack of education also has a negative impact on the health and well being of her children. For instance, a recent survey in India found that infant mortality was inversely related to mother's educational level (Figure 1). Additionally, the lack of an educated population can be an impediment to the country's economic development.

- Education will empower women to come forward and contribute towards the development and prosperity of the country.
- Economic empowerment and independence will only come through proper education and employment of women.
- Educated women are now looked upon with dignity and honor. They become a source of inspiration for millions of young girls who make them their role models.
- Educated women are more informed of their rights. It would eventually lead to decline in instances of violence and

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injustice against women such as dowry, forced- prostitution, child marriage etc.

- Educated women can choose a profession of her choice and can prove be highly successful in the field of life.

PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN

Before and after Independence, India has been taking active steps towards women's status and education. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, has been a path breaking step towards the growth of education, especially for females. According to this act, elementary education is a fundamental right for children between the ages of 6 and 14. The government has undertaken to provide this education free of cost and make it compulsory for those in that age group. This undertaking is more widely known as Sarva Shiksha abhiyan (SSA).

Since then, the SSA has come up with many schemes for inclusive as well as exclusive growth of Indian education as a whole, including schemes to help foster the growth of female education.

The major schemes are the following:

- **Mahila Samakhya Programme:** This programme was launched in 1988 as a result of the New Education Policy (1968). It was created for the empowerment of women from rural areas especially socially and economically marginalized groups. When the SSA was formed, it initially set up a committee to look into this programme, how it was working and recommend new changes that could be made.
- **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme(KGBV):** This scheme was

launched in July, 2004, to provide education to girls at primary level. It is primarily for the underprivileged and rural areas where literacy level for females is very low. The schools that were set up have 100% reservation: 75% for backward class and 25% for BPL (below Poverty line) females.

- **National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL):**

This programme was launched in July, 2003. It was an incentive to reach out to the girls who the SSA was not able to reach through other schemes. The SSA called out to the "hardest to reach girls". This scheme has covered 24 states in India. Under the NPEGEL, "model schools" have been set up to provide better opportunities to girls.

OBJECTIVES TO BE ACHIEVED THROUGH WOMEN'S EDUCATION

- Awareness of daughter's education is essential. It is said that "educated mothers educate family which results in educated population of a nation which builds strong nation"
- Encourage and ensure socio-economic participation of women in local and international forums.
- Encourage participation of women in income generating activities.
- Change the approach towards women based on sex discrimination.
- To induce the feeling of self-dependence amongst women.
- Child bearing at young ages should be prevented by preventing early marriages.
- Removal of gender inequality.
- Women should actively participate in social and political moves. 50 % seats should be reserved for women in all the governments.

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- Awareness needs to be generated regarding the necessity of educating girls so as to prepare them to contribute effectively to the socio-economic development of the nation.
- Eliminating all forms of discrimination in employment especially to eliminate wage differentials between men and women
- In order to change the attitudes towards female education and to raise the social consciousness of the country, a conscious strategic change is required in national media and communication effort
- Education is capable of increasing women's sense of analyzing which will support wider reforms in support of gender equality
- Increasing real representation of women in political bodies and governance institutions in order to move from being objects of legislation to initiators of change
- Instead of giving women a secondary position in society, they should be given equal status.
- To make women realize their own potential and to provide guidance to them for developing their potential.
- To create opportunities for them so that they can prove themselves in society and social institutions.
- To create certain roles for women in economic, political and social areas.

CONCLUSION

“Let us pick up our books and pencils. They are our most powerful weapon.”

- **Malala Yousafzai**

Why are the women “The other?” Are women universally the “second sex?” asked Simon De Beauvoir, a major exponent of the women's causes in the 1950s, decades later, we are still looking for answer. Women today are trying to understand their position in society to change it. The women play a strategic role in the society and in the economy. Taking an overview of all the above aspects, we come to know that the transformation is very much needed, accepting at the same time that its pace may be less than the desired pace. In sum, the study revealed that there have been concerted efforts to encourage girls to attend schools, which would lead to higher literacy in future. The study also revealed that there are several infrastructural barriers to women education in India. The study calls for focused approach towards increasing women centred educational infrastructure so as to reduce the women drop-out rates and to improve female literacy levels in India.

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