

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Samsujjaman

Student, Education Department, Kalyani University.

ABSTRACT:

Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Moreover educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. So that we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment India is poised to becoming superpower, a developed country by 2020. 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. Education of women in the education of women is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. To provide the education to everyone, EFA programme was launched in 2002 by the Government of India after its 86th Constitutional Amendment made education from age 6-14 the fundamental right of every Indian child. But position of girl's education is not improving according to determined parameter for women. To know the present position of women education, this study conducted by the author. And study concluded that the rate of women education is increasing but not in proper manner.

KEY WORDS: Women Education, Female Literacy, Empowerment, Provisions for Girls Education.

INTRODUCTION

Women in any nation are the mirror of its civilization. The position of Women in society is the index of the standard of social organization. There is no chance for the welfare of the World, unless the condition of Women is improved, is not possible for a bird to fly only on one wing. No country afford development without considering women who constitute about half of its stock of human include women in every aspect of life. A woman is a precious part of the society. Infect, the status of women is not hope or rise for that family or country where there is no esteem for women, where they live in sadness. But actually their social, economic and political status is lower than that of men in almost all countries of the world. Of course women

do enjoy better position in some societies than in other, but their overall position everywhere is lower than their male counterparts in regarding education, employment, political participation, health status etc. The constitution of India not only provides for equal rights and privileges for women and men but also for making special provision for women. Women in India now participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sector, science and technology, etc. despite all these development measures and the constitutional legal guarantees; women have lagged behind men in almost all sectors. In this context, researcher has selected to study the educational status of women in India in historical perspective.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The main objectives of this paper are:

- To examine the educational status of women in India.
- To Study the growth of women literacy in West Bengal and India.
- To explore the socio economic condition of women.
- To make a comparison between West Bengal and India regarding progress of women literacy.
- To show the govt. initiative programme for women education.

WOMEN EDUCATION:

Education is regarded as the key factor in overcoming the barriers that women face and the basic tool for empowering women and bringing them into the main stream of development. Education not only provides knowledge and skills to improve health and livelihoods, but it empowers women to take their right place in society and the development process. Education gives status and confidence in decision making. Educating women is the key to reducing poverty. The need for women education is emphasized all over the world. Women status in the society and education are interrelated. All over the world movements have been carried on to reduce illiteracy as stated by Bhatt,D.B and Sharma, R.S (1992) “The movement for improving women’s status all over the world has always emphasized education as the most significant instrument for changing women’s subjugated position in society.” Women’s education has an important role in the development of nations. The literacy rate of women also has impact on the economic condition and reduction of poverty of the country.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Empowerment of women that will have lasting impacts must involve consciousness raising before the social construction of gender, which subordinates women in the family, class, caste, religion, or society, can be changed. Three experimental approaches to empowerment in South

Asia have been tried: integrated development, economic empowerment, and consciousness rising. Consciousness rising has been implemented in awareness groups and education that have led to a new consciousness, self worth, societal and gender analysis, and access to skills and information. The economic empowerment approach has relied on improving women's control over economic resources and strengthening women's economic security. Gramin Bank has provided one example of organizing women around savings and credit, income generation, and skill training activities. Integrated development approaches have encouraged women's collectives that have engaged in development and social problem resolution and formed specialized activity groups as means of mobilization of women. No one design has assured success. Identification of the poorest and most oppressed in a geopolitical area has provided an entry point for action. Women were encouraged to find a separate time and space for themselves. The three aforementioned approaches have different assumptions about the reason for women's powerlessness: greater poverty and lower access to resources, economic vulnerability, and subordination within patriarchal societies and socioeconomic inequalities. Empowerment is the manifestation of a redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology, transforming the institutions that reinforce or perpetuate gender discrimination. The parameters of empowerment have been identified as:

1. Developing ability for critical thinking;
2. Fostering decision-making and action through collective processes;
3. Ensuring equal participation in developmental processes;
4. Enhancing self-esteem and self confidence in women.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

No doubt that majority of women in our country are uneducated that is the reason for their downfall education can change the scenario as a whole. Education can help in bringing following changes in women:

- Education helps in changing the mindset of an individual.
- Education can enhance their confidence.
- Raising the status in the family and society.
- Reducing dependability

All these above-mentioned parameters are an indicator of the empowerment process.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF WOMEN IN INDIA:

It is very important to know the historical background, if we are to make a study of status of women in India. It is not easy to find answers for questions like when did women start losing

their status or who was responsible for this situation. The position that women occupied in the medieval and later the colonial period is of utmost importance. Women were never put on high pedestal in the Shastras.

❖ **Women Education in Ancient Period**

It cannot be clearly stated whether equal rights between men and women prevailed or not during the Vedic period. But available sources show that liberal attitudes and practices pertaining to women did exist. Women were actively involved in religious and social matters. They had some freedom to choose their partner in marriage and a widow was permitted to remarry. As India started taking steps towards civilization, social discrimination increased. Jainism and Buddhism emerged as potent religious reform movements. According to Buddha, women's spiritual capacities were equal to men's. "Buddhism began as a religion that treated women as equal to men in their capacity for personal spiritual development."¹ "The universal prejudices against women, who are said to be weak-minded, fickle, treacherous and impure are shared by the Jains and expressed in several passages of the canon and in the form of maxims." The high status that women enjoyed during early Vedic period gradually started deteriorating in the late Vedic period. Lineage began to be traced in the male line and sons were the sole heirs to family property. As the economic and social status of sons began to rise, the position of women saw a steep decline. The position of women reached an all-time low during the age of the Dharmashastras. It is during this age that codes of conduct prescribing behaviour norms for women were evolved. This period saw the exclusion of women from both economic and religious sphere. During the period of Dharmashastra, child marriage was encouraged and widow marriage was looked down upon. The birth of girl child was considered as an ill omen and many parents went to the extent of killing the female infants. The practice of Sati became quite wide spread because of the ill treatment meted out to widows. Although in the Vedic period women had access to education in India, they had gradually lost this right. In cultural reality, the women enjoyed a privileged position in the Vedic period. The women had special customs, rituals and spirituality, with which men were not allowed to interfere.

❖ **Women Education in Medieval Period**

The condition of Women in society deteriorated more during the medieval period with the entrance of Muslims. At this point of time several evil practices like child-marriage, sati, and female infanticide were practiced largely. 'Purdah' system was started. These women were also forced to practice 'Zenana'. Rajput women of Rajasthan practiced

‘Jauhar’. Polygamy was common in Hindu Kshatriyas. At the same time many women excelled in arts, literature, and music. Women were also rulers in the medieval period. Some of the great women rulers were Razia Sultana, the only women monarch to rule the throne of Delhi. The Gond queen Durgavati ruled for 15 long years, before she lost the battle to Asaf Ali emperor Akbar’s general. Chand Bibi also fought the Mughals in 1590’s. Nur Jahan is still considered as the most effective ruler. In spite of all these successful women the condition of poor Indian women was the same. At this time, girls were married at a very tender age. Sati was also practiced where women were forced to jump in the burning funeral of their dead husband. Devdasi tradition was common in southern India where girls were married to deity or trees. The Bhakti movement tried to restore women’s position. Mirabai was most popular Bhakti movement figure. In this period, education for women’s was not common at every level, only few girls of rich and famous families could achieve the basic and religious education.

❖ **Women Education in British Period**

In the British period there was revival of interest in women's education in India. During this period, various socio religious movements led by eminent persons like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar emphasized on women's education in India. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Periyar were leaders of the lower castes in India who took various initiatives to make education available to the women of India.

❖ **Women Education after Independence**

Women’s education got a fillip after the country got independence in 1947 and 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. The constitution of India guarantees the right to equality to all Indian women without discrimination. The literacy rate before independence was 2.6% rose in 1961 to 15.3% and 50% by the year 2001. And now, according to the 2011 Census, the male literacy rate is 82.14 while female literacy rate is 65.46.

❖ **Women Education in Modern Period**

Kerala and Mijoram are the only states in India that have achieved universal female literacy rates. The improvement in social and economic status of women is said to be one of the reasons for literacy. In cities the literacy rate is almost equal between girls

and boys in the country however the rate in rural areas continues to be less than the boys. 40% of the centers under NFE, non formal education programs are set apart for women. According to statistics of women education in India, today 0.3 million NFE centres have primary education to 0.12 million girls out of 7.42 million children. However in tribal areas there is not much of a gender bias as compared to all other castes, tribal community statistics show lower male ratio in spite of much low income, literacy, education and other facilities several efforts are being made towards women education and empowerment. The government is taking steps to increase the rate of women education and employment.

LITERACY STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA:

Table-1 : Urban Female Literacy Rate In West Bengal And India (1981-2011)

Year	Female Literacy Rate			
	West Bengal	Growth Rate	India	Growth Rate
1981	60.72	6.61	58.07	5.53
1991	68.25	7.53	64.05	5.98
2001	76.14	7.89	72.86	8.81
2011	81.70	5.56	79.92	7.06

Source: Census 2011- Provisional Population Totals-India

Analysis: According to the table no- 1, this is witnessed from the fact that the literacy rate of urban women of West Bengal was greater than the women literacy rate in India during 1981. It is also noticed that during 1991 decade the literacy rate of women of West Bengal was more from the literacy rate of women in India. But after 2001 the women literacy rate of West Bengal has decreased in the perspective of Indian women literacy rate.

Table-2 : Rural Female Literacy Rate In West Bengal And India (1981-2011)

Year	Female Literacy Rate			
	West Bengal	Growth Rate	India	Growth Rate
1981	25.34	7.29	26.92	0.79
1991	38.12	12.78	30.17	3.25
2001	53.82	15.7	46.13	15.96
2011	66.08	12.26	58.75	12.62

Source: Census 2011- Provisional Population Totals-India

Analysis: According to the table no-2, this is witnessed that during 1981 the rural female literacy rate of West Bengal was greater than the women literacy rate of India. It is also noticed that during 1991 the literacy rate of rural women of West Bengal was greater than the literacy rate of women in India. But after 2001 the rural women literacy rate of West Bengal has decrease in the perspective of Indian women literacy rate.

Table: 3 Growth of Literacy Rate in India.

Year	Growth of Literacy Rate	
	Male	Female
1901-1911	0.73	0.45
1911-1921	1.65	0.76
1921-1931	3.38	1.12
1931-1941	9.31	4.37
1941-1951	2.26	1.56
1951-1961	13.24	6.48
1961-1971	5.55	6.63
1971-1981	10.55	7.88
1981-1991	7.63	9.44
1991-2001	11.72	14.87
2001-2011	9.36	16.68

Source: Govt. of India.

Analysis: According to the table no-3, this is seen that the male literacy rate of India has risen from 0.73 % to 9.31 % where as the female literacy rate of India has risen from 0.45 % to 4.37 % during 1901 to 1941. During 1901 to 1991 this is witnessed that the male literacy rate was higher than the female literacy rate in India. But at present the scenario has been changed. During 1991 to 2011 this is seen that the female literacy rate of India has risen from 14.87 % to 16.68 % where as the male literacy rate of India has decrease from 11.72 % to 9.36 % during 1991 to 1941. So, it is clear that today the female literacy rate is increasing from the male literacy rate in India.

SPECIAL INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN:

- (i) **National Commission for Women:** In January 1992, the Government set-up this statutory body with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.

- (ii) **Reservation for Women in Local Self-Government:** The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas.
- (iii) **The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000) :** The plan of Action is to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child. National Policy for Children- 2013 was adopted by the Government of India on 26th April 2013. National Plan of Action for Children 2016 is in Draft Format.
- (iv) **National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 :** The Department of Women & Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared a “National Policy for the Empowerment of Women” in the year 2001. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2016 is under draft stage.
- (v) **Sakshar bharat mission for female literacy :** Launched in 2008 for promoting adult education especially among woman under which Lok Shiksha Kendras were set up.
- (vi) **SABLA-Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent:** Girls It aims to provide nutrition for growing adolescent girls by provision of food grains.
- (vii) **Right To Education:** RTE considers education as a fundamental right which will provide free and compulsory education to every child aged between 6 to 14.
- (viii) **National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level:** It is for reduction in the school dropouts by giving special attention to weak girls. In villages, women’s group are formed. These groups follow up/supervision on girl’s enrolment, attendance.
- (ix) **Mahila Sangha:** Under this scheme women’s forums (Mahila Sangha) were created. It provides space for rural women to meet, discuss issues, ask questions, make informed choices. It is implemented in ten states.
- (x) **Rahstriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan:** Infrastructure for girls hostel for secondary education
- (xi) **Dhanlakshmi scheme:** Conditional money transfer scheme for Girl Child following 3 conditions.
 - ❖ a) At birth and Registration of Birth.
 - ❖ b) Progress of Immunization and Completion of Immunization.
 - ❖ c) Enrolment and Retention in School

CONCLUSION:

On the basis of above-detailed analysis and secondary data gathered from various sources, it could be concluded that there is no doubt about the essential need of women education. According to the Country Report of the Government of India, education of girls is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. To encourage the education of women at all levels and for dilution of gender bias in providing knowledge and education, established schools, colleges and universities even exclusively for women in the state. To bring more girls, especially from marginalized families of BPL, in mainstream education, the government is providing a package of concessions in the form of providing free books, uniform, boarding and lodging, clothing for the hostilities mid-day meals, scholarships, free circles and so on. Education for All (EFA) programme and other many educational programmes are providing various facilities to enhance the education for women, so these programmes are very helpful to improving the girl's education in India. The ultimate solution for empowering women and not only this but women should provide higher education so that they can be able to make their own decisions, they should be able to differentiate between good and bad. But it is also necessary that government of India should make plans and policies regarding women empowerment. Now it is cleared that only literacy is not the ultimate solution but women should be highly educated to know their rights and duties. And should be able to use their rights as per the need.

REFERENCES:

- ✓ Annual Report of the Department of higher Education, 2009-10 & 2010-11, Govt. of West Bengal.
- ✓ Bagchi Jasodhara, (2005), "The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal, 1970-2000: The Challenge ahead" India, sage publication.
- ✓ Chauhan, C. P. S. (2011), Participation of Women in Higher Education: The Indian Perspective. Analytical Reports in International Education, 4(1), 67-86.
- ✓ C, Nongbri. (2005). Role of Universities in the Empowerment of Women – A look into the Induction Programmes. University News, 43(47), 21-27.
- ✓ N, W. (2006). What is the evidence on effectiveness of empowerment to improve health? Copenhagen,. WHO Regional Office for Europe (Health Evidence Network report), February
- ✓ Kumar, Dr. Jitendra & Sangeeta (2013): Status of Women Education in India, Educationia Confab,

- ✓ Sharma, P. R. (2007). Micro-finance and Women Empowerment. The Journal of Nepalese Business Studies, Vol. IV No. 1, Dec.
- ✓ Lather, A. S., Jain, S., & Vikas, S. (2009). WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN URBAN INDIA A STUDY OF WORKING WOMEN PROFESSIONALS IN DELHI . Delhi Business Review X Vol. 10, No. 2 (July - December), Delhi
- ✓ Government of India, Census of India 2001.
- ✓ [2] Government of India, Census of India 2011.
- ✓ West Bengal, Vol. 10 & 11, Number : 42, May-June, 2009. Govt. of West Bengal, Deptt. of Information and Culture, Kolkata.
- ✓ West Bengal, Vol. 10 & 11, Number : 42, May-June, 2009. Govt. of West Bengal, Deptt. of Information and Culture, Kolkata.
- ✓ West Bengal, Vol. LI, No. 5, 1 & 2, January-February 2009, Deptt. of Information and Cultural Affairs, Govt. of West Bengal, Kolkata.