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Women's Education: A study of Rural India

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Educate one man, you educate one person, but educate a woman and you educate a whole civilization. Mahatma Gandhi

Abstract

This study highlights the literacy of the women and their education standard. It focuses on analysis the existing literature and done the various emerging statistics work on women education. This study concerns the overview to specify the India and its states and Female education status which contribute work to women education. Apart from this, this study focuses on the rural Indian women literacy status and their educational areas. Bases on some relevant and emerging issues, some barriers have become very important to justify and some recommendations and suggestions would give better result to analysis this study. This study also examines the rural and urban literacy trends and to comprise the relevant issues.

Women constitute almost half of the population of the world. Education is one and only channel for women to gives better way to improve their livelihood, health, malnutrition economic status of a household that represent a single unit of a national economy. In this paper, it can be said that the lack of woman education may be an obstacle to the country's economic development.

Key words: Women education, literacy rate, economic development

Introduction

That child who ages between 06 and 14 is a fundamental right to perceive the basic education of all citizens under the Eighty-sixth Amendment to the Constitution of India. Yet, the state of education of women in India is far from 'free' or as totalizing and encompassing as the right appears to guarantee. Although the government, through its various initiatives such as the **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan** (aimed at providing primary education especially to girl children from disadvantaged rural areas), attempts to improve the education of women, the barrier of educating women is not always monetary and within the purview of the state. Literacy rate at 71% in Rural India, 86% in Urban India: National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO)

Literacy rate in rural areas were pegged at 71 per cent last year, as compared to 86 per cent in urban Indian areas, if we just focus on 07 years and above, male literacy rate was found much better and higher than the female literacy rate, according to national sample Survey Organization (NSSO) survey. If we discuss about the age group of seven year and above, the male literacy rate was recorded at 83 per cent the female literacy rate of 67 per cent. Comparably, as per the study in the rural areas, approx 4.5 per cent of men and 2.2 per cent of women completed their education level of graduation and above, but in urban areas 17 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women completed only their basic level of education.

The details which has mentioned in 'Social Consumption Education' during the National Sample Survey (NSS) at seventy-first Round, between January 2014 to June 2014, done by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

As per the entire country population the samples which have withdraw from 36,479 households in rural areas is 29,447 in urban areas from 4,577 villages and 3,720 urban slabs. According to its findings, literacy rate above age group of seven years in the country was 75 per cent. In rural areas, it was 71 per cent compared to 86 per cent in urban areas. Adult literacy (age 15 years and above) rate in India was around 71 per cent. For adults also, literacy rate in rural areas were lower than in urban areas. In rural areas, adult literacy rate was Sixty-four per cent compared to Eighty-Four per cent in urban areas.

Nearly 86 per cent of rural households and 96 per cent of urban households reported upper primary schools within a distance of 2 kms from the house while nearly 60 per cent of rural households and 91 per cent of urban households.

Status of Literacy

Literacy illustrates a measure of educational status of any community. Literacy rate is evaluated as the percentage of target population educated to the respective total population. Though education is very important for both males and females, these exists a wide gap between both the genders in India. (Indian Government Report: 2011)

Literacy and education are important measures in a society and plays a very leading role in human Development that impacts overall social-economic development. Also, higher literacy rates improve development indicators consistently. Census obtains information on literacy for every individual, as this is acknowledged as one of the most important social characteristics (Velkoff,1998)

The divergences in the literacy rates between genders indicate the differences in the growth rate of literacy levels between males and females over a period of time. In our analysis, the divergence in the literacy rates between the genders showed a declining trend from 29.80 to 65.50 between 1981 and 2011 (Data Source census 2011), indicating the reduction in the gap between literacy rates between male and females over time. This can be attributed to the faster growth of female literacy rate compared to that of males during the period of reference (Thorat,2006)

In the Censuses prior to 1991, the children below five years of age were considered as illiterates. Because the ability to read and write with understanding is not found in the kinds below 5 years achieved until one has time to develop these skills, therefore in 1991 Census, it was assume that all the children in the age group of 0-6 years be considered as illiterate by definition and population aged seven years and above only be categorized as either 'literate' or 'illiterate'. Since then, the same criterion has been retained in subsequent censuses of 2001 and 2011.

In the Censuses up to the year 1981, it was customary to work-out literacy rate taking into account the total population (Crude literacy rate). Since, literacy rate is more meaningful if the sub-population in the age group of zero to six years is prohibited from the total population, it was decided in 1991 Census to use the term literacy rate for the population relating to seven years and above (Effective literacy rate). The same concept has continued in censuses of 2001 and 2011.

TRENDS OF FEMALE LITERACY RATES IN INDIA

India and its States

As per the provisional figures of Census 2011, in India 77,84,54,120 persons have been counted literates. Among all the literates population, 33,42,50,358 are females, whereas 44,42,03,762 are males.

The literacy rate of India in 2011 is 74.0 per cent. Literacy rate among females is 65.5 per cent Whereas the literacy rate among males is 82.1 per cent.

Top five and bottom five states/UT's by Literacy Rate: 2011

Rank	Persons		Males		Females	
	Name of State/UT's	Literacy Rate	Name of State/UT's	Literacy Rate	Name of State/UT's	Literacy Rate
Top Five States/UT's						
	INDIA	74.0	INDIA	82.1	INDIA	65.5
1	Kerala	93.9	Kerala	96.1	Kerala	92.0
2	Lakshadweep	92.3	Lakshadweep	96.0	Lakshadweep	89.4
3	Mizoram	91.6	Mizoram	93.7	Mizoram	88.2
4	Tripura	87.8	Tripura	92.8	Tripura	83.1
5	Goa	87.4	Goa	92.2	Goa	81.8
Bottom Five States/UT's						
	INDIA	74.0	INDIA	82.1	INDIA	65.5
1	Bihar	63.8	Bihar	73.4	Bihar	52.7
2	Arunachal Pradesh	67.0	Arunachal Pradesh	73.7	Arunachal Pradesh	53.3
3	Rajasthan	67.1	Rajasthan	75.6	Rajasthan	56.2
4	Jharkhand	67.6	Jharkhand	77.2	Jharkhand	58.0
5	Andhra Pradesh	67.7	Andhra Pradesh	78.3	Andhra Pradesh	59.3

(Source:- Literacy States Census 2011)

The Literacy rate of all Indian population is as follows:-

Year	Literacy Rate			Gap in Literacy
	Persons	Male	Female	
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8	26.6
1991	52.2	64.1	39.3	24.8
2001	64.8	75.3	53.7	21.6
2011	74.0	82.1	65.5	16.6

(Source: - Literacy States Census 2011)

Note:-Literacy rate for 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011 Census relate to the population aged seven years and above.

The 1981 Literacy rates exclude Assam where Census could not be conducted. The 1991 Census Literacy rates exclude Jammu & Kashmir where Census could not be conducted due to disturbed conditions.

Female Education in India

The issues concerning women's access to education are not uniform across different stages, professions or geographical spread. A brief look at the educational landscape with respect to women's education is being provided here. Female literacy amongst the 4 large northern states – Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, - is lower than the national average (65.5%). The discrepancy between male and female literacy rates is also higher for states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The differences in literacy rate for women also vary across urban and rural areas. The access level of education for women (as measured by the Gross Enrolment Ratio in rural areas is almost three times less than that of urban areas. There is also considerable inter-state variation in education access, as can be inferred from the Census data. While the GER at the aggregate level is about 13%, higher the national average in states such as Kerala, Goa, Nagaland and Manipur and substantially lower in states such as Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Literacy Rate in Percentage (%)

	2001	2011	Difference
Overall			
India	64.8	74.0	+9.2
Rural	58.7	68.9	+10.2
Urban	79.9	85.0	+5.1

Source:-Census of India (2011)

The upgradation in literacy rate in rural area is 2 times better that in urban areas, The rural urban literacy gap which was 21.2 percentage points in 2001, has come down to 16.1 percentage points in 2011.

Males	2001	2011	Difference
India	75.3	82.8	+6.8
Rural	70.7	78.6	+7.9
Urban	86.3	89.7	+3.4
Females	2001	2011	Difference
India	53.7	65.5	+11.8
Rural	46.1	58.8	+12.7
Urban	72.9	79.9	+7.0

Source:-Census of India (2011)

Improvement in female literacy is more than males in both rural and urban areas. The gender differ in literacy has become low from 24.6 in 2001 to 19.8 in 2011 in rural areas and from 13.4 in 2001 to 9.8 in 2011 in urban areas.

The number of Literates in India is 778.5 million

- Rural: 493.0 million
- Urban: 285.4 million
- There has been an increase of 217.8 million literates since last Census in 2001.
- Out of this, 131.1 million were in Rural areas and 86.6 million in Urban areas.

(Source: Census 2011 – Provisional Population Totals – India)

Residence	Sex	2001	2011	Change
Rural	Persons	58.74	68.91	+10.17
	Males	70.70	78.57	+7.87
	Females	46.13	58.75	+12.62
Urban	Persons	79.92	84.98	+5.06
	Males	86.27	89.67	+3.4
	Females	72.86	79.92	+7.06

(Source: Census 2011 – Provisional Population Totals – India)

There has been a uniform increase in both female & Male Literacy Rate in Urban areas, the steady increase in the Female Literacy Rate has reduced the gender gap significantly.

Though there has been a steady upward trend in both the rural and urban female literacy rates, it is observed that the rural female literacy is increasing much faster than that of urban. This fact is clearly evident from the index numbers, revealing that the disparity between rural and urban literacy rates is narrowing down in recent years.

There have been a number of social and economic factors determining the women’s education. Most of the factors are highly interdependent in nature and hence it is difficult to single out the effects of individual factors on women’s education. Yet, the present study made a modest effort to explore the influence of certain variables of interest on the educational attainment of women.

Barriers to Women's Education

Why do the statistics reflecting women's literacy, their enrolment in primary, secondary and higher education or their dropout rates read so poorly? What do they tell us about women's access to education? What systemic errors have aided in this and what can be done to remedy the situation? This section culminated some of the important barricades to women's education, drawing on previous studies where possible.

There’s some contradictory analysis to women's education are sociological, rooted in gender stereotyping and gender segregation, and others are driven by economic concerns and constraints. A consequence of gender profiling and stereotyping is that women incline to participate more in programmes that relate to their indigenous role. In institutions of higher learning, women are more disposed to enroll in courses traditionally considered more suitable for them such as arts and education, but less in courses related to science and technology. Likewise enrolment in vocational and technical fields has been male-dominated and providers of informal education and training tend to conduct programmes that relate to women's domestic role rather than their fruitful role. Families are also not accept to educate girls as compare to boys, and far more likely to drop out of their school, either to help out at home or for other socially persuade normative deliberations.

Parental reluctance to educate girls is a huge factor inhibiting their access to education. There exist various factors that fuel the choices parents in Indian society make with regard to refusing or limiting the education of the girl child. The way a society views its women determines the roles it delegates to them and the choices made for them or those they are allowed to make. When women are seen primarily as child bearers and rearers, then education is sometimes viewed as an unnecessary and

extravagant indulgence. A mindset that views education for girls as unlikely to reap any returns ascribes to the view that investing in the education of the male child is like an investment as the son is likely to be responsible for caring for aging parents, and women with largely a reproductive role in society have little need for education and any gains from it are anyway likely to accrue to the homes they go to after marriage. Economically poorer sections are often not in a position to send their children to school and are likely to invest in the male child than in the female child if they can for the above-mentioned reasons. The middle class too often does not consider education for women an important means for preparing them as individuals in their own right. Amongst the upper middle class, where education of women may not be encumbered by economic constraints, discriminatory stances, such as women's education having lower economic utility or at best being a secondary wage earner, do exist and are pervasive in the attitudes and norms prevalent in society.

In many cases, women themselves are responsible for holding back their participation in education, working on preconceived notions that they will be helpless to overcome the situation with the unavoidable of balancing work and home, assuming that mobility in employment can cause strain at the home front, or to conform to socially induced images of femininity. Studies conducted by the National Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974), covering a sample of 200 undertakings in the private and public sectors, reveal amongst others that women were restricted to a few restricted types of occupation because of conquer social attitudes regarding their aptitude, lack of enthusiasm of employers, contradiction of training opportunities in higher skills and their ignorance regarding the opportunities open to them. Women and girls receive far less education than men, due to prevailing social norms and sometimes fears of violence. Pointing to the inhibitions parents feel, especially amongst the poor or backward sections of society, Sonalde Desai, in her book on Gender Inequalities and Demographic Behaviour, argues that 'another disincentive for sending daughters to school is a concern for the protection of their virginity. When schools are located at a distance, when teachers are male, and when girls are expected to study along with boys, parents are often unwilling to expose their daughters to the potential assault on their virginity'. Added to these biases and concerns it is the social reality of the girl child as a vital resource in agriculture and household chores. Census reports and findings across various studies on the employment of women reveal that women workers in agriculture and related activities constitute about 88% (of the total female workforce) in rural areas and about 18% in urban areas (UNESCO report, 1991).. Thus, a large proportion of the girls missing from schools are kept at home to tend to the responsibilities of housework and serve as free labour in the farms and fields.

The different stages or levels of education along with the key attendant issues regarding accomplishment of women's education for each of the levels. If we consider different stages or avenues for education, then education can be categorized in terms of primary and secondary school education, vocational and finishing school education, arts and sciences and professional-level education.

Although obtained the girl child to enroll in primary schools appears to be the most troublesome situation, 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. Therefore, the focus primarily is on drawing girl children to enroll in schools at the primary level and ensuring their continuation for secondary education. Participation of women in vocational training and skills building, particularly in non-stereotyped ones, and in professional-level courses also requires particular attention as the statistics suggest. Thus, addressing the issue of women's access to education may require a customized approach, with issues at different levels of education varying by region or state. For example, the very less illiterate's states may require greater focus on primary and secondary level education for women given their poor literacy

levels. It may also be kept in mind that the impact of interventions for improving access to education may also vary according to the level. For example, attempts to ensure participation of the girl child in formal schooling may have a higher impact at the primary level, since there is a high probability that once enrolled girls will continue with their education. Similarly, impact on society with increased participation of women in vocational and professional-level education may also be high, since this would mean greater participation in the labor pool and improved economic and psychological fallouts of the same. Thus, considering issues pertaining to women's access to education may require a unique lens focusing on the differing levels, issues and varying degree of impact. A more customized approach to address the problems related to women's access to education is required, as it will also be discussed in the recommendations put forth later in the paper.

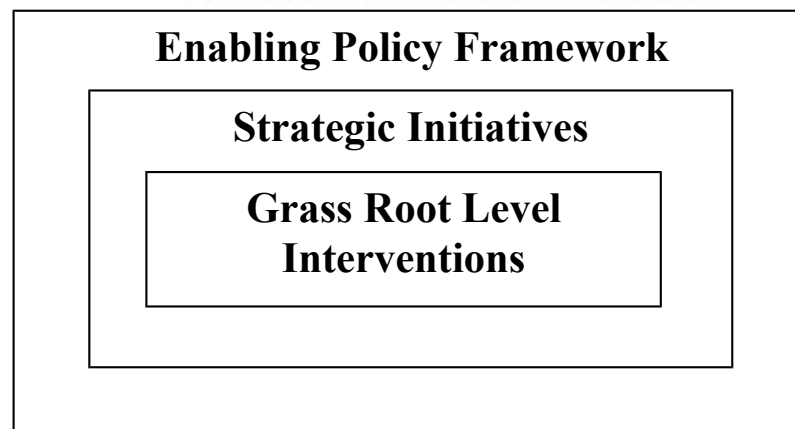
Some Recommendations

Although so much enough activities has been done to ameliorate the state of education in India, we are still a long way off from accomplish standards comparable even to other developing nations. India is ranked 109 amongst 128 countries in its education index for women. Although there is much work to be done to enhance education in India, particular observation is vindicating to women's access to education. An action has to be made to detach the social, psychological and structural barriers, for participation of majority of women in education. The state must play a prominent role in preventing gender stereotyping and segregation in education, and providing stipends, scholarships, loans, transport facilities, guidance and counseling services to women and their families, especially belonging to the lower and marginalized sections of society, and with required regulation and intervention, when necessary, to correct the imbalances in education access.

The initiatives of the government through various speculations and functioning in developing education in India were examined. With regard to facilities in schools, it had improved significantly, but a lot work needs to be done to enhance this access.

Below are some recommendations and suggestions for improving access to education for women of the country. The recommendations can be categorized as follows:-

- (a) Grassroot level improvements related to mindset changes,
- (b) Strategic initiatives related to innovation and incentivisation and
- (c) Enabling policy level framework that deals with regulation and reservation.



Towards improving access to education for women - broad recommendation categories

Grassroot level Improvements/Interventions

One of the foremost requirements for ensuring increased participation of women in education is effecting a mindset change in society. This class of recommendation, the building block or core of enabling any kind of change. Some important discussions could be done which provides relevance of this study part.

- **Sensitisation and awareness building for women's education:-**

Although the government and various voluntary organizations engage in various attempts to sensitise the local population to the need for women's education, much needs to be done in this area. Unless parents of the girl child see value and merit in sending the girl child to school. Rural immersion programmes for management students, especially in regions where the participation rate in schools is particularly low, will pave the way for better understanding and awareness of the differing needs and constraints of the intended beneficiaries. Parental reluctance can be targeted and stymied through such interaction, with a discussion of the various options and avenues that education can open up building awareness, and joint exploration facilitating alternate solutions keeping in mind the needs of the target population. Institutes of higher learning such as the IIMs, IITs, NITs, TISS, and JNU etc. can lead the way by partnering with the state governments in the region to spearhead such an initiative.

Strategic Initiatives

Beyond building awareness and sensitising people towards the need for educating women, innovative approaches to make education available and accessible to women, and incentives to make the prospect attractive for both women and their families, is required. Some important recommendations in this direction are offered below.

- **Target segment and approaches**

We need to move towards a segment-based and sector-wise approach to tackle the problem of poor access to education for women. In rural areas, where enrolment of women in education is rather low, mechanisms need to evolve such that the schools are more accessible for the girl child as well as the psychological and sociological barriers to sending the girl child to school are overcome. Approaches where there the girls go to schools face much more barriers faces in their whole life is one possible direction. For example, the concept of mobile schools in far-flung rural areas where the teacher and the classroom can be made mobile is likely to reach far more girl children and also effect parental sensitisation for education of the girl child in the process. Similarly, other mediums can be explored such as video and tele schooling, imparting education through e-choupals and panchayats, and tie-ups with mobile health clinics to get the school to reach the girl child rather than have them labor to reach the schools. A segmented approach will have to consider how best to address the particular requirements and needs of the region, depending on the potential for tie-ups and alternative media that can be used to deliver education.

- **Build linkages between government schemes such as NREGS and Women Education**

A recurring concern is that of poor infrastructure in schools, such as provision for toilets for women, that specifically addresses the needs of the girl child. While every school needs to have adequate facilities such as drinking water and toilets for both rural population (men and women), the fact that these are currently not in place indicates perhaps the lack of will or the fund and resource crunch at the local level. A way out might be to tie up with the NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) that focuses on developmental projects while ensuring minimum 100 days of employment with education-related projects. State governments can introduce projects under the NREGS that focus on providing adequate infrastructure in schools, with particular attention to the specific and differing needs of the girl child. This will jointly address the NREGS objectives as well as assure the female population of adequate school facilities.

- **Incentivisation for education of the girl child**

Since girls are more likely than boys to stay on in schools once they enroll, the primary problem is that of attracting the girl child to the school in the first place. To facilitate this process, beyond communicating the usefulness of education to women, education of the girl child must become an attractive proposition for the parents of the girl child, who might otherwise prioritize sending the male child only to school. Some form of monetary incentive that state governments or panchayats can introduce at their level would go a long way in ensuring equal participation of both boys and girls in formal education. While mid-day meal schemes are one such incentivisation, it might help if incentive plans that particularly target the female child are introduced. For example, if a family has its girl children enrolled in schools, they can be made eligible for further discounts through the Public Distribution System (PDS) or entitled to food stamps, or even direct subsidies can be offered. Other forms of incentives that directly address the concerns of the parents, such as discounts in agricultural supplies for parents of the girl child or loaning out the school premises for marriage of girls who have completed 16 years of schooling, can all be made available. While these incentives may not cost the government much in aggregate, they are likely to fuel stronger participation especially in the short term where instrumental and monetary concerns override the need to educate women.

Enabling policy framework

Efforts to improve access to education for women may also be addressed through effective regulation and government intervention beyond piecemeal efforts by the citizen body for any long-lasting impact. This class of recommendation is shown as the outer square in the above figure, intended as the overarching umbrella in efforts to revitalize education access for women.

- **Reservation for women in education**

The role of legislation and government intervention is one of the most powerful and effective tools to remedy systemic errors and imbalances prevalent in any society, which continue to be sustained over a period of time. A form of affirmative action, akin to other affirmative actions in necessary education for all women segment, reservation for women in education can potentially reduce the disparity in education access and enrolment, and therefore opportunities made available to women. Although government intervention may not always be desirable, there is no denying that the reservation policy for 'backward castes' has benefited a section of the population and has been instrumental in correcting existing social imbalances. Extending the same logic, since women have continued to be inadequately represented across the education value chain, necessitating a certain

percentage of women participation across various levels through required legislation and reservation will not only ensure fair representation but also encourage schools and institutes to actively devise means and programmes to attract women to their portals. Additional subsidies and incentives can further augment such structural mechanisms to ensure gender parity in education.

The road ahead for education of women is long and winding. Much needs to be accomplished, first to attract the girl child and rural women to enroll in schools and then to retain, train and educate them. Although structural issues may be easier to address with the commitment and will of the government and local bodies, the psychological and sociological barriers require long-term sustained efforts from all. Improving attitudes towards the girl child and rural women, challenging prevalent norms of society and countering gender stereotyping and segregation will require more than government engagement; it will take the concerted effort of civil society, NGOs, institutes of higher learning, other stakeholders in education and, above all, the initiative and will of women themselves.

Conclusion

This paper scrutinized the trends in women education, the investments on education and infrastructural supports in India. The study consistently opens that there concludes remarkable progress in the performance of women education revealed from female literacy levels and its change over time. It was also perceived that the analysis and difference between rural and urban female literacy rates are diminish down.

One may ask why education of rural women is even important, or why the state ought to focus on it, beyond improving the numbers and statistics to reflect figures at par with the rest of the developed world. Is it a mere image building exercise in an attempt to stay on top of the numbers? Although that may be equally important, there are more to accrue for the individual, family unit and ultimately the nation, with investment in education of its women.

Neglecting the education of women, who constitute nearly half of the population, does not auger well for the development of any nation. Beyond the obvious imbalance in the labor pool, education for women is an important determinant of their enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence, helping to build a positive image, developing their ability to think critically, fostering better decision making and helping them make more informed choices about health, employment and even the education of their children. Education will not only ensure more participation in developmental processes but also enhance awareness of rights and entitlements in society, so that women can enhance their participation in society on an equal footing in all areas. The economic independence that education brings is an added incentive. Economic independence and awareness will help curtail the vicious cycle of reinforcing negative stereotypes and aid women in chartering paths as individuals in their own right, contributing to society, polity and the economy

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