

THE CHANGING SCENARIO OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstracts

Gender discrimination is one of the issues concerned in development process, practically developing countries facing the problems of gender inequality which leads to growing emancipation of women. Elimination of gender inequality is one of the millennium development goals India being a 7th largest country in the world as per population, has the highest women illiteracy. The barriers in the traditional society made the women to be deprived and suppress. The paper highlights the issues of the women education in India and the problems faced by women.

Introduction

Education is one of the indicators of development, while calculating human development index the level of education and knowledge has been taken as one of the indices. Most of the developing countries have lower literacy rate as a result the human development index ranking of developing countries is very low. Apart from this the literacy rate of men and women is widely varied in developing countries. Generally the literacy rate of women is lower than men literacy rate which is very common in developing countries, though women constitute equal percentage of population profile they are deprived of various rights and facilities which ultimately lead to gender inequality. To arrest this inequality education of women plays a significant role.

The people around the world especially women literacy is the bridge from devastating poverty to the renewal hope. The literacy rate has risen substantially over the past 50 years, in the last 10 years it had become stagnant, having around 30-40 per cent. There are 538 million illiterate women in the developing countries and a total of 640 million illiterate women in the world.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines an illiterate person as someone who cannot with understanding both read and write short. According to the **Beijing Platform in September 1995**,¹ a person who only can read but not write, or can write but not read is considered to be illiterate. A person who can only write figures, his or her name or a memorized ritual phrase is also not considered literate.

Female education is a catch-all term for a complex of issues and debates surrounding education (primary education, secondary education, tertiary education, and health education in particular) for females. It includes areas of gender equality and access to education, and its connection to the alleviation of poverty. Also are not involved the issues of single-sex education and religious education, It is still highly relevant contemporary discussion of female education as a global consideration.

¹ B.P. Beijing Platform is Fourth World Conference of Women, UNESCO.

Education in India

Women's education in India has been one of the major issues of concern of the Government of India as well as the society at large. It is because of the fact that today the educated women play a very significant role in overall development and progress of the country. Women hold a prominent position in the Indian society as well as all over the world. However, since the prehistoric times women were denied opportunities and had to suffer for the hegemonic masculine ideology. This unjustifiable oppression had resulted into a movement that fought to achieve the equal status of women all over the world. Women Education in India is the consequence of such progress and this led to the tremendous improvement of women's condition throughout the world. Nevertheless eradication of female illiteracy is considered as a major concern today.

In the recent era, the Indian society has established a number of institutions for the educational development of women and girls. These educational institutions aim for immense help and are concerned with the development of women. In the modern society, women in India have come a long way. Indian women is at par with men in all kinds of tasks like reaching the moon, conquering Mount Everest, and participating in all fields. All this is possible just because of education and the profound impact it has had on women.

Women's Education in Ancient India

In ancient India, women and girls received less education than men. This was due to the set of social norms. Interestingly, in the Vedic period² women had access to education, but gradually they had lost this right. Women education in ancient India prevailed during the early Vedic period. In addition to that Indian scriptures Rig Veda and Upanishads mention about several women sages and seers. Women enjoyed equivalent position and rights in the early Vedic era. However, after 500 BC, the position of women started to decline. The Islamic invasion played a vital role in restricting freedom and rights of the women. A radical change attended and there was a terrific constraint for women education in India.

Women's Education in Colonial India

The position of the women education in India revived with the invasion of the British in the country and with the advent of Bhakti movement. The colonial period also introduced the institutional form of imparting learning. Women education in Colonial India witnessed an essential expansion. Various movements were launched to make women of the country literate. Furthermore, this progress journeyed through the years and influenced the modern Indian education system.

Women's Education in Modern India

Women Education in Modern India is traced back to the years after the independence of India. In the present times, the government of India takes measures to provide education to all women of the country. Women literacy rate seemingly rose in the modern days. Women education in India became a compulsory concern and female literacy has gone higher than male literacy. And this has actually helped women to achieve top positions at work place and also at society.

² Vedic Period, The Oldest Scripture of Hindu

At present, the Constitution of India guarantees free primary school education for both boys and girls up to age 14.³ Education in India plays a vital role in the overall development of the country. This proves that educated women promote education in their family. Further, learned women can also help in the lessening of child death rate and expansion of population. In the modern era, women education is the replica of a Vedic model for instructive inspiration. The government of India has recently launched the Saakshar Bharat Mission for Female Literacy,⁴ which aims to reduce female illiteracy.

Modern Indian Women

The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. If on one hand she is at the peak of ladder of success, on the other hand she is mutely suffering the violence afflicted on her by her own family members. As compared with past women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way. Their path is full of roadblocks. The women have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battlefield of life, fully armored with their talent. They had proven themselves. But in India they are yet to get their dues. The sex ratio of India shows that the Indian society is still prejudiced against female. There are 933 females per thousand males in India according to the census of 2001, which is much below the world average of 990 females. There are many problems which women in India have to go through daily. These problems have become the part and parcel of life of Indian women and some of them have accepted them as their fate.

Girl Education

The girls of medieval India and especially Hindu society were not given formal education. They were given education related to household chores. But a famous Indian philosopher 'Vatsyayana' wrote that women were supposed to be perfect in sixty four arts which included cooking, spinning, grinding, knowledge of medicine, recitation and many more.

Though these evils were present in medieval Indian society but they were mainly confined to Hindu society. As compared to Hindu society other societies such as Buddhism, Jainism and Christians were a bit lenient.

Women in those societies enjoyed far more freedom. They had easy access to education and were more liberal in their approach. According to these religions gender was not the issue in attaining salvation. Any person whether a man or a woman is entitled to get the grace of god. During the time of king Ashoka, women took part in religious preaching. According to Hiuen Tsang, the famous traveler of that time, Rajyashri, the sister of Harshavardhana was a distinguished scholar of her time. Another such example is the daughter of king Ashoka, Sanghmitra. She along with her brother Mahendra went to Sri Lanka to preach Buddhism.

³ Article 41 Indian Constitution Right to Education to all Citizens – Article 21A Free and Compulsory Education for Children upto 14 years.

⁴ S.B.M. – Saakshar Bharat Mission for Female Literacy. Prime Minister launched on International Day 08-09-2009, New Delhi, India.

Obstacles for the women education in India

Right from the beginning the India never allowed women to peruse education except few royal families. The women of common society deprived of education.

In India women education never got its due share of attention. From the medieval India women were debarred from the educational field. According to medieval perception women need just household education and this perception of medieval India still persists in villages of India even today. Girls are supposed to fulfill domestic duties and education becomes secondary for them whereas it is considered to be important for boys. Although scenario in urban areas has changed a lot and women are opting for higher education but majority of Indian population residing in villages still live in medieval times. The people of villages consider girls to be curse and they do not want to waste money and time on them as they think that women should be wedded off as soon as possible.

The main reason for not sending girls to school is the poor economic condition. Another reason is far off location of schools. In Indian society virginity and purity is given utmost importance during marriage and people are afraid to send their girl child to far off schools where male teacher teach them along with boys. The lack of education is the root cause for many other problems. An uneducated mother cannot look after her children properly and she is not aware of the deadly diseases and their cure, which leads to the poor health of the children. An uneducated person does not know about hygiene this lack of knowledge of hygiene may lead to poor health of the whole family.

The malnutrition results in poor health of women. The women of India are prejudiced from the birth itself. They are not breastfed for long. In the want of a son the women wants to get pregnant as soon as possible which decreases the caring period to the girl child whereas the male members get adequate care and nutrition. Women are not given the right to free movement that means that they cannot go anywhere on their own if they want and they have to take the permission of male member of family or have to take them along. This results in decrease in women's visit to doctor and she could not pay attention to her health as a result.

Generally in India, women are the one who eat last and least in the whole family. So they eat whatever is left after men folk are satiated. As a result most of the times their food intake does not contain the nutritional value required in maintaining the healthy body. In villages, sometimes women do not get to eat the whole meal due to poverty. The UNICEF report of 1996 clearly states that the women of South Asia are not given proper care, which results in higher level of malnutrition among the women of South Asia than anywhere else in the world. This nutritional deficiency has two major consequences for women first they become anemic and second they never achieve their full growth, which leads to an unending cycle of undergrowth as malnourished women cannot give birth to a healthy baby.

The mortality rate in India is among highest in the world. As females are not given proper attention, which results in the malnutrition and then they are married at an early age which leads to pregnancies at younger age when the body is not ready to bear the burden of a child. All this results in complications, which may lead to gynecological problems, which may become serious with time and may ultimately, lead to death. However in the

last two decades with implementation pre and post natal services the health of maternal mother is increasing.

In India violence against women is a common evil. Not just in remote parts but in cities also women bear the brunt. They are subjected to physical and mental violence. They are the one who work most but are not given their due. The women are not safe anywhere neither at home nor at workplace. Every hour a woman is raped in India and every 93 minutes a woman is burnt to death due to dowry problem. There are many laws such as The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, The Hindu Succession Act of 1956, The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, The Hindu Women Right to Property Act of 1937, The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, to protect women and punishment is severe but the conviction rate of crime against women is very low in India. The various women empowerment measures have lead to converging the gender disparity and strengthen the voice of women in India. Indian women work more than men of India but their work is hardly recognized as they mainly do unskilled work. Their household chores is never counted as a work, if a woman is working in a field to help her husband it will also be not counted as a work. A study conducted by Mies in 1986 states that in Andhra Pradesh a woman works around 15 hours a day during the agricultural season whereas a male on an average works for around 7-8 hours.

In India a large percentage of women do not have power. They cannot take decisions independently not even related to their own life. They have to take permission of male members for each and every issue. They don't have any say in important household matters and not in matter of their own marriage. It was a norm in medieval India. Girls were married off at the age of 8-10. They were not allowed access to education and were treated as the material being. The plight of women can be imagined by one of the Shloka of Tulsidas where he writes [r1] "Dhol, gawar, shudra, pashu, nari, ye sab tadan ke adhikari". Meaning that animals, illiterates, lower castes and women should be subjected to beating. Thus women were compared with animals and were married off at an early age. The child marriage along with it brought some more problems such as increased birth rate, poor health of women due to repeated child bearing and high mortality rate of women and children.

The divorce rate in India is not so high compared to western countries but it does not mean that marriages are more successful here. The reason behind low level of divorce rate is that it is looked down by the society. It is regarded as the sign of failure of marriage, especially of women. She is treated as if she has committed some crime by divorcing her husband.

Feminine Literacy Rate Comparison	India	World
Female Literacy (%)	58%	77.6%
Female School Enrollment	47	62

Source: <http://www.mapsofindia.com/culture/indian-women.html>

Though there are problems in the lives of Indian women but they are always ready to fight all the odds and enjoy their life to the full they have their own talent, hobbies, and they socialize according to Indian customs. Apart from this various steps taken by the Governments has led to the increase in the rate of women literacy. Literacy campaigns in

most districts have taken up health and hygiene issues as an integral component of adult education programs. Literacy campaigns have helped to spread knowledge about health care and nutrition, thereby enabling mothers to keep their family in better health and to care better for their children. Literacy campaigns have also disseminated information for creating awareness about problems of early marriage, spacing and small family norms.

STATE-WISE PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE LITERACY IN THE COUNTRY AS PER 2001 CENSUS

Percentage of Literates to Population age 7 Years and above by Zones and States, 1991 and 2001									
Zone/State and Union Territory	1991			2001			Gains in literacy rates (LR 2001-LR 1991)		
	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F
INDIA	52.2	64.1	39.3	65.2	75.6	54.0	13.0	11.5	14.7
NORTH ZONE	51.2	63.8	36.9	66.5	77.6	54.1	15.3	13.8	17.2
Haryana	55.9	96.1	40.5	68.6	79.3	56.3	12.7	10.2	15.8
Himachal Pradesh	63.9	75.4	52.1	77.1	86.0	68.1	13.2	10.6	16.0
Jammu & Kashmir	51.5	63.3	38.8	65.4	75.9	54.2	13.9	12.6	15.4
Punjab	58.5	65.7	50.4	70.0	75.6	63.6	11.5	9.9	13.2
Rajasthan	38.6	55.0	20.4	61.0	76.5	44.3	22.4	21.5	23.9
Chandigarh (UT)	77.8	82.0	72.3	81.8	85.7	76.7	4.0	3.7	4.4
Delhi (UT)	75.3	82.0	67.0	81.8	87.4	75.0	6.5	5.4	8.0
EAST ZONE	47.6	60.1	33.9	59.0	70.1	47.0	11.4	10.0	13.1
Bihar	37.5	51.4	22.0	47.5	60.3	33.6	10.0	8.9	11.6
Sikkim	56.9	65.7	46.8	69.7	76.7	61.5	12.8	11.0	14.7
West Bengal	57.7	67.8	46.6	69.2	77.6	60.2	11.5	9.8	13.6
Orissa	49.1	63.1	34.7	63.6	76.0	51.0	14.5	12.9	16.3
A & N Islands (UT)	73.0	79.0	65.5	81.2	86.1	75.3	8.2	7.1	9.8
NORTH EAST	54.5	63.2	44.1	65.8	73.0	58.0	11.3	9.8	13.9
Assam	52.9	61.9	43.0	64.3	71.9	56.0	11.4	10.0	13.0
Arunachal Pradesh*	41.6	51.5	29.7	54.7	64.1	44.2	13.1	12.6	14.5
Manipur	59.9	71.6	47.6	68.9	77.9	59.7	9.0	6.3	12.1
Meghalaya	49.1	53.1	44.9	63.3	66.1	60.4	14.2	13.0	15.5
Mizoram	82.3	85.6	78.6	88.5	90.7	86.1	6.2	5.1	7.5
Nagaland	61.7	67.6	54.8	67.1	71.8	61.9	5.4	4.2	7.1
Tripura	60.4	70.6	49.7	73.7	81.5	65.4	13.3	10.9	15.7
CENTRAL ZONE	42.4	56.6	26.5	60.1	72.8	46.2	17.7	16.2	19.7
Madhya Pradesh	44.7	58.5	29.4	64.1	76.8	50.3	19.4	18.3	20.9
Uttar Pradesh	40.7	54.8	24.4	57.4	70.2	43.0	16.7	15.4	18.6
WEST ZONE	63.6	75.4	51.0	73.5	82.9	63.4	9.9	7.5	12.4
Gujarat	61.3	73.1	48.6	70.0	80.5	58.6	8.7	7.4	10.0
Maharashtra	64.9	76.6	52.3	77.3	86.3	67.5	12.4	9.7	15.2
D & N Haveli (UT)	40.7	53.6	27.0	60.0	73.3	43.0	19.3	19.7	16.0
Daman & Diu (UT)	71.2	82.7	59.4	81.1	88.4	70.4	9.9	5.7	11.0
SOUTHERN ZONE	59.3	69.1	49.2	70.4	78.7	62.0	11.1	9.6	12.8
Andhra Pradesh	44.1	55.1	32.7	61.1	70.9	51.2	17.0	15.8	18.5
Goa	75.5	83.6	67.1	82.3	88.9	75.5	6.8	5.3	8.4
Karnataka	56.0	67.3	44.3	67.0	76.3	57.5	11.0	9.0	13.2
Kerala	89.8	93.6	86.2	90.9	94.2	87.9	1.1	0.6	1.7
Tamil Nadu	62.7	73.8	51.3	73.5	82.3	64.6	10.8	8.5	13.3
Lakshadweep (UT)	81.8	90.2	72.9	87.5	93.2	81.6	5.7	3.0	8.7
Pondicherry (UT)	74.7	83.7	65.6	81.5	88.9	74.1	6.8	5.2	8.5

Source: Census of India - 2001 Provisional Figures

As per the table the literacy rate in India in 1991 was 52.2% of which the women literacy rate was only 39.3% of the six zones in India.

Central zone comprises of Mandya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh had just 26.5% of women literacy rate. In the year 2001 the average literacy rate in India was 65.2% and the women literacy rate was just 54.1% which indicates the increase 14.7% literacy rate among women. However there has been improvement in women literacy rate in central zone with the increase of 19.7% between 1991- 2001 where as in 2011 the literacy rate of India has been increased to 70.04% and the women literacy rate has been increased to 65.46% which almost double in the two decades

Literacy Rate in Indian State: Census 2011

Rank	State	Literacy rate (2011 Census)	Literacy rate- Male (2011 Census)	Literacy rate- Female (2011 Census)
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	86.3%	90.1%	81.8%
2	Andhra Pradesh	67.7%	75.6%	59.7%
3	Arunachal Pradesh	67.0%	73.7%	59.6%
4	Assam	73.2%	78.8%	67.3%
5	Bihar	63.8%	73.5%	53.3%
6	Chandigarh	86.4%	90.5%	81.4%
7	Chattisgarh	71.0%	81.5%	60.6%
8	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	77.7%	86.5%	65.9%
9	Daman & Diu	87.1%	91.5%	79.6%
10	Delhi	86.3%	91.0%	80.9%
11	Goa	87.4%	92.8%	81.8%
12	Gujarat	79.3%	87.2%	70.7%
13	Haryana	76.6%	85.4%	66.8%
14	Himachal Pradesh	83.8%	90.8%	76.6%
15	Jammu and Kashmir	68.7%	78.3%	58.0%
16	Jharkhand	67.6%	78.5%	56.2%
17	Karnataka	75.6%	82.8%	68.1%
18	Kerala	93.9%	96.0%	92.0%
19	Lakshadweep	92.3%	96.1%	88.2%
20	Madhya Pradesh	70.6%	80.5%	60.0%
21	Maharashtra	82.9%	89.8%	75.5%
22	Manipur	79.8%	86.5%	73.2%
23	Meghalaya	75.5%	77.2%	73.8%
24	Mizoram	91.6%	93.7%	89.4%
25	Nagaland	80.1%	83.3%	76.7%
26	Orissa	73.5%	82.4%	64.4%
27	Puducherry	86.5%	92.1%	81.2%
28	Punjab	76.7%	81.5%	71.3%
29	Rajasthan	67.1%	80.5%	52.7%
30	Sikkim	82.2%	87.3%	76.4%
31	Tamil Nadu	80.3%	86.8%	73.9%
32	Tripura	87.8%	92.2%	83.1%
33	Uttar Pradesh	69.7%	79.2%	59.3%
34	Uttarakhand	79.6%	88.3%	70.7%
35	West Bengal	77.1%	82.7%	71.2%
	Whole INDIA	74.04%	82.14%	65.46%

Sources: <http://www.mapsofindia.com/census2011/literacy-rate.html>

The literacy increase - overall and for women – follows a decade in which successive governments have focused on school education like never before since Independence. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan launched in 2001, along with the universalisation across government schools of the mid-day meal scheme, are credited by most experts as critical interventions that have helped India achieve near universal enrolment in primary education. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act – popularly referred to as the right to education (RTE) Act, is implemented. For the first time provides a legal right to students between 6 and 14 to demand schooling. “But it must remember that the RTE Act talks about every child receiving schooling from his enrolment through till the stage he completes primary schooling,” said educationist Vinod Raina, speaking in the context of the RTE act. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh – traditional laggards in education – have shown maximum improvement both in improving overall literacy and in their female literacy rate. Bihar’s overall literacy has gone up from 47% in 2001 to 63.8% in 2011, while UP’s overall literacy has risen from 42.2% to 59.3% over the same period. The female literacy rate of Bihar has jumped a startling 20% – from 33.1% in 2001 to 53.3% today. UP has seen a rise from 42.2% to 59.3% in female literacy. Kerala remains at the top of the pile in overall, male and female literacy. And the least literacy rate found in Uttar Pradesh.

Conclusion

Despite the low literacy rate in India there are same inquiries in Indian women achievement. It is found that, the women have made mile stones in the process of development. India has world’s largest number of women professionals and it is one of the leading countries where more number of women working is found. It is also true that India has more number of female doctors, surgeons, scientists. IT Professionals and teaching community then the United States. India also has the pride of having women prime minister and president apart from producing many chief ministers in the states thus women literacy has been optimally lifted on the nation building. However in many states due to varied socio-cultural barriers the women literacy rate is low which need to be encouraged by dismantling such barriers.

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