

Status of Women Education in India: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

Women education in India has a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country. When women who contribute almost half of the population are empowered it will strengthen the national economy. Education is considered as a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges; This paper discusses the impact of education on empowerment of women as well as the challenges and changes that we must have to deal with during the process. We call for a renewed emphasis on relevant, quality and holistic education to ensure the desired results.

1. Introduction

Women play an imperative role in making a nation progressive and guide it towards development. They are essential possessions of a lively humanity required for national improvement, Women education in India has a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country. When women who contribute almost half of the population are empowered it will strengthen the national economy. Education is considered as a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their lives. Increasing access to education notwithstanding, gender discrimination still persists in India and lot more needs to be done in the field of women's education in India. Women have so much unexplored potential which has never been tapped. As education is both an input and input of human development, educational equity will ensure enabling and entrepreneurial development. Today, the female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 census are 65.46% where the male literacy rate is over 80%. Even beyond literacy there is much that education can do for women's rights, dignity and security. Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom for development. Eileen Malone Beach sees education, health care, and income as a blessed trinity because they are so closely related.

2. Women in Higher Education in India Status

There's an African proverb which goes "If you educate a man you educate an individual but if you educate a woman you educate an entire nation" and this is the single most important thing that our country needs to understand at this moment. In 2015 -3.7 million eligible girls were out of school and in rural areas girls receive an average of fewer than four years of education. In a country where 21.9% of the population is below its official poverty limit, it does not come as a surprise that poverty is the major obstacle that limits education for girls.

But poverty is not the only thing that is disrupting the fundamental right of education amongst Indian girls there are many more contributing factors such as the distance of schools

from the corresponding villages, lack of sanitation facilities in schools, shortage of female teachers, gender bias in curriculum, absence of support from their respective families and this list is never ending. There's a common belief among rural households that girls should stop schooling after reaching puberty because more often than not they are teased by boys throughout the long walk from their home to school. India has the highest number of child brides in Asia and inevitably there is this dogma surrounding young girls that educating them is a waste of time and money as they are born only to be married off and manage the household. In rural households and especially amongst the poor, the girl child is a valuable resource for housework and in the fields, an additional hand that cannot be wasted away through an education with almost invisible gains and far too heavy a price that most rural and poor families cannot afford to pay.

As a result, a large gender gap emerges which was highlighted in the 2011 census that showed the male literacy rate to be 82.14% while for females it lags behind at 65.46%. Although getting the girl child to enroll in primary schools seems to be most problematic, once enrolled, girl children are more likely to continue their primary education. At the secondary level of education, girls tend to drop out more than boys, again posing a challenge to retain the girl child for secondary education. In our so-called 'modern India', estimates show that for every 100 girls in rural India only a single one reaches class 12 and almost 40% of girls leave school even before reaching the fifth standard and more than 15% children in schools can't read a simple story in Hindi, our national language.

The differences between the positions of men and women in the society will not lessen; leave alone disappear, as long as there are differences between the education levels of men and women. We must realize that going to school is one thing, on the other hand, the quality of education that one gets is another. Within government schools- overcrowded classrooms, absent teacher, unsanitary conditions are common complaints and can cause parents to decide that it is not worth their child going to school. A 2010 report conducted by the National Council for Teacher Education estimated that an additional 1.2 million teachers were needed to fulfil the RTE act requirements and merely 5 % of government schools complied with all the basic

standards and infrastructure set by the act. Moreover 40% of classrooms had more than 30 students and over 60% didn't have any electricity and over 21% of the teachers were not professionally trained. Although much work has been done to improve the state of education in India, we are still a long way off from attaining standards comparable even to other developing nations.

India is ranked 105 amongst 128 countries in its Education for All Development Index. There is much work to be done to enhance education in India; particular attention is warranted to women's access to education. An attempt has to be made to remove the social, psychological and structural barriers, for the participation of the majority of women in education. Even though the Government and various voluntary organisations are engaged in several attempts to sensitize the local population to the need for women education, unless parents of the girl child see value and merit in sending the girl child to school, they will resist doing so and instead prefer to use her help in household chores or agricultural activities. It is absolutely vital that we incorporate the belief among women that they must stand on their two feet and the only feasible way to achieve this is through education and its proper utilization. One way to make the families more interested is by making the school come to them rather than sending their girls to school far away from home by implementing more mobile schools across rural India.

But most importantly we need to encourage women entrepreneurs and emerging leaders such as one of our own Anjali whose incredible courage is an inspiration. Anjali is 16 but she stopped going to school because she faced sexual harassment almost every day as she walked to school and back. She was frightened but she never lost hope and now she is one of our most diligent members in our Sanjay camp and works tirelessly to organise community meetings in order to help others like her. She is back in school now and is an exemplary role model for all.

In India the female education has its roots in the British Regime. In 1854 the East India Company acknowledged women's education and employment. Initially this education was limited only to primary school level education and only the richer section of the society enjoyed this facility. Thus as it was confined only for a small section of people in society so the literacy rate for women increased from 0.2% in 1882 to 6% only in 1947. It is very unfortunate to say that for centuries higher education for women has been neglected. In this connection I may refer the suggestions given by the University Education Commission in 1947. The report of the said commission revealed that they were against female education. In their recommendation they wrote "women's present education is entirely irrelevant to the life they have to lead. It is not only a waste but often a definite disability.

But in spite of this, it is fact that in post-independence period the female literacy rate was 8.9%. Thus in 1958, the government of India appointed a national committee for the education of women. The committee submitted report in favour of women education. The government of India accepted most of the recommendations of the committee. Competitive higher

educational institutions women are gaining entry without availing gender quota. This is undoubtedly credit for them.

Since independence there had been a phenomenal growth in the number of women students' enrolment in higher education. On the eve of the independence the women enrolment was less than 10 per cent of the total enrolment but in the academic year 2010-11 women enrolment increased up to 41.5 per cent.

The reason behind this neglecting attitude was biological differences. But today, in the 21st century none can ignore the necessity and urgency of higher education for women. Because now-a-days there is no biological differences. That is why all over the world higher education for women has gained a wider role and responsibility. In the third world countries the need for higher education among women is more important as because colonialism has remained a great force here which hinders education.

There is a possibility of revolutionary change in India's higher education system and this is women participation. In some elite institutions we find that number of female students is more than male students and there is a possibility to increase this trend. It is true that number of males is outnumbered in comparison with female. One of the reasons for this is rampant sex selection and cultural factors. It is common feature that from the time of birth girls are discriminated in subtle and crude ways. But in spite of this, it is a great advancement that the presence of women in colleges and universities are growing. Not only this, it is also found that in some most

The constitutional directive to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years has remained unfulfilled till now. Educational experts admit that this failure is mainly due to the slow progress of education among girls. Literacy and educational levels are increasing for Indian women still there is gap between male and female literacy rate which can be seen in the following Table.

Literacy Rate in India

Year	Persons	Male	Female
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	65.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Census of India (2011)

In 2011 the percentage of educated persons increased to 74.04% of which male percentage was 82.14% and female percentage was 65.46% respectively. Literacy rate among rural women is only 58.8 percentages as per 2011 census. Female literacy was at a national average of 65.46 % whereas the male literacy was 82.14%. Within the Indian states, Kerala has shown

the highest literacy rates of 90.02% whereas Bihar averaged lower than 50% literacy, the lowest in India. India is the world's largest democracy where billions of people live and of course almost of half of these are women. So how does women education effect India's development? If girls are not educated, families suffer too. Educated mothers use their knowledge to improve the health of their children and other family members. Their knowledge about health risk protects their families against illness. Child mortality rate is much higher where mothers lack education than in families where mothers are educated. Girls education emerging as one of the top priorities of Indian society "Educating girls is not an option, it is a necessity". We all want to eliminate gender disparities in education.

3. The present status of women's education in India

The literacy rate of women is much lower compared to men. In the Indian society which is patriarchal, girls have fewer privileges and lower status than boys. Very few girls are admitted to schools and among them many are school drop outs. Many girls cannot attend school due to conservative cultural attitude. Gender inequality reinforces itself in education as it is factually proved that the rate of literacy for women is 65.46% against 82.14% of men according to 2011 Census. The Census report also shows that the rate of literacy of Indian women is even lower than the national average literacy rate that is 74.04%. Studies show too that the rate of unemployment in case of young females belonging to the age group of 15-24 is 11.5% whereas for young males of the same age group it is 9.8%. In India a survey was conducted which showed results supporting this fact that the rate of infant mortality is related inversely to female rate of literacy and level of education. The survey as well suggested correlation between economic growth and education.

4. Literacy and Education of women in India

Education is regarded as a key instrument for the empowerment of women. Education changes their worldview, improves their chances of employment, facilitates their participation in public life, and also influences their fertility. Several studies indicate that educated women have, on an average, fewer children and they take good care of their socialization.

Although considerable progress has been made with regard to literacy and education, the overall picture still remains unfavorable to women. At the beginning of the 20th century, the country as a whole was largely illiterate with just 5.3 per cent of the population counted as literate. Only 0.60 per cent women were then literate. In 1951, the first Census taken four years after independence, the picture was not much better.

Literacy Rate

- As per Census 2011, the literacy rate at all India level is 72.98% and the literacy rate for females and males are 64.63% and 80.9% respectively. During the last decade, the highest improvement in literacy rate was observed among rural females (24%).
- In 2011, among the State/ UTs, the male and female literacy rate is highest in Kerala (male: 96.1%, female

92.1%) and lowest in Bihar (male: 71.2%, female: 51.5%).

- The gap in literacy rates of males and females is low in the States of Meghalaya, Kerala and Mizoram (less than 5 percentage points) and high in the States of Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh (20 percentage points or above) with Rajasthan being the highest.

Adult Literacy Rate

At all India level, the adult (15 + years) literacy rate is 69.3% and that among males is 78.8% and females is 59.3%. Rural-Urban gap existed in Adult literacy rate for both females and males. The adult literacy rate for females in rural areas is 50.6% vis-a-vis 76.9% in urban areas whereas for males the same in rural areas is 74.1% vis-a-vis 88.3% in urban areas.

5. After Graduation, numbers of men increase, women decrease

The highest concentration of women is seen among undergraduates, at 12.4 million, followed by 1.9 million for post-graduation. Only 0.6 million girls are enrolled for diploma courses. As many as 14 million boys are enrolled in undergraduate courses (almost 17.5% higher than girls), followed by post-graduation (1.8 million, or 6.1% lower than girls) and graduate diploma courses (1.6 million, 61% higher than girls).

The trend of more young men than women is evident at almost every level after high school, except M.Phil, post graduate and certificate courses, where female enrolment is slightly higher than male enrolment. Post graduate courses have 49% males and 51% females, according to the data released by Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Women tend to focus on the humanities, with 38% of all women enrolled in Bachelor of Arts courses, followed by science and commerce; 28% of men enrol for BA courses. When it comes bachelors of education, women (2.8%) once again outnumber men (1.8%). Up to 8% of all young men sign up for bachelor's courses in engineering, nearly double of women (4.1%). There is a similar skew for male (9%) and female (4.5%) in bachelors in technology courses.

The enrolment in higher education has been estimated to be 33.3 million, of which 17.9 million were male and 15.4 million female in 2014-15, according to the All India Survey on Higher Education, released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in 2015. Young women accounted for 46% of the total enrolment in higher education, an improvement from 44.3% in 2012-13.

The gross enrolment ratio (GER, the number of college students in the 18-23 age group as a proportion of all young men and women in that age group) in higher education in India was 23.6 in 2014-15, up from 20.8 in 2012-13. This is lower than the global average of 27 and lower than other emerging economies, such as China (26) and Brazil (36), according to

data released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. While the GER for young men was 24.5, the GER for young women was 22.7 in 2014-15, an improvement from 17.9 in 2012-13.

Higher Education Enrolment Rates By Course

Course	Male	Female
Bachelor of Arts	28.0%	38.0%
Other*	20.2%	15.0%
Bachelor of Commerce	12.0%	11.0%
Bachelor of Science	10.0%	12.0%
Bachelor of Technology	9.0%	4.5%
Bachelor of Engineering	8.0%	4.1%
Master of Arts	3.5%	5.4%
Master of Business	2.3%	1.4%
Master of Science	1.6%	2.3%
Bachelor of Education	1.3%	2.8%
Bachelor of Law	0.9%	0.5%
Master of Computer	0.9%	0.8%
Master of Commerce	0.8%	1.2%
Master of Technology	0.6%	0.4%
Bachelor of Medicine	0.5%	0.5%
Master of Engineering	0.3%	0.2%

NOTE: Others* include all other courses.

Source: Census of India (2011)

6. History of Gender Inequality

If we highlight ancient India, an Indian woman was in the position of high esteem and was pronounced by the word of maata (mother) or Devi (goddess) in the Vedas and Upanishads. Same as Manu Smriti, woman was considered as a precious being and in the early Vedic age, girls were looked after with care. Then practice of polygamy deteriorated the position of woman and in the medieval period, the practices of purdha system, dowry system, and sati system came into being. But with the passage of time, the status of woman was lowered.

After the development of science and technology, female feticides is being practiced by large number of people. This has also led to a drop in the female ratio. The Indian census 2011 state wise shows that Kerala represent the highest sex ratio with 1084 females per 1000 males while Haryana represents the lowest sex ratio with just 877 women per 1000 males. Then the dowry became popular and it was the starting period of female infanticide practices in few areas.

In India, a sex-selection phenomenon has been in place since the 1980s, with men born during this period now at marriageable age. Then the urbanization since the 1990s where a lot of families and men have moved to cities to look for work. People are much wealthier but at the same time there is pressure to produce sons as an heir, so educated, wealthy families are now more likely to have sex selection. These entire factors are coming to play and creating this toxic mixture, which has turned violence against women into a bigger issue today.

The origin of the gender inequality has been always the male dominance. At least in India, a woman still needs the anchor of a husband and a family. Their dominating nature has

led women to walk with their head down. It was all practiced from the beginning and is followed till date. In the case of a woman's reservation in parliament, the opposing parties believe that women are born to do household tasks and manage children and family.

In many parts of India, women are viewed as an economic and financial liability despite contribution in several was to our society, economy and by their families. The crime against women is increasing day by day. Domestic Violence, Rape, Sexual harassment, molestation, eve teasing, forced prostitution, sexual-exploitation, at work places are a common affair today. So, it's an alarming issue for our country.

The major reasons for the gender inequality are identified as the need of a male heir for the family, huge dowry, continuous physical and financial support to girl child, poverty, domestic – violence, farming as major job for poor and the caste system.

Gender Inequality

Gender Inequality means disparity between men and women in different social, economic & political, cultural and legal aspects. This problem is simply known as gender biasness, which in simple term means the gender stratification or making difference a male or a female. According to the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report (2013), India ranks 132 out of 187 countries on the gender inequality index- lower than Pakistan (123). The report states that all countries in South Asia, with the exception of Afghanistan, were a better place for women than India, with Sri Lanka (75) topping them all. Types of Gender Inequality: - According to Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen (2001), there are seven types of gender inequalities at present in India. Here is a brief explanation of all the types of gender inequality.

- **Mortality Inequality:** In this, Inequality between women and men directly involves matters of life and death, and takes the brutal form of unusually high mortality rates for women and a consequent preponderance of men in the total population, as opposed to the preponderance of women found in societies with little or no gender bias in health care and nutrition.
- **Natality Inequality:** In this kind of inequality a preference is given to boys over girls. It is ardent in many of the male dominated societies and these manifests in the form of parents wanting their newborn to be a boy rather than a girl. With the availability of modern techniques to determine the gender of foetus, sex selective abortions have become common in India.
- **Employment Inequality:** In terms of employment as well as promotion at work women often face greater handicap than men. This is clearly exemplified as men getting priorities in getting better work opportunities and pay scale than their female counterparts.
- **Ownership Inequality:** In many societies ownership of property can also be very unequal. Since ages the

traditional property rights have favored men in the most parts of India. The absence of claims to property can not only reduce the voice of women, but also make it harder for women to enter and flourish in commercial, economic and even some social activities.

- **Special Opportunity Inequality:** Even when there is little difference in basic facilities including schooling, the opportunities of higher education may be far fewer for young women than young men. Indeed, gender biasness in higher education and professional training can be observed in India.
- **Basic-Facility Inequality:** Even when demographic characteristics do not show much or any anti-female bias, there are other ways in which women can have less than a square deal.
- **Household inequality:** There are often enough, basic inequalities in gender relations within the family or the household, which can take many different forms. Even in cases in which there are no overt signs of anti-female bias in, say, survival or son-preference or education, or even in promotion to higher executive positions, the family arrangements can be quite unequal in terms of sharing the burden of housework and child care.

7. Suggestions for Promoting Women Participation in Higher Education

- Introduce attractive scholarships for both financially poor students and meritorious students to encourage women students in higher education.
- Provide counselling for both family and person concerned at the secondary stage of education.
- Make skill-oriented higher education.
- Establish non-traditional curricular for women and extend state support for this.
- Improve transport facilities for women students.
- Education policy has to be taken to facilitate women participation in higher education.
- Establish more female educational institutions.
- Provide Bank loan facilities for women students.
- Establish higher educational institutions in rural and tribal areas.
- Check sexual harassment within and outside institutions.
- Increase women teachers in co-educational institutions of higher education.
- Increase women representations in decision making bodies of higher educational institutions.

- Establish equal opportunity commissions for higher educational institutions
- Introduce stipends, scholarships and fellowships for women studying in higher educational institutions.
- Government should formulate and implement policies for stopping drop out of girl students in secondary and lower classes.
- Establish post-secondary vocational training institutions for promoting the entry of women in higher education.
- In many cases early marriage leads to withdrawal of women from higher studies. This must be stopped.
- Increase hostel facilities for women students.
- Above all, attitudes of the male oriented society must be changed. This will undoubtedly help in increasing women participation in higher education.

8. Conclusion

To conclude the present scenario there is a positive relationship between education and woman empowerment. Another important aspect in this regard is that, in these societies the issue of women empowerment has been facing certain serious challenges, which are outcome of some certain evil norms and attitude such as child labour, child marriage, illiteracy, superstition, partial attitude of the parents, female feticides, etc. and in such a situation women empowerment is an urgent necessity. In order to promote women's empowerment, it is necessary to create an environment that will allow women to participate in educational programs and share the benefits. The educational and other policies for women empowerment should be implemented in reality for empowering women in the world.

Women play an imperative role in making a nation progressive and guide it towards development. They are essential possessions of a lively humanity required for national improvement, so if we have to see a bright future of women in our country, giving education to them must be a pre-occupation. Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power. The education of women is the most powerful tool to change the position of society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. To encourage the education of women at all levels and for dilution of gender bias in providing knowledge and education, established schools, colleges and universities even exclusively for women in the state. The education develops the idea of participation in government, panchayats, public matters etc for elimination of gender discrimination.

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