



**EDUCATION IS THE FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN'S PROSPECT:
CHALLENGES, REMEDIES AND EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN IN
INDIA.**

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ABSTRACT

Equality in social systems is a necessary condition for empowerment of women. Development and empowerment are also not synonymous. But women's security, decision-making power, and mobility are three indicators for women's empowerment. In this respect we can say that education is the milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. According to Swami Vivekananda, "education is the manifestation of perfection already in a man". So education is central to the process of sustainable development and is empowering, if its contents are geared towards it. Numerous studies in the last decade, in the international arena have shown, however, that educating the female population in a country helps economic growth, and yet there appears to be no correlation between education, improvement in economic conditions and empowerment of women, that women's status is elusive, multidimensional and hard to measure and it is important to look at different aspects of women's status to understand these complex relationships. According to Pandit J.L. Nehru "If we educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empower means mother India empowered."

Key Words: education, Women's Prospect, empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is both, a process and a result, that cannot be measured nor can it be taken by some individual or institution/organization and given to some body else. A woman can only empower herself; organizations (through logistic support) and, governments (through their

gender just policies) can play a role in supporting the journey and providing an enabling environment. Women are empowered when they become aware of the unfair power relations they face and are able to take the challenge to overcome inequality. Empowerment enables women to take control over their lives and builds self-confidence and self-reliance. In order to build self-confidence and to evolve a female agenda, besides education, formation of coalitions to have a united strong voice is equally important.

WOMEN EDUCATION THE ROADWAY

In India, although from the Vedic period women had access to education, but they had gradually lost this right. Again at the end of the British period it gradually retrieve its position through *Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Derozio* and others not only their right to education but also their social recognition.

After independence the government has taken various measures to provide education to all Indian women. As a result women's literacy rate has grown over the three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 1971 only 22% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2001 54.16% female were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 14.87% as compared to 11.72 % of that of male literacy rate. Education as a means to promote development in social, political, and economic spheres has been gender-blind, but in the late 1970s this perspective changed. Research concluded the existence of a high correlation between an increase in women's schooling level and a decline in infant mortality and fertility rates. Women who had completed basic education were able to make use of health facilities and service for their children and had a higher interest in sending their children to school. Women are still unequal to men, but the last quarter of a century has seen tremendous improvement in their status through progress in education, in having better health and longevity of life and entry into jobs in the organized sectors. While we have found no direct correlation between increase in education with female work participation rate and representation in legislatures, education does lead to individual development and creates awareness about individual rights and is thus empowering at the individual level.

WOMEN'S EDUCATION PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGS

In spite of the forceful intervention by a bastion of female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programmes over the last 62 years and above all, the United Nation's enormous pressure with regard to the uplift of the plight of women in terms education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons. The 2011 Census report indicates that literacy among women as only 65.46 percent it is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women India is even much lower to national average i.e. 74.04

.The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, the weak, backward and exploited. Moreover education is also not available to all equally. Gender inequality is reinforced in education which is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 65.46% against 82.14% of men as per 2011 Census.

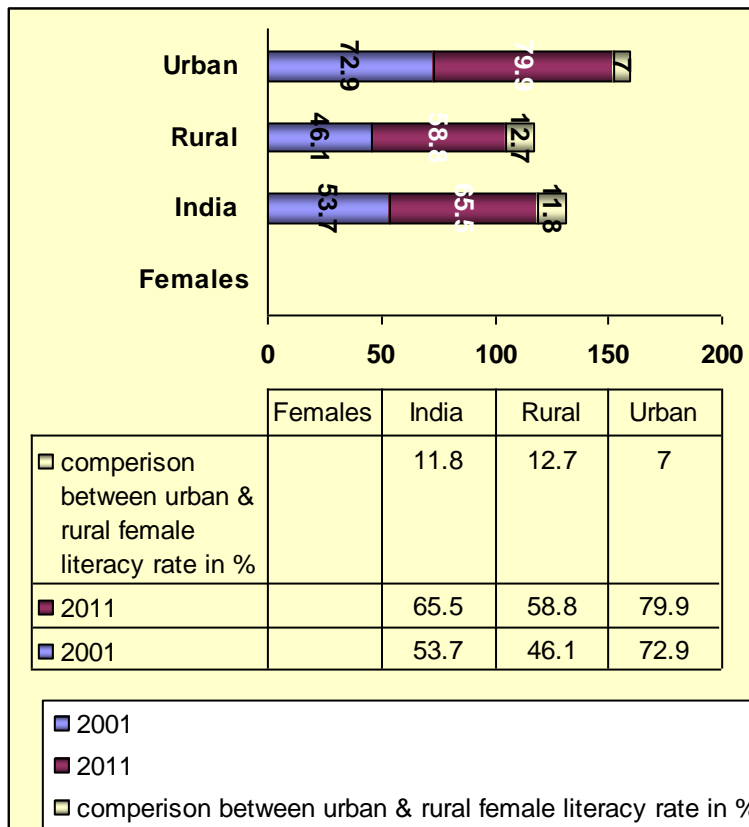
TABLE -1 LITERACY RATE IN INDIA

Year	Persons	Males	Females
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
1961	24	34.4	13
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76	54
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Rank	State	Literacy Rate (2011 Census)	Male Literacy Rate (2011 Census)	Female Literacy Rate (2011 Census)
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	86.3 percent	90.1 percent	81.8 percent
2	Andhra Pradesh	67.7 percent	75.6 percent	59.7 percent
3	Arunachal Pradesh	67.0 percent	73.7 percent	59.6 percent
4	Assam	73.2 percent	78.8 percent	67.3 percent
5	Bihar	63.8 percent	73.5 percent	53.3 percent
6	Chandigarh	86.4 percent	90.5 percent	81.4 percent
7	Chhattisgarh	71.0 percent	81.5 percent	60.6 percent
8	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	77.7 percent	86.5 percent	65.9 percent
9	Daman & Diu	87.1 percent	91.5 percent	79.6 percent
10	Delhi	86.3 percent	91.0 percent	80.9 percent
11	Goa	87.4 percent	92.8 percent	81.8 percent
12	Gujarat	79.3 percent	87.2 percent	70.7 percent
13	Haryana	76.6 percent	85.4 percent	66.8 percent
14	Himachal Pradesh	83.8 percent	90.8 percent	76.6 percent
15	Jammu and Kashmir	68.7 percent	78.3 percent	58.0 percent
16	Jharkhand	67.6 percent	78.5 percent	56.2 percent
17	Karnataka	75.6 percent	82.8 percent	68.1 percent
18	Kerala	93.9 percent	96.0 percent	92.0 percent
19	Lakshadweep	92.3 percent	96.1 percent	88.2 percent
20	Madhya Pradesh	70.6 percent	80.5 percent	60.0 percent
21	Maharashtra	82.9 percent	89.8 percent	75.5 percent
22	Manipur	79.8 percent	86.5 percent	73.2 percent

23	Meghalaya	75.5 percent	77.2 percent	73.8 percent
24	Mizoram	91.6 percent	93.7 percent	89.4 percent
25	Nagaland	80.1 percent	83.3 percent	76.7 percent
26	Orissa	73.5 percent	82.4 percent	64.4 percent
27	Pondicherry	86.5 percent	92.1 percent	81.2 percent
28	Punjab	76.7 percent	81.5 percent	71.3 percent
29	Rajasthan	67.1 percent	80.5 percent	52.7 percent
30	Sikkim	82.2 percent	87.3 percent	76.4 percent
31	Tamil Nadu	80.3 percent	86.8 percent	73.9 percent
32	Tripura	87.8 percent	92.2 percent	83.1 percent
33	Uttar Pradesh	69.7 percent	79.2 percent	59.3 percent
34	Uttarakhand	79.6 percent	88.3 percent	70.7 percent
35	West Bengal	77.1 percent	82.7 percent	71.2 percent
-	ALL INDIA	74.04 percent	82.14 percent	65.46 percent

Literacy rate urban - rural and male - female comparison in %			
	2001	2011	Difference(+)
<u>Males</u>			
India	75.3	82.1	6.8
Rural	70.7	78.6	7.9
Urban	86.3	89.7	3.4
<u>Females</u>			
India	53.7	65.5	11.8
Rural	46.1	58.8	12.7
Urban	72.9	79.9	7



THE ROOT CAUSES FOR LOW LITERACY AMONG WOMEN IN INDIA

Women education is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. No single factor or cause can be held responsible for very low literacy rate of women in India. Subsequently it is associated with combination of many factors including social, cultural, economic, educational, demographic, political and administrative and so on. The following are the some of the important factors which could be attributed for the present poor state of affairs of womenfolk in education.

1. **The Lower Enrolment:** The lower enrolment of girls in schools is one of the foundational factors which stand as stumbling block for women empowerment in India. Reliable sources indicate that more than 50 % of the Non-Starters (those who have never been to school) are girls. According to the latest statistics, two out of every ten girls in the age group of 6-11 are still not enrolled in schools.
2. **Higher drop-out rate among girls from schools:** The incidence and prevalence of drop-outs among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas seem to be quite high. According to available sources, occurrence of drop-out and stagnation amongst girls is nearly twice that of boys all over India
3. **Girl Child as Second Mother:** In many families girl children play the role of second mother by shouldering the responsibilities of household work such as looking after the sibling, fetching water, collecting firewood, bringing fodder for cattle, cleaning and cooking etc. In rural India especially in poor families this traditional sex role makes girl

child handicapped and conditioned by the attitude of mother and the family and discourages girl child to go school as it becomes secondary

4. **Bonded Labour System:** This social evil is a quite discouraging phenomena which stand as barrier for girl's education in rural areas for the underprivileged families of washer men and agricultural labour , scheduled caste and scheduled tribes.
5. **Cast System as a Barrier;** Children belonging to low caste families are forced to learn skills and work ways and not encouraged to go to school due to various factors in the sphere of strict instruction /threat from high caste communities for their selfish motives of keeping them as domestic servants and child labourers in the farms or factory.
6. **Dowry as cordon:** Dowry system and other social practices act as main causes of the neglect of the girl child and discrimination against girl child including the deprivation of right of education. In many families especially poor and down-trodden think that if their daughters are educated more, they have to accumulate more assets and properties to provide as dowry in large proportion at the time of marriage, so prefer rather to either stop their children with average education and so on but never higher education. This prevails more in underprivileged families and communities

2011		Gap in literacy rate	Decadal difference in literacy rates		State /UT Code	India/State/ Union Territory #
Males	Females		Males	Females		
6	7	8	9	10	1	2
82.14	65.46	16.68	6.88	11.79		INDIA
78.26	58.01	20.25	11.66	15.01	01	Jammu & Kashmir
90.83	76.60	14.23	5.48	9.18	02	Himachal Pradesh
81.48	71.34	10.14	6.25	7.98	03	Punjab
90.54	81.38	9.16	4.40	4.91	04	Chandigarh *
88.33	70.70	17.63	5.05	11.07	05	Uttarakhand
85.38	66.77	18.61	6.89	11.04	06	Haryana
91.03	80.93	10.10	3.70	6.22	07	NCT of Delhi *
80.51	52.66	27.85	4.81	8.81	08	Rajasthan
79.24	59.26	19.98	10.42	17.04	09	Uttar Pradesh
73.39	53.33	20.06	13.71	20.21	10	Bihar
87.29	76.43	10.86	11.25	16.03	11	Sikkim
73.69	59.57	14.12	9.86	16.04	12	Arunachal Pradesh
83.29	76.69	6.60	12.13	15.23	13	Nagaland
86.49	73.17	13.32	6.95	13.07	14	Manipur
93.72	89.40	4.32	3.00	2.65	15	Mizoram
92.18	83.15	9.03	11.16	18.24	16	Tripura
77.17	73.78	3.39	11.74	14.17	17	Meghalaya
78.81	67.27	11.54	7.53	12.66	18	Assam
82.67	71.16	11.51	5.65	11.55	19	West Bengal
78.45	56.21	22.24	11.15	17.34	20	Jharkhand
82.40	64.36	18.04	7.05	13.85	21	Orissa
81.45	60.59	20.86	4.07	8.74	22	Chhattisgarh
80.53	60.02	20.51	4.47	9.73	23	Madhya Pradesh
87.23	70.73	16.50	7.57	12.93	24	Gujarat
91.48	79.59	11.89	4.72	13.98	25	Daman & Diu *
86.46	65.93	20.53	15.28	25.70	26	Dadra & Nagar Haveli *
89.82	75.48	14.34	3.85	8.45	27	Maharashtra
75.56	59.74	15.82	5.24	9.31	28	Andhra Pradesh
82.85	68.13	14.72	6.75	11.26	29	Karnataka
92.81	81.84	10.97	4.39	6.47	30	Goa
96.11	88.25	7.86	3.58	7.78	31	Lakshadweep *
96.02	91.98	4.04	1.78	4.26	32	Kerala
86.81	73.86	12.95	4.39	9.43	33	Tamil Nadu
92.12	81.22	10.90	3.50	7.32	34	Puducherry *
90.11	81.84	8.27	3.78	6.60	35	Andaman & Nicobar Islands *

7. **Child Labour Practice:** A large segment of child population in India is engaged in child labour practices. According to UN sources India is the most child labour populous nation in the globe with more than 50 million child labourers indulged in beedi works , carpet making , bricks, mining , quarrying ,glass, bangles, match and fireworks, gem polishing ,handloom works. zari, embroidery ,coir industry, domestic works, construction etc. In most of these industries girl children are preferred for high productivity and low cost.
8. **Poor School Environment for girls:** In general the school environment for girls in India is not really interesting and encouraging. The subjects taught in schools are also not related to the environment of girl children. The methods of teaching are mostly out – dated, rigid and uninteresting. There are still hundreds of schools with poor basic amenities such as drinking water, latrine and toilet facilities, improper building, and inadequate number of teachers' especially female teachers preferable for any parents for safety of their girl children from different types of exploitation and abuse.
9. **Female age at marriage:** There is high association of female literacy with female age at marriage. By and large the female age at marriage of 18 (recently 21 years) as prescribed by various legislations not at all followed in India .It is very much ignored and neglected by the families of parents with low literacy and illiteracy background. This obnoxious practice discourages female children to continue their schooling and higher education as they enter into family life at the early age which is not advisable from the physical and mental health point of view and also of social development.
10. **Inferiority, subservience and domesticity:** The female child in Indian culture especially in rural, tribal and poor families is expected to develop the qualities of inferiority; subservience and domesticity which place sever limitations on her education and development
11. **Poverty as a Barrier:** In many poverty stricken families, children especially girls are considered as economic assets as they bring income for livelihood as well to save from economic crises due to death or incapacity of parents (sick/ handicapped/aged)
12. **Ineffective Law Enforcing Machinery:** Indian constitution and various legislations pertaining to education to children assure free and compulsory education all children of this nation but unfortunately the enforcement machinery fail to discharge its duties and responsibilities to the satisfaction of the public interest and welfare of women
13. **Demographic Factors:** The high population growth rate, rapid urbanisation, migration etc also attribute immensely for the poor literacy level of women and girls in India
14. **Poor Political Will and Conviction:** Government officials, policy makers, politicians etc of our country have neither political will nor conviction for the empowerment of women in general.

REMEDIAL MEASURES FOR IMPROVING THE LITERACY LEVEL OF WOMEN IN INDIA

The following measures can be considered for bringing phenomenal change in the plight women's education and empowerment in India

- Since the prevailing situation of poor or less enrolment of girls in schools closes the doors for development and prosperity of future generation of women, concerted efforts must be initiated jointly by the government, parents and civil society to achieve universal enrolment for girls without any compromise. The enrolment can be made even mandatory for every girls by the government in the realm of compulsory education. .
- The Ministry of Education both at Centre and State level should work out strategic steps to stop firmly the ongoing high drop –outs among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas with the serious involvement of voluntary organizations in every locality to realize zero drop-out among girls.
- The poverty stricken families can be identified through proper research and necessary poverty alleviation services be provided to strengthen the income thereby to enable the families to send their children to schools and colleges without much financial difficulties
- Bonded Child labour and Child labour practice must be abolished with strict administrative measures and the relieved children form bondage should be integrated into schools with suitable defense social mechanism.
- Appropriate steps should be taken by the educational authorities with the participation of communities in order to bring the girl children to the main stream of education and development at every level including family and community.
- The female child in every Indian family irrespective of socio-economic status should be molded to overcome the challenges of inferiority; subservience and domesticity which place sever limitations on her education and development. Every family irrespective its socio-cultural and economic background can take it a challenge to bring up their girl children as dignified human being with empowerment in physical , mental, economic and social dimensions of life.
- The Midday meal scheme and other educational supportive services like free text books, Note books , Fee uniforms , Free Bicycles, Free bus , scholarships Free bus pass and so

on as done in the state of Tamil Nadu can be provided in all states and union territories to lift up the literacy level among girls

- As social evils like dowry, child marriage , caste system and other practices deprive rights of education for children belonging to poor and underprivileged families and communities, they should be eliminated through well-designed packages of mass awareness programmes and social welfare measures with full support of public, political parties, NGOs and government agencies.
- The electronic and print media can play significant role in building a good and positive image about girls and women in general in the society by giving no focus for such advertisements and news fetching commercial gain at the cost of depicting women as an object. This would help in changing the society 's attitudes towards girls and their roles to treat every girl or woman as human being with self respect and dignity.
- Government, voluntary sector and philanthropic organizations and individuals should come forward to provide free education for poor girls and provide free hostel facilities for girls studying in schools and colleges in every state of India. This will certainly encourage children of poor families to pursue good and higher education without much impediments
- The schools of social work, departments of women studies, Women Universities and other educational institutions in hand with NGOs and social service organizations such as Rotary Clubs , Lions Clubs , women lib organizations associations can work together to improve the educational status of the womenfolk in this country on mutual respect and understanding.
- The parents of children belonging to poor, underprivileged families must be specially educated with proper social formula to help them to understand the significance of education for their girl children as foundation for empowerment
- Government, NGOs and public should work hand in hand to implement the minimum age at marriage (21 and above) Awareness should be created to institutionalize it as a traditional practice cut acrossing castes, religions, community etc.
- Government officials, policy makers, political parties and others should have adequate political will and conviction to empower women in India without double standard mind

- The law enforcing machinery should be made really effective with efficient monitoring vigilant system to implement the constitutional and legislative provisions and administrative measures to assure free and compulsory education for all children of this nation without any gender discrimination.

According to Raj kumari Chadrsekar² “education plays the twin role of preserving the cultural traditions and values of the past and creating new values and new goals for bringing about a smooth and orderly social change,”

Education aids women to acquire knowledge and provides the necessary courage and inner strength to face the challenges of life.

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