

An Overview of Women Education in India

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Abstract: The real progress of any nation depends on the qualities and skills of its citizens and education is the key which develops capabilities of human to make a good member of society. Family is the unit of society in which the mother develops the qualities of a child. Hence woman is called the first teacher of the child. It describes the importance of women education in society and nation's development. The educational progress of women brings social development which in turn, is necessary for progress of nation. This paper is concerned with some major issues, problems and some suggestions for improvement of women education in India.

Key Words: Women Education, Development, Male and female literacy, Rights.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Education is the key which develops capabilities of human to make a good member of society and family is the unit of society. The mother is the first personality who develops the qualities of a child. In fact woman is the first teacher of the child who teaches basic manners and habits to the child. Hence the importance of women education is extremely important in the development of society and nation. The educational progress of women brings development of society which in turn is necessary for country's progress. In a developing country like India, to identify the importance and to make efforts for its improvement is the need of present time.

2. WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA DURING ANCIENT TIMES:

In India, during vaidik time period, the social condition of women was good enough and it was written that they took part in religious celebrations and other traditions. After the vaidik period, social and educational condition of women turned to worse with the time. During this period it was written that the social and educational condition of women depended on their social class and caste that time. Women of higher social class and caste enjoyed the facility of education, but it was not available for lower castes women. Mostly women used to take care of house, look after and brought up children, perform homely work like cooking, washing clothes etc. and their participation in the social life was negligible.

Besides staying away from the opportunities of education and social equity, other social evils and bad traditions towards women like Sati, Devdasi tradition, poor condition of widows, murder of women by declaring them as Dayan, child marriage, etc. were in society. Due to unavailability of education, human and social rights, from childhood to teenage- women were dependant on parents, after marriage- dependent on husband and in old age they were dependant on sons.

During Mughal period, the women were limited to the boundaries of house and the pardah tradition also limited the chances for their education. Such traditions for women which are responsible for educational and social backwardness of women are continuing even today in some countries of the world as well as in the Indian society.

3. WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA DURING BRITISH AND POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

During the British rule in India, several moves were made for the upliftment of social and educational conditions of women and regulation were made for social equity. Widow Remarriage act (1854), Removal of Sati tradition Act (1859) were some example of them. Some chronological efforts in the direction of educating women in India are listed as following-

- First significant effort in the direction of women education in India was taken by Christian missionaries when Devid Heiar started first school for girls' at Calcutta (Kolkata) in 1820. J.E.D. Bethune, the head of Bengal Shiksha Parishad, started another girl's school in 1849.
- Wood's dispatch was a boost for women education as it stated that 'All possible efforts should be made for women education and personal efforts for improvement of women educations should be encouraged'. As a result, many girls school were opened.
- Hunter commission emphasized on women education and said 'For complete development of human resources, for reformation of family and to build character of children during childhood, women education is more important than education of men.'
- Annie Besant started Hindu girls' school in Banaras in 1904 and Lady Hardinge medical college in 1916 which were important milestones in the direction.
- Sadler Commission (1917) recommended for separate curriculum preparation for girls education and to make arrangement of training in the fields like medical education, and also stressed on encouraging co-education.
- Jyotiba Phule by his extraordinary efforts, started girls schools at Pune (Maharashtra) with the help of British government. This was a revolutionary step in Indian women education. His wife Savitribai Phule supported him for this noble cause. Savitribai Phule did so much for girls' education and she is called first lady teacher of the country. These two opened other girls schools one after other. The Indian society was very conservative and traditional that time and both of these had to face strong opposition from the superstitious and traditional Indian society but the British government helped them.
- Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar gave rights to women by making laws for them in The Indian constitution. Right for equality for women, right for education and property, Hindu code bill, equality in employment opportunity and equal salary for equal work and for social equality the proposal for political and constitutional reservation were the given by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and as result of these today educational and social status of women has uplifted somewhat. Dr. Ambedkar made following provisions for women equality and education-
 - Right to equality before law by Para 14
 - Right to prevent sexual harassment by Para 15
 - Right to equal opportunity in recruitment of public services
 - Right to equal salary for equal work by Para 39 (a)
 - Reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj system by Para 243 d (3), 243 T (3), and 243 R (4).

After independence, the condition of women across the country was very ruined and poor due to highly superstitious, traditional and illiterate society. Indian constitution provisioned to overcome this- that the state, if deems necessary, can make special provisions for improving the social status of women and children. In fact the social and educational conditions of women after independence were not very satisfactory but some efforts carried on.

Consequently a national committee was constituted by Indian government in 1958, which is also called **Deshmukh committee**, on women education. This committee reported in favor of increasing efforts for women education.

Bhaktvatsalya committee was constituted in 1963 to find out the resources for progress in women education and to gain public support.

Education commission (1964-66) suggested bringing equality in education of women and men and to provide financial support for education of women.

National policy on education (1986) recommended introducing time bound and stepwise programmes for women education and to introduce adult education programme for women of 15-35 years age group. It also recommended increasing women enrolment in technical, vocational and science and technology education.

In this line the year 1975 was declared as international year for women and the year 2001 was declared as women empowerment year.

Several efforts were put but the women education did not reached up to the expectations and the women literacy rate did not increased with remarkable rate during post independence period. Women literacy data during different decades with census of India proves it. It also clear from the graph that the rate of female literacy has always been less than male literacy rate and did not increased significantly by the time.

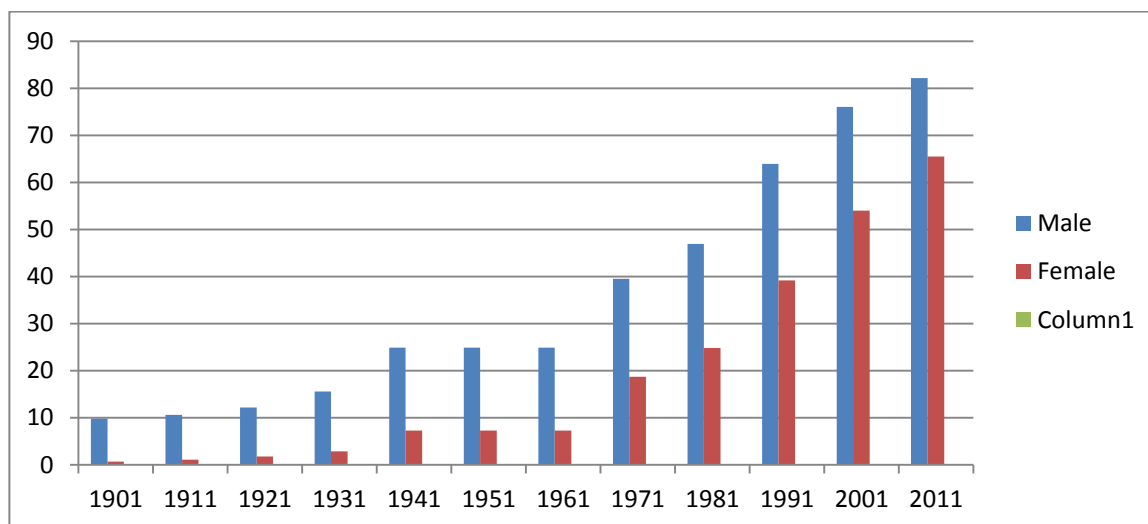


Figure 1: Male and female literacy rates in India during different censuses.

As women education is extremely important for social as well as national development, many policies were formed and steps were taken to achieve the targets of women education but still the required improvement is awaited. Factors like superstitions, illiteracy and useless traditions are responsible for it besides other reasons. Low literacy and awareness especially in rural and low literate let them unaware of the information about government schemes and poor funding from government stops implementations of these schemes, which are major factors responsible for this.

4. CHALLENGES IN THE WAY OF WOMEN EDUCATION:

Several economical, social, political, demographic and administrative factors are directly or indirectly responsible for poor social and educational condition of women in the country. The major factors are following-

4.1 Social issues- In India, some classes social and castes make barriers in the way of education of poor and lower castes like giving low marks in examinations, social discrimination, untouchability, demoralization from education and harassment in many ways which is still continuing even in higher education. This stops the education of these classes as well as of women.

4.2 Traditional reasons- In some tribes, castes the place of women is deemed to be lower than men and hence their education is not given any importance.

4.3 Economic factor- Many poor families among laborers and tribes do not educate girl children due to poor financial conditions.

4.4 Bounded labour- The curse of bounded labour is still continuing in some states of India. Such girl children, whose families are bounded labour, work with their families to pay their debts as a family burden and don't attend schools.

4.5 Dowry system- Dowry is a curse in Indian society for women and their families. It is a common thinking in society is that higher education is provided to girls, similar level of educated groom is to be searched and more dowries is to be given. Such reasons stop families to limit the educational level of their girls in some areas.

4.6 Child marriages- Girl child marriages in less age limits the chances of education of girls because they have to focus on families and mostly lack of support from family results in leaving study.

- 4.7 Insecure environment of society and schools-** Incidents like molestation, ragging, and eve teasing are heard at workplace and educational institutions. Due to these reasons guardians hesitate in some areas to send their girls to schools and colleges located in remote. This factor is responsible for low enrolments of girls in rural and remote areas especially in higher education.
- 4.8 Costly education due to privatization-** Education has become costly in recent time due to government policies of Liberalization, Privatization and globalization. Recently government has also allowed FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) in education. All this has resulted in increased cost of education. This is directly related to greater expanse in girls' education; besides the amount spend in dowry also. This generates hesitation among families towards providing higher education for girls.
- 4.9 Distant location of schools-** In several rural and remote areas, the locations of schools are very far away and colleges are even not available. Due to non availability of school in proximity, many girls leave schools after completing primary and upper primary education and thus leave study.
- 4.10 Partial behavior of families-** In India, particularly in rural areas the education of boys always preferred to girls education. Girls generally forced to leave study after 8th or 10th and on the other hand boy's education is encouraged always.

Such many reasons are barriers towards achieving the targets of women education and towards achieving Millennium Development Goals. The status of education among Muslims, Scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and remote areas is in poor condition.

5. STEPS NEEDED TO IMPROVE WOMEN EDUCATION:

Serious efforts are required to overcome above barriers in the way of women education. Some required steps in this direction are following which can be effective to improve the status of women education-

- 5.1 Establishment of girls schools at less distance-** For girls it is required to provide higher schooling and college education at their nearby place. This will result in lowering the no. of girls leaving schools. Recently Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) has a target to open a govt. secondary school in 5 km radius and a govt. senior secondary school in a radius of 7 km. which is a good move in the direction. In the same way Rashtriya Ucchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) has a target to open up new colleges and increasing the G.E.R. in higher education.
- 5.2 Providing basic infrastructure in schools-** basic infrastructural facilities like separate toilets, drinking water and girl's room etc. are required in girl's schools and colleges, particularly in rural areas. During 11th 5 year plan several toilets were opened in schools all over India but 12th plan document states that among 63% of these schools there are no toilets for girls. Providing hostels in girl's schools and colleges is also a need for improving women education. Under 11th 5 year plan, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme is proved helpful as it is meant for the rural girls and are working at block level.
- 5.3 Recruiting more female teachers-** Appointing proper number of female teachers in girls schools as well as in co-educational institutions is a prerequisite to increase admissions in these schools. Girls can be more comfortable as well as they will inspire by the presence of female teachers.
- 5.4 Counseling of parents -** In rural areas, backward villages, in less educated areas of tribes and migratory workers groups people require counseling for enroll girls and for continuing their education. Realizing them the importance of girls education will be an effective step in this direction.
- 5.5 Provision for scholarships, fellowships and financial support-** Providing financial support in the form of scholarships, fellowships and internships for higher education and research for the girls of economically backward groups and deprived sections of the society like SC, ST, minority and poor people as well as handicapped girls will be a boost for girls education. The timely distribution of scholarships, fellowships and internships will be another step to motivate the girls for education.
- 5.6 Encouraging distance education-** Improving and popularizing distance education and encouraging working women, housewives, and deprived section women to acquire education via correspondence/ distance education stream and private mode of study will be a useful reform towards providing education for all women who are deprived of education due to lack of time, distance and other boundations. Another factor of concern is to maintain the quality of distance/ private mode of education.

- 5.7 Ensuring transport facilities-** Even today girls have to travel on foot for a long way in some of the rural areas, remote and hard locations, and cross the river etc. By providing transport facilities in such areas we can encourage girls education. During 11th five year plan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) has a target to provide transport facility for girls but it has not been implemented even today.
- 5.8 Relaxation in fees for women-** For women, a relaxation in course fees, application fees and other criteria of admission in correspondence courses, distance education courses and private study mode course will encourage women enrolment by informal ways of study as most of the women due to marriage and other reasons are unable to attend regular stream of education. At present NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling) offers concession in fee for women in courses, such efforts should be encouraged in other universities and colleges also.
- 5.9 Stopping child marriages-** Efforts are needed to stop girl child marriages among low educated classes of society and rural areas. A campaign for stopping child marriages in backward communities and villages is required for this as child marriages and marriages in less age are the barrier in higher education of girls.
- 5.10 Opening educational institutions in educationally backward areas-** In such tribal and rural areas and educationally backward Muslim areas where guardian often don't like to send their girls to schools which are far from home due to traditions and conservative thinking, schools, colleges, vocational educational institutes like it is and polytechniques should be established on priority to improve and empower girls education. In recent years central government started a scheme to open model schools on the pattern of central schools in Educationally backward Blocks (EBBs), having hostel facilities. But this scheme was closed unexpectedly, if it was implemented, it will provide a boost to rural girls education. At present, educational institutions are being opened in educationally backward areas and minority concerted areas under Multisectoral scheme and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) of central government. In this context the 11th 5 year plan was a great leap as many educational institutes were opened during this period. For example Maulana Azad National Urdu University established its sub regional centres and off campuses at socio-educationally backward areas, particularly Muslim backward areas like Mewat (Haryana), Sambhal (Uttar Pradesh) Asansol (West Bengal), Bidar (Karnataka) and Kashmir, where Polytechniques, ITIs, Model schools, and Colleges of Teacher Education have been started. A college of vocational studies is also being opened up by Maulana Azad National Urdu University at Bidar to provide skills to youth of these areas. This is a major effort in this direction which will certainly result positively in near future. More such efforts are needed to empower and come up the challenges.
- 5.11 Providing healthy environment in educational institutions-** Activities like eve teasing, ragging, and molestation around educational institutions should be stopped by strict laws. Making campuses and surroundings safe for girls by making strict regulations and following them will result in encouragement of girls' education. A grievance cell should be established across all girls' educational institutes. Anti ragging Act of UGC in recent time is a good step in this direction.
- 5.12 Subsidized educational loan for girls-** Government provision of providing educational loans on subsidised/ low interest rates for women's higher education/ technical education medical and engineering and management education will help them to go for higher education besides financial barriers.
- 5.13 Relating women education with skill-** encouraging nontraditional courses and curricula and enriching and updating vocational education curricula especially for women is necessary for women to make them able to self business and government jobs.
- 5.14 Ensuring proper women representation in educational, constitutional, and management bodies -** Ensuring more women representation in constitutional and educational bodies of institutes and colleges and management committees, regulatory bodies and government organization is needed for better decisions at management and action level on women educational and related problems and their prompt solutions.

6. CONCLUSION:

The condition of women educational in ancient India and during medieval period was not satisfactory and there were several issues responsible for it. During British rule and after independence it was felt that there should be an improvement in these condition of women education in order to overcome the other social problems of women and many efforts were made for it. In the chronological times, establishment of Women and child development department under Ministry of Human Resource development, Government of India in 1985 and establishment of

National commission for women in 1992 were great steps in the direction of conservation and ensuring women rights.

National Policy of Education 1986 in its recommendation stated that ‘Indian government should encourage women empowerment through women education’. It was like a milestone in the way of women education of country that time. National Literacy Mission was another significant step in the direction which was focussed on education of the adult women of 15-35 years age group.

During different 5 year plans of India, government introduced systematic efforts in the direction. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Univrsalization of Elementry Education (UEE), Mahila Samakhya, Efforts of increasing female enrolment and retention in schools, empowering Anganwadis and Balwadis, Establishment of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, and efforts in Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) were other chronological schemes and government efforts which have changed the scenario of women education across the nation.

Some other specific initiative of like starting Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thakarsi (SNDT) University Mumbai, especially for women, and other similar institutions like Banasthali Vidyapith in Tonk, Rajasthan, Avinashlingam Deemed University, Jyoti Vidyapith University, Indira Gandhi Institute of Technology Delhi are other milestone in the way, some of these offer education for women at lower fee.. Increase in the enrolment and literacy of girls, Women partnership in several facets of the society as well as in employment in government and private sector are the results of these efforts.

Recently UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2015 stated that along with many other countries of the world, India has also not achieved the standards of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) including Education for all, in which especially Millennium Development Goal (MDG 3) is to promote Gender equality and empower women. It indicates that we have to introduce more serious efforts and their implementation for to achieve the objectives of women education.

Today in Sustainable development goals (SDGs) have been introduced because in recent decade despite progress, the world failed to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Along with the other Sustainable development goals, SDG 4 is to provide inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and Sustainable development goal 5 is associated with achieving gender equity and empowering all women and girls.

In the efforts to achieve these targets and reforms in the area of women education, and gender equality, Government, Public, teachers and other stakeholders and policy planners have to play coordinated and dedicated part which will ensure the progress of women education in India.

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