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Education and Women Empowerment in India: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Women constitute almost half of the population of the world. Education for women is the best way to improve the health, nutrition and economic status of a household that constitute a micro unit of a nation's economy. In this context, it can be argued that lack of women education can be an impediment to the country's economic development. In India, women achieve far less education that of men. As per the Census report 2001, the literacy rate of women is 54.16 per cent and that of men is 65.38 per cent. There has been a sincere effort to improve the education attainment of women by both government and voluntary organizations. The changes in the policies and infrastructural supports on primary, secondary and higher education reflect the initiatives of the Government of India towards women education. This paper examined the trends in women education, the investments on education and infrastructural supports in India. The study revealed that there had been significant progress in the performance of women education revealed from female literacy levels and its change over time. It was also observed that the gaps between rural and urban female literacy rates are narrowing down. It was observed that rural poverty acts as a push factor for women's education rather than as an obstacle to women's education. The significant influence of urbanization on women's education implied that urbanization had been playing a beneficial role in the attainment of women's education in India. At the same time, the drop-out rate had a negative effect on women's education. It revealed that that reduction of girl's drop-out rates is necessary for achieving women's education. The initiatives of the government through investment and infrastructure in developing education in India were examined. With regard to facilities in schools, it has improved significantly, but a lot more needs to be done. In sum, the study revealed that there have been concerted efforts to encourage girls to attend schools, which would lead to higher literacy in future.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women education refers to every form of education that aims at improving the knowledge, and skill of women and girls. It includes general education at schools and colleges, vocational

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and technical education, professional education, health education, etc. Women education encompasses both literary and non-literary education. Educated women are capable of bringing socio-economic changes. The constitution of almost all democratic countries, including India, guarantees equal rights to both men and women. Primary education is now a fundamental right. When a woman (or a girl) is ensured of her rights, the society at large is ensured of its sustainability. Realizing the importance of women education, the government and many non-government organizations took a lot of projects to spread women education. Literacy programs are being taken in favor of women.

II. IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN EDUCATION

1. Economic development and prosperity: Education will empower women to come forward and contribute towards the development and prosperity of the country.

2. Economic empowerment: So long as women remain backward and economically dependent on men, the helpless condition of them cannot be changed. Economic empowerment and independence will only come through proper education and employment of women.

3. Improved life: Education helps a woman to live a good life. Her identity as an individual would never get lost. She can read and learn about her rights. Her rights would not get trodden down. The life or condition of women would improve a lot, if we take a broad outlook in the field of female education.

4. Improved health: Educated girls and women are aware of the importance of health and hygiene. Through health education, they are empowered to lead a healthy life-style. Educated mothers can take better care of both herself and her baby.

5. Dignity and honor: ²Educated women are now looked upon with dignity and honor. They become a source of inspiration for millions of young girls who make them their role-models.

6. Justice: Educated women are more informed of their rights for justice. It would eventually lead to decline in instances of violence and injustice against women such as dowry, forced-prostitution, child-marriage, female foeticide, etc.

7. Choice to choose a profession of her choice: Educated women can prove to be highly successful in the fields of life. A girl-child should get equal opportunity for education, so that she can plan to become a successful doctor, engineer, nurse, air-hostess, cook, or choose a profession of her choice.

² Robert J. Brent, *Does female education prevent the spread of HIV-AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa?*, Applied Economics, 2006, vol. 38, issue 5, pages 491-503

8. Alleviate poverty: Women education is a prerequisite to alleviate poverty. Women need to take equal burden of the massive task of eliminating poverty. This would demand massive contributions from educated women. There cannot be much social and economic changes unless girls and women are given their rights for education.

³India is the second largest country in the world so far as population is concerned. But so far as education is concerned it is a backward country. In the past, women did not receive any education at all. They were not allowed to come out of the four walls of their houses. Domestic works were their only education. During the British rule in India some noble social thinkers of the time paid their attention to the education of women in our country. Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar were famous reformers who gave emphasis on the education of women. They put forth a very strong argument.

Man and woman are like the two sides of a coin. Without one, the other cannot exist. They help each other in every sphere. So education should be given to both men and women. Further, women are the mothers of the future generation. If women are uneducated, the future generations will be uneducated. For this reason the Greek warrior Napoleon once said, "Give me a few educated mothers; I shall give you a heroic race." In day to day life, the real problems are faced first by women and then the same problems are conveyed to men for solution. If the women are educated, they can solve all the problems of their houses. Very often, the working men of some families become handicapped in unfortunate accidents. In that situation, the complete burden of the family rests on the women of the families. To meet this exigency women should be educated. They should be employed in different spheres. Women can work as teachers, doctors, lawyers and administrators. Educated women are good mothers.

Women and girls in the developing world are often denied opportunities for education. Lack of education limits prospects, decreases family income, reduces health, puts women and girls at risk of trafficking and exploitation, and limits the economic advancement of entire countries.

World Education believes that education for girls and women is the single most effective way to improve the lives of individual families as well as to bring economic development to poor communities worldwide. World Education has a long history of successfully working with local partners to design, manage, and evaluate community-based initiatives to advance the conditions of girls and women. World Education's programs help girls enroll and stay in

³ Chandra, Shefali (2012). *The sexual life of English : caste and desire in modern India*. Durham: Duke Univ. Press. p. 22. [ISBN 978-0822-352-273](#). Retrieved 28 January 2016.

school and help women gain access to or create new educational, financial, and social resources in their communities. They also help girls and women improve their own lives, the lives of their families and the conditions in their communities. For parents—and especially mothers—this means creating conditions that ensure their daughters have equal access to basic education, are able to make informed decisions about their futures, and are able to protect themselves from trafficking, sexual exploitation, HIV, for example.

III. GENDER DISPARITIES

⁴One of the primary ways in which there are gender disparities in education in West Africa are in the ratios of male to female participation: 43.6% of men have completed primary education as opposed to 35.4% of women, 6.0% of men have completed secondary education as opposed to 3.3% of women, and 0.7% of men have completed tertiary education as opposed to 0.2% of women.¹ Some of the reasons for poor enrollment and participation is the "male breadwinner" ideal that prioritizes educating boys over girls and limited funds available to families for education. In addition, in West Africa women are seen as the primary providers of unpaid care work. This offers competing demands on the time of girls and oftentimes their families will prioritize girls' spending time taking care of siblings or doing domestic labour. In addition, a leading cause of gender disparities in education are gender disparities in the labor market, which lead to gendered ideas of women's role in a society.

In addition to this, some gender disparities are caused by teacher's attitudes towards students in the classroom according to the students' gender. There are some preconceived notions that boys are more intelligent and harder working than girls in some West African countries. In particular in Guinea, surveys have been taken by researchers suggesting that school teachers, particularly in rural schools, believe that boys learn lessons better, have more ambition, are smarter, and work harder, while girls make less effort, rarely give good responses to questions, and use poor French expression. In addition, in both urban and rural schools analyzed, girls were expected to do the manual labor to keep the schools clean while this expectation was not held for the boys.

Gender disparities in higher education persist as well, with women accounting for a little over 20% of university level enrollment in all of Sub-Saharan Africa, and countries in West Africa such as Niger and Ghana reporting rates of 15% and 21%, respectively. This is considered a contributing factor to why there are so few women in higher level management and

⁴ *Luther deutsch*, p. 70, at [Google Books](#)

administrative jobs. In Ghana in 1990, women made up less than 1% of managers in the labor market, but with an average annual growth rate of 3.2%.

IV. CURRENT POLICIES

Before and after Independence, India has been taking active steps towards women's status and education. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2001, has been a path breaking step towards the growth of education, especially for females. According to this act, elementary education is a fundamental right for children between the ages of 6 and 14. The government has undertaken to provide this education free of cost and make it compulsory for those in that age group. This undertaking is more widely known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan(SSA).

Since then, the SSA has come up with many schemes for inclusive as well as exclusive growth of Indian education as a whole, including schemes to help foster the growth of female education.

The major schemes are the following:

Mahila Samakhya Programme: This programme was launched in 1988 as a result of the New Education Policy (1968). It was created for the empowerment of women from rural areas especially socially and economically marginalized groups. When the SSA was formed, it initially set up a committee to look into this programme, how it was working and recommended new changes that could be made.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme(KGBV): This scheme was launched in July, 2004, to provide education to girls at primary level. It is primarily for the underprivileged and rural areas where literacy level for females is very low. The schools that were set up have 100% reservation: 75% for backward class and 25% for BPL (below Poverty line) females.

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL): This programme was launched in July, 2003. It was an incentive to reach out to the girls who the SSA was not able to reach through other schemes. The SSA called out to the "hardest to reach girls". This scheme has covered 24 states in India. Under the NPEGEL, "model schools" have been set up to provide better opportunities to girls.

One notable success came in 2013, when the first two girls ever scored in the top 10 ranks of the entrance exam to the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). Sibbala Leena Madhuri ranked eighth, and Aditi Laddha ranked sixth

In addition, the status and literacy rates between West Bengal and Mizoram were found to be profound; a study compared the two states as they took on politically different approaches to helping empower women (Ghosh, Chakravarti, & Mansi, 2015). In West Bengal, literacy rates were found to be low even after fulfilling the 73rd amendment from 1992. The amendment established affirmative action by allotting 33% of seats at panchayats, or local self-governments, to women. Mizoram chose not to partake in the 73rd Amendment but has seen greater literacy rates, it is second highest in the country, and also has a better sex ratio. It was thus found that affirmative action steps alone were not enough. Women also need to be given the opportunity to develop through formal education to be empowered to serve and profit from holding these public leadership roles

‘Education for all’ is one of the major tasks being carried out by the Indian government but still we have the lowest female literacy rate in Asia. India is working but the pace is slow as we haven’t achieved what we should have been so far. At the start of British Raj till independence just 2-6% of females were literate. The percentage went up to 15.3% in 1961 and 28.5% in 1981. Literacy rate crossed 50% in 2001. By 2011 female literacy rate in India stood at 65.46%. So there is an obvious increase in the female literacy rate but India is far behind as compared to other countries at global level. Female illiteracy rate varies with the state. In Kerala 86% of women are literate whereas literacy rate in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh is just between 55-60%. Shockingly the rural areas of India have the lowest female literacy rate. Rural Rajasthan has less than 12% female literacy rate.

V. CONCLUSION:

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, girls and women were educated only for traditional household works. Now, the society is witnessing changes in the role-status of women. There is greater emphasis on educating girls and women in the same way as we educate boys and men. The modern-day parents want to fulfill the aspiration of their children without gender parity. The educated women should insist on exercising their civil, social, political and economic rights. This will help improve the overall condition of women in the society. We can hope for better days while all women of our country will be enlightened and educated.

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