
Girl Child Education in India – A Situational Analysis

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Abstract

The paper examines the issue of women's access to education in India. Drawing on existing literature and various statistics concerning women's education, the paper provides an overview of the state of education with respect to women and highlights some of the issues and barriers to women's education. The paper also tries to cover the schemes those have been introduced by the government to increase the access, expand coverage and improve the quality of education among women in different parts and segments of the country. Based on an analysis of emergent issues, some recommendations and suggestions are offered in terms of grassroot level interventions, strategic initiatives and enabling policy framework, towards improving women's access to education.

Key Words: *Literacy, Vocational Education, Economic Productivity, Social Development, Women Empowerment,*

Introduction

'Educating a boy is educating a person: Educating a girl is educating a nation', this statement is well justified. Many surveys and studies worldwide have demonstrated that educating women is the single most profitable investment in terms of children's health, community welfare and building long-term success of developing countries. Education opens a whole new world of opportunities for a girl, it gives her the confidence to tackle different problems of life, become economically independent, make better choices, resolve family or community issues satisfactorily, stand for her rights and guide her children. The journey to become a successful nation begins with Universal Education for Women. India can reach its true potential as a nation only when its female population is equipped with the power of education.

Free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 6 and 14 is a Fundamental Right of citizens under the 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India. Yet, the state of education of women in India is far from 'free' or as totalising and encompassing as the right appears to guarantee.

Post-Independence there has been a concerted attempt to improve literacy levels of the population in India. Many schemes have been introduced to increase the access, expand coverage and improve the quality of education. Amongst them the universalization of elementary education, incentive schemes for retention and non-formal education for adults are noteworthy for their scope and intent. Although over the years, India's literacy rate has improved manifold, from 12% in 1947 to 74.4% in 2011, if we look at the percentage of educated people, there is a huge gap between male (82.14%, in 2011) and female (65.46%, in 2011) literacy rates in India (Census Report, MHA, (2011).

The various statistics and numerous studies have repeatedly pointed the need to extend the reach and access of education to the women of the country. Although literacy rates and access to education are areas of concern for women, the dropout rates and enrolment figures in higher education imply that getting girls to enrol in schools is the first hurdle. Once this hurdle is surmounted, girls are more likely than boys to stay on for primary education, but pose a challenge again at the secondary and higher levels of education.

Research Questions and Objectives

To answer the research questions as to why education of women is even important, or if it is a mere image building exercise, or a way to stay on top of the numbers in the race with the developed nations. To answer these research questions the paper has set the following objectives:

- 1) To find out how education is indispensable for women.
- 2) To find out and explore the different stages at which the women's education is hampered in India.
- 3) To understand the role Government has played so far to improve the access and extent of education for women.

Education: Indispensable for Women

Low female literacy rate has a huge negative impact on the overall growth and development of the society. 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 labour 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 is not only to 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. We can summarise the reasons as to why the education is indispensable for women as follows:

Social Development: Kothari Commission of 1968 recommended education as the primary tool for social development. By prioritising women's education in India, the country can achieve the goal of social development as it will help resolve many issues faced by society.

Gender Equality: It is perceived that woman is part of the unprivileged section of

society in India. Education is the only tool which can prevent the propagation of this myth and help to close a gender gap in society.

Economic Productivity: Educated women can bring in more productive linkages, backward and forward both, which can bring in fruits in multiple amounts. An educated woman means an educated foundation and hence generation of more productive resources. It will not only bring economic gains to women but will also raise GDP of the nation.

Reduction in Infant Mortality: A well-educated woman will have more chances of making better decisions for her family's health. Studies have shown that increased literacy among women will bring down infant mortality rate and maternal mortality rate while raising the life expectancy.

Improved Living Standard: Education will improve chances of employment for women and hence they can contribute to their family income. This in turn results in better living standards for the entire family.

Woman Empowerment: Education is a powerful tool for female emancipation and empowerment. Women have been deprived of their rights in society for too long. By educating themselves, they can redress the imbalance. They are also less likely to be taken advantage of, and will experience lower exposure to domestic abuse.

Better Future Prospects: Women who are educated are able to take charge of their future and also play an important role in shaping the future of their family by bringing up their children in a far better way by making them aware and accessible to better opportunities and prospects which gets ignored by the uneducated women/mothers.

Holistic and Inclusive Development of the Society: When women are included in key decision-making positions, they take holistic decisions for the development of the society

Women's education in India is hampered at different stages

In most of the developing world around the globe including India, women are often denied education opportunities. Even though women constitute 48% of the total population in India – the literacy rate for women in urban areas is 79.11% as against 88.76% males, and the figures are even lower in the rural scenario where 57.93% women are literate as against 77.15% literate males (Educational Statistics at a Glance, MHRD Report (2005 - 06). India's GDP growth percentage can be drastically improved if women are educated and start contributing equally economically.

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 highlights some of the barriers to women's education.

Some of the barriers to women's education are sociological, rooted in gender stereotyping and gender stagnation and other are driven by economic concerns and constraints.

A consequence of gender profiling and stereotyping is that when the parents cannot afford education for their kids, the son is always given preference over the daughter, if at all they try and send them to school. The daughters tend to participate more in programmes that relate to their domestic roles. Therefore, the school dropout rate amongst adolescent girls stands high at 63.5% (Educational Statistics at a Glance, MHRD Report (2005 - 06).

If the daughter wants to go for higher studies, it becomes a matter of discussion among parents, relatives, neighbours. 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. Hence educating the girl child is sometimes viewed as an unnecessary and extravagant indulgence.

We live in a society where the upbringing of children still depends largely on the mother. What good are we going to pass on to the next generation if that mother is illiterate? The chances are that her own daughter might become an illiterate mother one day, thus continuing the vicious cycle.

1.1 Level of Education with Key Issues

Level of education	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	VOCATIONAL FINISHING SCHOOL	& PROFESSIONAL
Issues	1 Low enrolment - getting the girl child to the school	1 High drop-out rates	1 Gender stereotyping and segregation	1 Gender stereotyping
	2 Sociological and psychological barriers to sending girls to school	2 Inadequate facilities	2 Domestic preferences	2 Self efficacy (own belief and ability to succeed)
	3 Engagement of the girl child in other work	3 Engagement in other work (housework, farms etc.)		

1.2 Women Education Hampered at Different Stages

Stages	Early Childhood	Adolescent	Higher Studies	Post Marriage
Issues	Sons get preference over daughters in many rural areas	Female school drop-out rate stands at 63.5%	Women's marriage is given priority over education	Women takes care of the family and puts back studies or career

What Has The Government Done So Far?

There are many reforms and strategies by the government towards the betterment of women education in India.

1. Sakshar Bharat Mission for Female Literacy

This programme was formulated with the objective of achieving 80% literacy level at national level, by focusing on adult women literacy, seeking to reduce the gap between male and female literacy to not more than 10 percentage points. It works on four broader objectives, namely imparting functional literacy and numeracy to non-literates, acquiring equivalency to formal educational system, imparting relevant skill development programmes and promote a leaning society by providing opportunities for continuing education.

2. Right to Education (RTE)

RTE considers education as a Fundamental Right which will provide free and compulsory education to every child aged

between 6 to 14 years. The right to education is legally guaranteed for all without any discrimination. States have the obligation to protect, respect and fulfil the right to education.

3. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

Gender disparities still persist in rural areas and among disadvantaged communities. To overcome such disparity, the said programme was launched with the aim to ensure that the quality education is feasible and accessible to the girls of disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level.

4. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level

The NPEGEL is a focussed intervention of Government of India, to reach the 'Hardest to Reach' girls, especially those not in school. It is for reduction in the school dropouts by giving special attention to weak girls. In villages, women's groups are formed to follow up/supervision on girl's enrolment, attendance. The scheme is being implemented in educationally backward blocks (EBBs) where the level of rural female literacy is less than the national average and the gender gap is above the national average.

5. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan

The scheme was launched with the objective of enhancing access to secondary education and to improve its quality. It is envisaged to achieve an enrolment rate of 75% at the second stage of implementation by providing a secondary school within reasonable distance of any habitation. Infrastructure facilities, such as additional class rooms, laboratories, libraries, art and craft rooms, toilet blocks, drinking water provisions and residential hostels for girls and teachers in remote areas, were given top priority under this scheme.

6. Dhanlakshmi Scheme

To promote the awareness and importance of education of girl child, government has launched a special conditional money transfer scheme for the girl child, conditional to the fulfilment of the following three conditions:

- At birth and registration of birth.
- Progress of immunization and completion of immunization.
- Enrollment and retention in school.

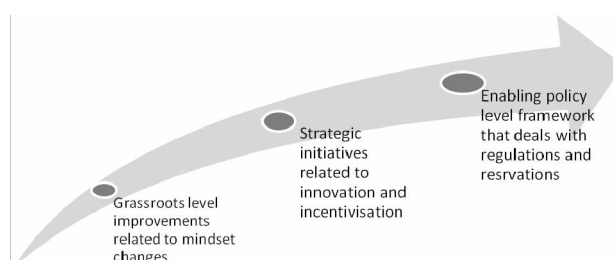
7. SABLA-Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls

It enables adolescent girls to pursue self-development and empowerment. It aims to upgrade home-based skills and life skills, and integrate with the National Skill Development Programme (NSDP) for vocational skills. It enables adolescent girls to get into formal/non formal education. It also promotes awareness about health, hygiene, nutrition, adolescent reproductive and sexual health (ARSH) and family and child care.

The Way Forward

Although much work has been done to improve the state of education in India, we are still a long way off from attaining standards comparable even to other developing nations. Below are some recommendations and suggestions for improving access to education for the women of India. The recommendations can be categorised as those related to the following three subheads:

Grassroot level improvements / interventions:



- Sensitisation and awareness building for women's education: One of the foremost requirements for ensuring increased participation of women in education is changing the mindset of the society. Unless parents of the girl child see value and merit in sending the girl child to school, they will resist doing so and instead prefer to use her for help in household chores.

Strategic initiatives:

- **Target segment and approach:** 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, and the psychological and sociological barriers to sending the girl child to school are overcome.

• **Incentivisation for education of the girl child:** The primary problem is that of attracting the girl child to the school. To facilitate this process, education of the girl child must become an attractive proposition for the parents of the girl child, who might otherwise prioritise sending the male child only to school.

• **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. Government intervention has benefited a section of the population and has been instrumental in correcting social imbalances. Extending the same logic, 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.

Conclusion:

One may ask why education of 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.

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 labour 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 charting paths as individuals in their own right, contributing to society, polity and the economy.

It is therefore true in all respect that, as India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said, 'You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women.'

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