

“Education a key to Women Empowerment” Issues and Trends in Women Education in India

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Abstract

As per the government of India census report 2011, women constitutes nearly 50% of the total Indian population which is figured as 1.2 billion but men still continues to enjoy the supremacy over women. The country is growing at a very rapid pace and it is believed that India will be a developed nation by 2020, but without the empowerment of various marginalized sections of the society including women, this development may prove to be an ambiguous one. The life of women in urban India has considerably changed with the overall development of the country but the women in rural India are still being deprived of basic amenities of life like education, health care, nutrition, social security etc. The persistence of some social curses against women like gender discrimination, early marriage, women infanticide, domestic violence etc., and lack of infrastructural facilities like schools, colleges and health centers etc. in remote areas on the part of government adds more to the woes of women in rural India. Therefore, to change the status of women in our society it is necessary to break all the social barriers that come in between education and women of our nation. Education is considered as an effective tool for social change. The paper was aimed to bring about the role of education in the empowerment of women and highlight the various trends and issues in the education of women in India. The data for the study has been gathered through secondary sources and it was observed that women in India lag behind men at almost every level of education. Further, it was also found that the gap between male and female enrollment is more in higher education than elementary and secondary levels of education.

KEYWORDS: Education, Female literacy, Women empowerment

Introduction

Women all over the world face discrimination and exploitation in almost every sphere of her life. From womb to tomb in every field whether education, politics, economics, social, healthcare, nutrition or legal, women does not enjoy the same status as men usually enjoys. To discontinue the plight of women and to minimize the gap of gender inequality women needs to be empowered and in this rapidly changing competitive environment education of women may prove an effective tool to empowering women. The former Prime minister of India, Late PT Jawaharlal Nehru, once said;

“If you educate a man you educate an individual however if you educate a women you educate a whole family. Women empowerment means mother India empowered”.

Education is a milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. Education has been recognized as an essential agent of social change and development of any country. Education exposes people to new thoughts and ideas and provides necessary skills. Hence to think harmonious development without educating women is impossible. Moreover, educated women lead to better moms and housewives who in turn lead to better families and better societies.

Objectives of the Study

The study has been carried out with a view, to bring about the role of education in the empowerment and upliftment of women in India. Through this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the present status of women in India. However, the main focus of the study was to analyze the trend in women education at various levels of education in India. Further, the paper also brings in light the various schemes and programmes undertaken by the government of India to help the cause.

Present Status of Women in India

The socio-economic position and the overall condition of women in India have slowly and steadily changed during the last few decades. With the beginning of new era since from independence of country there has been continuous emphasis on a number of issues and women empowerment and education is one of them. Over these years, India has been able to increase the overall literacy rate to 74% in 2011 from 17% in 1951 and so far as the female literacy rate is concerned, it was 9% in 1951 and has been recorded as 64% in the government of India census report 2011. Also with the increased level of literacy among Indian women, they no longer consider themselves weaker or lesser than men in any respect. The modern Indian woman backs herself and possesses immense self confidence to face any challenge. The women today is competing with men in every field, whether it is education or sports, economics or politics, science and engineering or what so ever, women are at front with men and are doing exceptionally well. However, there is still a long way to go. The status of women in India may be assessed by going through the following reports:

- **Less equal status for Indian women report:** In 2012, women occupied only 8 out of the 74 ministerial positions in union council of ministers.
 - There were only two women judges out of 26 judges in the Supreme Court and there were only 54 women judges out of 634 judges in various high courts.
 - Women still constitutes a mere 10% of the legislators in the parliament and state assemblies. Karnataka and west Bengal are the only states where women have exceeded the reserved 33% with 42% and 39% respectively. These examples show that given a chance women can excel in any field. They just need the necessary support and encouragement.
- **A report on “Men and Women” in India 2012**, brought out by the ministry of statistics and programme implementation says that 46% of women (15-19) years are not involved in any kind of decision making. Around 40% women have no access to money.

- **According to state of worlds children report of UNICEF 2009-** avoidable complications during child-birth results in the death of 78000 women in India every year.
 - One million children born in India are dying every year even before they became 28-days old
 - The maternal mortality rate of India stands at 301 per 100000 births – highest in U.P-517 and lowest in Kerala at 110
 - Despite an increase in institutional deliveries 60% of pregnant women still deliver their babies at home.
- According to the report by **Save the Children an international NGO** - 1/5th of the world's new born deaths occur in India.
 - India also has the highest under-five mortality with over 2-milliom children dying before their fifth birthday. About 90% of these deaths are preventable.
 - 1/3rd of all malnourished children live in India- and 46% of children below 3 years of age are underweight.
- **The backward class's commission** set up by the government of India in 1953 classified women in India as a backward group requiring special attention. The educational, economical, political and social backwardness of women makes them the largest group hindering the process of social change. Moreover, this backward group bears the major responsibility of bringing up future generation.
- **According to a 1998 report by the US department of commerce**, the chief barriers to female education in India are inadequate school facilities such as sanitary facility, shortage of female teachers and gender bias in the curriculum.

The differences between the positions of men and women in the society will not lessen or disappear as long as there are differences between the education levels of men and women. Inadequate education or no education is the important factor contributing to the backwardness of our masses, especially women. The low literacy among women brings down the national literacy. This gap which exists between the literacy rates of the two sexes also exists between the enrollment t of girls and boys at all levels of education. Right from the primary school to the university we find number of girl students is considerable lower than boys.

After the independence India is free to take new and innovative steps for women empowerment. The Indian constitution guarantees gender equality, no discrimination, equality of opportunity, equal pay for equal work for all Indian women and it allows the states to make special provisions in favour of women and children. Further, it renounces practices insulting to the dignity of women, made provisions for securing just and humanitarian conditions of work and for maternity relief. Moreover to safeguard women from the abuse of various ill practices like trafficking of young girls and women, female infanticide, sexual harassment at workplace, domestic violence etc, the government of India from time to time passes many acts and laws like The immoral traffic (prevention) Act, 1956, Dowry prohibition (maintenance of lists of presents to the bride and bridegroom) rules were framed in 1985, sex determination test were banned and made a punishable act. In 2001 the government of India made landmark initiative for empowerment of women by declaring the year 2001 as the year of women empowerment and the National Policy for Education was passed. Rajyasabha passed women's

Reservation Bill ensuring 33% reservation to women in Parliament and state legislative bodies on 9th March 2010.

Women and Education

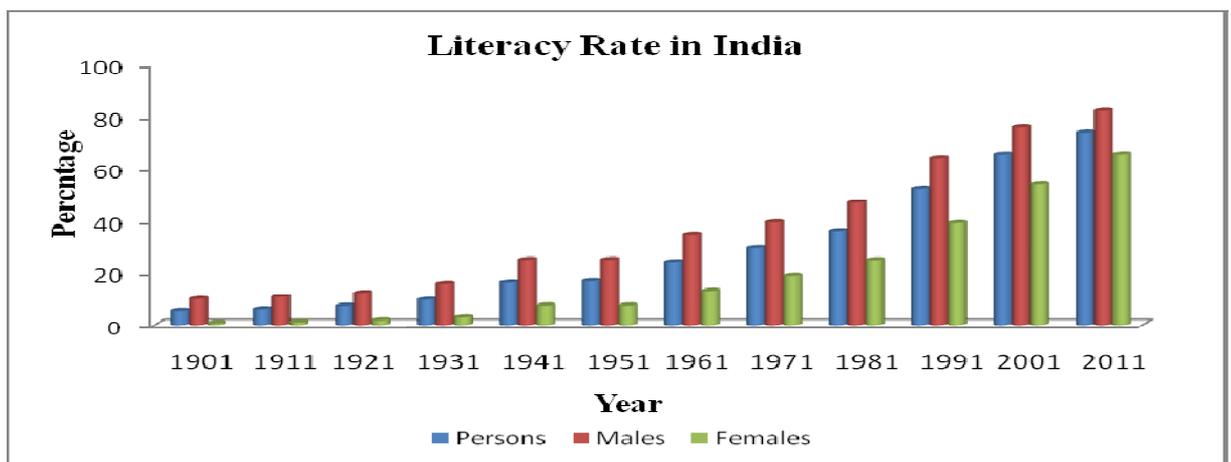
Women have progressed considerably in terms of education and schooling over the past few decades. Just 20 years ago, a smaller percentage of women than men had post secondary education. Today the situation is completely different. Education indicators show that women generally do better than men. This gap in favor of women is even noticeable at a young age, since girls often get better marks than boys in elementary and secondary school education. The following table gives the literacy rates among men and women in India since 1901.

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	65.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: *Census of India 2011*.

The data given in the above table can also be shown in the form of chart like the one given below;



The literacy rate of women has increased from 0.7% in 1900-01 to 7.3% in 1951 and has reached to 65% in 2010-11. This implies that during the British rule women education suffered to a large extent. However, after the Independence, India has done well to secure maximum literacy rate among women so far. The following table shows the level-wise enrollment in school and higher education in India during 2010-11 and also gives the percentage of girls to the total at every level of education:

Table-2: Level - Wise Enrollment in School Education and Higher Education. (000's)

Level/Category	Total	Boys	Girls	%age of Girls
Pre-Primary level	6236	3317	2919	46.80
Primary (I-V)	135316	70468	64848	47.92
Upper-primary (VI-VIII)	62056	32807	29248	47.13
Elementary Level (I-VIII)	197373	103276	94097	47.67
Secondary (IX-X)	31779	17452	14326	45.08
Senior Secondary (XI-XII)	194160	108470	85682	44.12
Class I-XII (Total)	248568	131577	116991	47.06
Certificate	115	53	62	53.90
Diploma	3579	2275	1004	28.05
Under-Graduate	19837	11173	8664	43.67
Post-Graduate	2704	1480	1224	45.26
P.G Diploma	121	76	45	37.19
Integrated	203	109	94	46.30
M. Phil	18	9	9	50.00
Ph. D	72	44	28	38.88
Hr. Education (Total)	26651	15521	11130	41.76

Source: *Educational statistics at a glance- GOI, MHRD Bureau of Planning, Monitoring and Statistics, New Delhi, 2012.*

From the above given table it can be seen that except Certificate and M. Phil levels of education girls lag behind boys at every level of education. The difference between male and female enrollment is high at Diploma level. Moreover, girls are also behind boys at two important levels of higher education i.e., Post-Graduate and Ph. D.

Higher Education

It has always been a constant endeavor of the department of higher education to frame different scheme and projects to ensure larger participation and enrolment of women. Therefore reducing the gender gap in higher education is a focus area. There has been a phenomenal growth in enrollment of women students in higher education in the country. The share of girl's enrolment which was less than 10% of the total enrollment on the eve of independence has been increased to 41.50% in the beginning of the academic year 2010-11. The following table gives the data relating to enrolment and number of girls colleges in Higher Education in the country.

Table-3 Student's enrollment (000's)

Year	Total(Boys+ Girls)	Girls Only	%age of Girls	No. of Girls colleges
2000-01	8399443	3306410	39.4	1578
2001-02	8964680	3571656	39.8	1756
2002-03	9516773	3811691	40.1	1824
2003-04	10011645	4026187	40.2	1871
2004-05	10542262	4259072	40.4	1977
2005-06	11137627	4510738	40.5	2071
2006-07	11887095	4820216	40.6	2208
2007-08	12727082	5167192	40.6	2360
2008-09	13641808	5649102	41.4	2565
2009-10	14624990	6080373	41.6	3612
2010-11	16974883	7048688	41.5	3982

Source: *University Grants Commission, New Delhi.*

The given table clearly depicts the increasing trend in the women enrollment in different colleges of the country. It could be seen from the table that the girl enrollment has increased from 33 lakh's out of 83.99 lakh students in higher education in 2000-2001 (which works out to be 39.4%) to 70 lakh's in 2010-11, which works out to 41.5% of the total enrolment. Similarly the number of women colleges also show increasing trend.

Gross Enrollment Ratio

Gross enrollment ratio (GER) is the total student enrollment in a given level of education, regardless of age expressed as a percentage of the corresponding eligible official age group population in a given school year.

Table-4 Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in percentages (%)

Level	2001-02			2010-11		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Primary (I-V)	104.9	85.9	95.7	115.4	116.7	116.0
Upper-Primary(VI-VIII)	66.7	49.9	58.6	87.7	83.1	85.5
Elementary (I-VIII)	90.3	72.4	81.6	104.9	103.7	104.3
Secondary (IX-X)	NA	NA	NA	69.0	60.8	65.0
Class (I-X)	NA	NA	NA	97.6	94.8	96.2
Senior Secondary(XI-XII)	NA	NA	NA	42.2	36.1	39.3
Class (I-XII)	NA	NA	NA	88.0	84.8	86.5
Hr. Education (18-23)	9.3	6.7	8.1	20.9	16.5	18.8

Source: *Education statistics, MHRD, GOI, New Delhi, 2011.*

With the application of RTI Act from 2009 and implementation of scheme like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan like (SSA) and Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDM) the level of enrollment at primary stage has effectively increased during the previous decade. Moreover the gross enrollment ratio of girls at primary stage is slightly high than the gross enrollment ratio of

boys in 2010-11, this was not even at par in 2001-02. The GER of girls at elementary stage has also improved from mere 72.4% in 2001-02 to 103.7% in 2010-11. Similarly the GER of girls at higher education stage shows an increase of almost 150% to 16.5% in 2010-11 from mere 6.7% in 2001-02.

Level- Wise Drop-Out Ratio.

Drop out ratio is the percentage of students who drop from a given level or grade or cycle of education in a given school year.

Table- 5 Drop out Ratio, (in percentages)

Level	2001-02			2010-11		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Primary (I-V)	39.7	41.9	40.7	28.7	25.1	27.0
Elementary(I-VIII)	50.3	57.7	53.7	40.3	41.0	40.6
Secondary(I-X)	66.4	71.5	68.6	50.4	47.9	49.3

Source: Educational statistics, MHRD, GOI, New Delhi, 2011.

From the above table it could be worked out that the total drop-out ratio at all levels has slipped down to some extent in 2010-11 vis-a-vis 2001-02 but still 47.9% girls drop-out at secondary stage. Although the drop-out ratio of girls is less as compared to boys at secondary stage but still there is noticeable number of girls who drop out after elementary education stage. This problem demands more attention from the government if India has to achieve its Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal education.

Government Initiatives to support women education and empowerment in India

Women in India belongs to marginalized group and the reason for that is illiteracy, poverty, superstitious and religious beliefs of people, socio-cultural backgrounds of women and to some extent the women themselves by assuming that they are not equal to men. Due to the lack of education, knowledge and understanding women have suffered all over the world in every respect. As per Richard H. Robbins, (Global problems and the cultures of Capitalism), Women work more than men but are paid less, women do two-thirds of the world's work, receives 10% of the world's income and own 1% of the means of production". According to Inter Press Service, "On a global scale, women cultivate more than half of all the food that is grown. In sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, they produce up to 80% of basic food stuffs. In Asia, they account for around 50% of food production." Yet women often get little recognition for that, in fact, many go unpaid. Above all women faces gender discrimination throughout a lifetime. UNICEF notes that "where there is a clear economic or cultural preference for sons, the misuse of (pregnancy diagnostic tools) can facilitate female foeticide. Moreover the principle focus of middle years of childhood and adolescence is ensuring access to, and completion of, quality primary and secondary education, with a few exceptions, it is mostly girls who suffer from educational disadvantage."

Education modifies behavior and change the overall outlook of people. Education is a milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. So we cannot neglect the

importance of education in reference to women empowerment. In view of this, the government has initiated many projects to improve the literacy rate of women in India. The following are some of these government programmes, schemes, and facilities which are in progress;

1. National policy on Education (NPE)

NPE is a policy formulated by the government of India in 1968 to promote education amongst India's people. It emphasizes three aspects in relation to elementary education;-

- Universal access and enrollment.
- Universal retention of children up to 14 years of age, and
- A substantial improvement in the quality of education to enable all children to achieve.

2. 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 in rural areas especially socially and economically marginalized groups.

3. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBVS)

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 female is very low. The schools that were setup have 100% reservation; 75% for backward class and 25% for BPL females.

4. 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 Serva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was not able to reach through other schemes. This scheme has covered 24 states in India. Under the NPEGEL, "model schools" have been set up to provide better opportunities to girls.

5. Sakshar Bharat Mission for Female Literacy

This was launched in 2002 to prevent the alarming drop in female education. Its aim was to reduce the illiteracy rate of women by half. In spite of new in the arena, it has managed to do its share.

6. Indian shiksha Karmi Project

This project is all about sharing power through education. This project tries to preach the ignorant Indian population that women too can rise to be on the top after acquiring education. This plan is co-supported by the Swedish government and it is vogue in Rajasthan.

7. Training for female Teachers

Training women to educate the nation is also another forte of Indian shiksha Karmi Project. This plan educates them about all the technical know-how that is required to become a teacher.

8. Scholarship for Her

Several scholarships have been introduced by the central as well as the state government; the single girl child scholarship for women and scholarship for women scientists are few of them. Scholarship like Maulana Azad national scholarship has been launched to assist meritorious girl students belonging to minority community.

Government in India has always been positive in its efforts with regard to women education and empowerment and the above mentioned schemes and programs is the direct result of that positiveness. Moreover, education to women means empowerment and empowerment leads to development. The following table shows the number of girls enrolled per hundred boys, at elementary and secondary stage of education since 1950:

Table-6 Number of girls Enrollment per Hundred boys enrolled by stages of education

Year	Primary (I-V)	Upper-Primary(VI-VIII)	Secondary (XI-X)
1950-51	39	18	16
1960-61	48	32	23
1970-71	60	41	35
1980-81	63	49	44
1990-91	71	58	50
2000-01	78	69	63
2005-06	87	81	73
2006-07	88	82	73
2007-08	91	84	77
2009-10(P)	92	87	81
2010-11(P)	92	89	82

Source: Ministry of Human resource Development, GOI, New Delhi, 2011.

The above table gives the number of girl's enrolled per hundred boys at different stages of education since 1950-51. At no stage of education the number of girls enrolled has equated the number of boys enrolled. However the figures given show the increasing trend of girls enrolled per 100 boys at all level of education, which is a good sign and off-course the direct result of aforesaid schemes and programmes.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Women empowerment simply means to give strength and confidence to women so as to make them self-reliable, compatible and competent enough to combat with the changing requirements of the society. Women empowerment is a global issue. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at NAROIBI in 1985. Gender discrimination, oppression and continued inequality of women in all sectors - education, economics, political, legal, healthcare, nutrition etc lead to the evolution of the concept of women empowerment. The perception of the world about women has now changed. To think about the development of any nation without the upliftment of its women is impossible. All the marginalized sectors including the women need to be empowered. Women themselves need to swim against the system which requires strength. Such strength comes from the process of empowerment and empowerment will come through education.

Education is simply the modification of behaviors. It acts as an effective tool to bring about a social change. Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for women, because the educational achievements of women can have significant impact on the family. The educated woman leads to educated mothers and families which in turn

lead to educated societies and nations. Women education will ensure civilized society and developed nation. Swami Vivek Ananda said that there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless conditions of women are improved.

In India we classify population as rural and urban so far as the social status is concerned. There exists a big difference in behavior of people belonging to rural and urban India. While urban population enjoys almost all the amenities of developed cities, the rural India continues to suffer in getting basic necessities of life like food, drinking water, education, healthcare facilities etc. Moreover, the women and children have been the worst bearers of this situation. To change this scenario of division between rural and urban India, education looks to be an effective tool. However, with the implementation of schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Mid Day Meals (MDM), Raashtria Madhimik Shiksha Abhiyan (RAMSA) and many related schemes, the level of education has improved to a large extent but still millions of kids are out of schools in India. The government of India has been continuously monitoring the status of education especially in women and is taking necessary steps to improve it. Furthermore the following suggestions may also help to improve literacy rates among women in India.

- ❖ The Right to Education Act (2009) applies only to the children belonging to the age group of 6-14. While the drop-out rates at secondary education stage is still high, the reason being high incidence of poverty. The ambit of Right to Education Act needs to be widened.
- ❖ Mid Day Meal Scheme has been a success so far as improvement in elementary education is concerned but there ought to exist more accountability for people at the helm of affairs so as to stop accidents like what happen in Bihar few months ago.
- ❖ There are still hundreds of single teachered schools in India where pupil to teacher ratio is high. More teachers need to be employed to help the cause.
- ❖ The government must ensure elimination of all forms of gender discrimination and thus enable women to enjoy fundamental freedom at par with men in all spheres.
- ❖ Government should build up an enabling environment to provide women easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services. Moreover, people at the helm of affairs must also ensure training, employment and income generation activities for the social and economic development of women as was proposed in 10th five year plan also.
- ❖ The government is required to invest more in improving women education as their still exist a gender gap of 16% between literacy rates of women and men in India as per the 2011 census report.

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