

GIRL CHILD : EDUCATE TO EMPOWER

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At the all India level it can be seen that the gender gap in literacy has been reducing and rate of female literacy has been increasing every decade but the gap between the genders exists. A lot of factors are responsible for poor to low rate of literacy among women. One of the foremost factors is the persistence of gender based inequality.

All over the world education is one of the most significant means for empowering any individual or community in general, and women and girls in particular. Level of educational attainment and rate of literacy are indicators of general development of any society. Gender equality and empowerment of women are indispensable goals for sustainable development and prosperity. After independence, India adopted different paths and strategies for national, social, economic and political development. The overall situation and status of women has improved to some extent and their lives have changed. However, this change cannot be called extraordinary. There are instances of empowerment and improvement in indicators of gender equality but this development has largely remained concentrated among few groups and communities in the society. Education is one of the key variables that influences a number of other social and economic factors that determine growth, rate of fertility, growth of population, rate of migration, income-generation capacity of population etc. There is no disagreement that nothing is more important for sustainable development than the social, economic, and political empowerment of women and their education is the only sustainable route for achieving actual empowerment. But when it comes to schooling and education of girls, one can see yawning gaps between ideology and practice and because of this women and girls tend to lag behind.

Educational status of women in India

As per the 2011 Census, the total literacy rate in India stands close to 75per cent and rate of literacy among women is 65.46per cent. According to Census 2001, the percentage of female literacy in the country was 54.16per cent. The literacy

rate in the country has increased from 18.33per cent in 1951 to 74.04per cent as per 2011 census. The female literacy rate has also increased from 8.86per cent in 1951 to 65.46per cent in 2011. It is noticed that the female literacy rate during the period 1991-2001 increased by 14.87per cent whereas male literacy rate rose by 11.72per cent. Hence, the female literacy rate actually increased by 3.15per cent more compared to male literacy rate. Data in Table 1 presents statistics regarding general rate of literacy in all the states in India along with a break up of rate of literacy among males and females.

The data demonstrates that a few states such as Kerala, Mizoram, Tripura, along with some Union Territories, have made remarkable progress in the field of literacy and education. **For instance, education played an important role in Kerala's tremendous transition from a rigidly caste-divided society into one of India's most egalitarian states. The school system in Kerala has directly challenged the traditions of the past. Women and girls were encouraged to get educated and become independent. The social fabric and work ethic both emphasized the importance of education for all.** Similarly, the success story of Tripura is attributed to the involvement of local government bodies, including gram panchayats, NGOs and local clubs, under the close supervision of the State Literacy Mission Authority (SLMA) headed by the chief minister. Wherever and whenever any society has accorded somewhat equal status to women, and have realized the significance of women education, women have become empowered and have contributed to socio-economic development of the region. Although, there have been substantial achievements made in the past for bridging the gender gap in the field of education, a lot needs to be done in many regions across India. Data in Table 2 shows a comparison of

Table 1: Rate of literacy (census 2011)

States/UT	Total literacy rate per cent	Male literacy rate per cent	Female literacy rate per cent
INDIA	74.04	82.14	65.46
INDIA	68.74	78.26	58.01
Himachal Pradesh	83.78	90.83	76.60
Punjab	76.68	81.48	71.34
Chandigarh #	86.43	90.54	81.38
Uttarakhand	79.63	88.33	70.70
Haryana	76.64	85.38	66.77
NCT of Delhi #	86.34	91.03	80.93
Rajasthan	67.06	80.51	52.66
Uttar Pradesh	69.72	79.24	59.26
Bihar	63.82	73.39	53.33
Sikkim	82.20	87.29	76.43
Arunachal Pradesh	66.95	73.69	59.57
Nagaland	80.11	83.29	76.69
Manipur	79.85	86.49	73.17
Mizoram	91.58	93.72	89.40
Tripura	87.75	92.18	83.15
Meghalaya	75.48	77.17	73.78
Assam	73.18	78.81	67.27
West Bengal	77.08	82.67	71.16
Jharkhand	67.63	78.45	56.21
Odisha	73.45	82.40	64.36
Chhattisgarh	71.04	81.45	60.59
Madhya Pradesh	70.63	80.53	60.02
Gujarat	79.31	87.23	70.73
Daman & Diu #	87.07	91.48	79.59
Dadra & Nagar Haveli #	77.65	86.46	65.93
Maharashtra	82.91	89.82	75.48
Andhra Pradesh	67.66	75.56	59.74
Karnataka	75.60	82.85	68.13
Goa	87.40	92.81	81.84
Lakshadweep #	92.28	96.11	88.25
Kerala	93.91	96.02	91.98
Tamil Nadu	80.33	86.81	73.86
Puducherry #	86.55	92.12	81.22
Andaman & Nicobar Islands #	86.27	90.11	81.84

Source: Census of India 2011 # Union Territory

rate of literacy among men and women since year 1951.

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Table 2: Literacy Rates

Census year	Total Population (per cent)	Males(per cent)	Females (per cent)
1951	18.3	27.2	8.9
1961	28.3	40.4	15.4
1971	34.5	46.0	22.0
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8
1991	52.2	64.1	39.8
2001	64.8	75.3	53.7
2011	74.04	80.9	64.6

Source: http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/EAG2014.pdf

the foremost factors is the persistence of gender based inequality. In patriarchal setup, gender inequality and asymmetry of power relationships leads to discrimination against females in all the spheres of activities. The process of socialization plays a significant role in perpetuating gendered division of labour in family, role expectations from each gender, and feminine and masculine traits. Children as young as 6-7 years old are socialized into understanding the gendered nature of society. Such practices also get reflected in the trends and patterns regarding education of males and females and boys and girls in society. The data indicates that women have been lagging from the beginning in terms of rate of literacy and educational achievements. This fact can be established through the data already presented in the Table 1 and 2. Data in Table 3 also indicates male and female enrolment in educational institutions at various stages, from the primary level up to the higher education.

Data provided in Table 3 indicates a steady decline in the number of girls enrolling for education as we move up from primary to secondary and then at the level of higher education. A clear-cut decline in the numbers can be noticed as we move from undergraduate to post graduate level particularly.

The importance of education for empowerment of girls is undeniable. A large number of initiatives and measures taken up by the government have resulted in a rise in percentage of women in education. But women and girls are still perceived to be playing greater roles in domestic and non-public domains. Women, irrespective of their caste, religion and

Table 3: Level-wise Enrolment in School & Higher Education

Level	All Categories (in '000')		
	Male	Female	Total
Primary (I-V)	67223	62769	129992
Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	33746	32035	65780
Elementary (I-VIII)	100969	94804	195773
Secondary (IX-X)	19484	17477	36961
I-X	120453	112281	232734
Senior Secondary (XI-XII)	11747	10406	22153
I-XII	132199	122688	25662
Under Graduate	12723	10815	23538
Post Graduate	1744	1631	3374
MPhil	16	19	35
Ph.D	50	34	84
PG Diploma	164	51	215
Diploma	1500	624	2124
Certificate	81	95	176
Integrated	51	32	83
Higher Education- Total	16329	13301	29629

Source: http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/EAG2014.pdf



status, are disadvantaged in terms of enjoying the benefits of general growth and development in society. In order to understand the increase in number of girls enrolling for education, it would be pertinent to look at figures related to number of girls enrolled per 100 boys in the. A thorough analysis of these figures presented in Table 4 indicates a scenario in which a whole gamut of factors play a direct or indirect role in determining the status of women or girls in the society.

One can notice that the number of girls enrolled per hundred boys has never gone above 100 mark. The statistics in a way reveals skewed sex-ratio and preference for a male child by families in India that has also led to evils like

Table 4: Number of Girls per hundred Boys enrolled by stages of education

Level/Year	Primary (I-V)	Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	Secondary (IX-X)	Senior Secondary (XI-XII)	Higher Education
1950-51	39	19	NA	15	13
1960-61	48	31	NA	26	21
1970-71	60	41	NA	33	28
1980-81	63	49	NA	45	36
1990-91	71	58	NA	49	46
2000-01	78	69	63	62	58
2005-06	87	81	73	72	62
2006-07	88	83	73	74	62
2007-08	91	84	77	76	63
2008-09	92	86	79	77	65
2009-10	92	88	82	80	67
2010-11	92	89	82	79	78
2011-12	93	90	84	81	80
2012-13 (p)	94	95	89	87	81
2013-14 (p)	93	95	90	89	NA

Source: http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/EAG2014.pdf

female infanticide or feticide. **The discrimination, which in many cases starts even before a girl child is born, continues all along her life. Spending on her education is considered to be a waste of resources or money. If resources are limited then it is usually invested for educating the boys in the family who are perceived as 'support in the old-age'.** Data in Table 4 presents number of girls enrolled at every stage per 100 boys. The gap between number of boys and girls continues through years and in different stages. It is only in the last couple of years that the gap between number of girls per 100 boys has become narrow.

Although from the data presented in Table 3 and 4, one can notice a positive change in the enrolment of girls for education at the primary level up to the secondary school level, however, social discrimination and economic exploitation continues to be one of the main hurdles in education of girls. Because of the engagement of the girls in the domestic chores or household responsibilities, often educating girls is not a priority or their education is ignored by the family or they themselves neglect their studies due to other responsibilities, lack of time and concentration. The social environment in which girls are brought up in the family becomes both a cause and a consequence for:

- a) Low enrolment rate of girls in the schools
- b) High dropout rate among girls.

Statistics in Table 5 indicate the rate of drop outs among girls and boys in early stages of schooling for all categories of students including SC and STs.

Some of the commonly mentioned reasons for drop-out in the primary and middle school level as reported by a NSSO Survey are:

- 1) Not interested in studies
- 2) Costs too much
- 3) Required for household work (which applies primarily to girls)
- 4) Required for outside work for payment in cash or kind (this applies primarily to young boys in the family)
- 5) Required for work on family farm/family business
- 6) Repeated failure
- 7) Marriage at an early age.

Although the NSSO survey has identified these as common reasons for both girls and boys, it is not difficult to see through the data and reasons and establish that the dynamics of gendered division of labour, role expectations, disinterestedness of family in educating girls beyond a limit play a decisive role in higher dropout rate among girls. Apart from these reasons, a substantial percentage of girls quit because

Table 5: Drop-Out Rates in School Education (in per cent)

Classes/Year	Classes (I-V)			Classes (I-VIII)			Classes (I-X)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1960-61	61.7	70.9	64.9	75.0	85.0	78.3	NA	NA	NA
1970-71	64.5	70.9	67.0	74.6	83.4	77.9	NA	NA	NA
1980-81	56.2	62.5	58.7	68.0	79.4	72.7	79.8	86.6	82.5
1990-91	40.1	46.0	42.6	59.1	65.1	60.9	67.5	76.6	71.3
2000-01	39.7	42.9	40.7	50.3	57.7	53.7	66.4	71.5	68.6
2005-06	28.7	21.8	25.7	48.7	49.0	48.8	60.1	63.6	61.6
2006-07	24.6	26.8	25.6	46.4	45.2	45.9	58.6	61.5	59.9
2007-08	25.7	24.4	25.1	43.7	41.3	42.7	56.6	57.3	56.7
2008-09	29.6	25.8	27.8	41.1	36.9	39.3	54.0	54.4	54.2
2009-10	31.8	28.5	30.3	41.1	44.2	42.5	53.3	51.8	52.7
2010-11	29.0	25.4	27.4	40.6	41.2	40.8	50.2	47.7	49.2
2011-12	23.4	21.0	22.3	41.5	40.0	40.8	48.6	52.2	50.3
2012-13(p)	23.0	19.4	21.3	41.8	35.7	39.0	50.4	50.3	50.4
2013-14(p)	21.2	18.3	19.8	39.2	32.9	36.3	48.1	46.7	47.4

Source: http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/EAG2014.pdf

of non-availability of educational institutions in the close vicinity and lack of regular and safe means to travel. A large number of studies have pointed out lack of proper toilets/ means of sanitation and hygiene as one of the important reasons for not sending young girls to the school.

Programs and Policies:

In order to overcome these problems and challenges in supporting education for girls, a large number of initiatives have been launched by the successive governments to ensure gender equality in the field of education. Keeping in mind the philosophy of the Constitution of India, as mentioned in its Preamble, the government's policies, initiatives and actions have attempted to achieve social justice, equality, and providing equal opportunities to all irrespective of ones caste, gender, religion or any other socio-cultural or biological affiliation. A large number of dimensions such as prevalent norms, traditions, language, religion, meanings, identities and cultural practices are crucial in determining content and intent of programs and policies for empowerment of women.

Girl child education is a field that finds top priority in the Government's agenda. The present government is of the opinion that improving the current literacy rates requires serious efforts and it aims to increase education among girl students and give them livelihood opportunities. To encourage girl child education, it is suggested that there should be a high school within every 5 kms. The need to create proper learning environment is emphasized. Parents must be made aware of value of education to girls and impetus should be given to girl child education. Stressing on the importance of higher education, the government has proposed to start a college in every taluka. The need to allow girls to dream of becoming doctor or engineer is important

and so is the availability and access to institutions of higher education. A large number of schemes and programmes are available for girl child and women empowerment.

Conclusion:

A holistic approach towards empowerment of girls and women is desirable in order to achieve concrete results. The new strategies and initiatives must include various tools of social empowerment of women such as right and access to education, health care, adequate nutrition, right to property and access to equal opportunities, legal and institutional mechanism to help women in need, access to media and finally dispute redressal mechanism. Barriers to empowerment of women and girls are ingrained in socio-cultural practices in India and have hardly been challenged by even women themselves. These barriers not just prevent women from achieving their potential but also keep them away from advancing in life and making choices that affect their lives.

One cannot deny the positive correlation between education and development. A large number of studies have proved that women's education leads to rise in their ability and capacity to control their lives and surroundings. Education also leads to greater control over their lives and choices. The educational level of an individual contributes in improving quality of life and among women particularly it influences, health of infants, rate of infant mortality, nutritional level of children, quality of life of family in general and women in particular, life expectancy, and general wellbeing of the family. As said by Mahatma Gandhi, 'educate one man, you educate one person, but educate a woman and you educate a whole civilization'.

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