

Women and Education in India

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Abstract

Women play a vital 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. In addition to this, educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population. Education is a reasonably good indication of development and the right of every individual to education is one of the first provisions of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. But education is often neglected in societies struggling to meet the needs of their people. Recently education has received greater priority as Planners and Policy makers finally recognized it as a key factor in determining the pace of development. Only 65.46 per cent of women are literates as per 2011 census. Even though the education system expanded very rapidly, the gender gap in literacy remains conspicuous by its presence. The Constitution of India confers on women, equal rights and opportunities in all fields. The Government of India has endorsed the same through its Plans, Policies and Programmes. In spite of all these, women in India have not been able to take full advantage of their rights and opportunities

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in practice for various reasons. Therefore in this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the literacy status of Indian women as well as the International and National initiatives to promote women's education in India.

Keywords: Women, Education, Gender Sensitization, Literacy, Low Literacy

Although efforts have been taken to improve the status of women in India, the constitutional dream of gender equality is miles away from becoming a reality. Even today, 'the mainstream remains very much a male-stream'. The dominant tendency has always been to confine women and women's issues in the private domain. The traditional systems of control with its notion of 'what is right and proper for women' still reigns supreme and reinforces the use of violence as a means to punish its defiant female 'offenders' and their supporters.

Women in India constitute almost 50 per cent of the country's human resources and their contributions are vital for the nation's progress. Women's development is regarded as an important approach to raise the levels of productivity and to break the vicious circle of poverty, for which better health and education forms important. These factors not only improve the physical well being of the individuals directly, but also enhance their productivity and ability to contribute to the 'National Income'.

In any society, education is a reasonably good indicator of development. Spread and diffusion of literacy is generally associated with essential trait of today's civilization such as modernization, urbanization, industrialization, communication and commerce.

Therefore to acquire a better quality of life, education is highly essential. The word 'education' implies the characteristics of both the types of knowledge, material as well as spiritual. Mahatma Gandhi said that "education is a means for an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the

end of the education or even the beginning. It is one of the means where man and woman can be educated". Thus Gandhiji's concept of education stands for the balanced and harmonious development of all the aspects of human personality. Moreover, the 'Human Rights' concept also tells that each human being has right to live with human dignity (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Articles 14-26.)

The Constitution of India also confers on women, equal rights and opportunities in all fields - political, social, economic and legal. The Government of India has endorsed the same through its Plans, Policies and Programmes launched at different points of time. The article 15 of the Constitution of India prohibits any discrimination on grounds of sex (Constitution of India Article 15(1) (3)). In spite of these, women have not been able to take full advantage of their rights and opportunities in practice for various reasons.

The magnitude of illiteracy among women in India is very high. Only 65.46 per cent of women are literates as per 2011 census. It reflects that India is not utilizing the potential workers in a proper way. There is either un-utilisation or under utilization of women's capacities and skills. Therefore in this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the International as well as National responses towards women's education. At the end of the article some measures are suggested to overcome the problem of illiteracy among women and to foster their journey towards a dignified and decent life.

Method

The data for the present study have been gleaned from various sources which have been duly acknowledged. Information on women's enrolment at different levels of University and professional colleges was obtained through the reports of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi and The Report on Selected Educational Statistics, Published by the Statistics Division, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi.

Observation and Data Analysis:

Women's Right to Education: It is nearly six decades since the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of Human Rights - on 10th December 1948. This declaration listed 30 Articles. Out of which the Article 26 states that:

"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial, religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children".

The reality in India: In Independent India, education acquired special significance and has been supported by the Government from time to time through its policies and programmes. Therefore in recent years the education system expanded rapidly. But the gender gap in literacy rate remains conspicuous by its presence. The following facts and figures throw light on the gravity of the problem which is a reality and the seriousness of the task ahead.

According to the Table I the pre-Independence time literacy rate for women had a very poor spurt in comparison to literacy rate of men. This is witnessed from the fact that literacy rate of women has risen from 0.7 % to 7.3 % where as the literacy rate of men has risen from 9.8 % to 24.9 % during these four decades.

In the post-independence period the percentages of literacy rates among males and females grown in a faster mode. But the gap between male and female literacy which was 18.30 per cent in 1951 increased to 25.05 per cent in 1961 and 26.62 per cent in 1981 (Table-1). After that there was a slow decrease in the gap as the literary rate among women started gradually increasing after 1991 (54.16% in 2001 and 65.46% in 2011) due to the interventions taken by the government. But still nearly 35 per cent of women are illiterates. From this analysis one can infer that still the female literacy rate is wadding behind male literacy rate. This higher rate of illiteracy of women is undoubtedly attributing for women dependence on men and to play a subordinate role. The lack of education is the root cause for women's exploitation and negligence. Only literacy can help women to understand the importance in educating them to accomplish their goals in par with men in different spheres of life.

Table-2 shows that the state wise female literacy rate had an average of 65.46% in all India basis in 2011 census with Kerala state in highest literacy with 91.98 percent and among Union Territories, Lakshadweep occupies first place with 88.25 per cent. In Uttar Pradesh only 52.66 per cent women are literate followed Bihar with 53.33 per cent. Similarly, out of 35 states six (6) states have recorded female literacy below 60 % while nine (9) states have recorded more than 80% female literacy (2011 census).

As per the census 2011, the positions of female literacy in different districts of the country (top/bottom five districts) are as below:

Top five districts according to Female only literacy rate in India are:

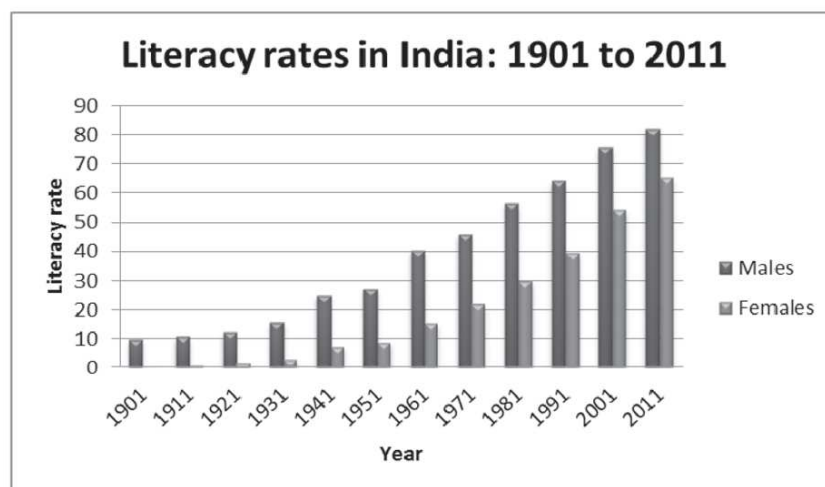
1. Serchhip in Mizoram with 98.28% female only literacy rate.
2. Aizawl in Mizoram with 98.00% female only literacy rate.
3. Mahe in Puducherry(U/T) with 97.61% female only literacy rate.

4. Pathanamthitta in Kerala with 96.26% female only literacy rate.
5. Kottayam in Kerala with 95.67% female only literacy rate.

Table-1: Literacy rates in India since 1901 to 2011

year	Persons	Males	Females	Difference of male-female literacy rates
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7	9.1
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1	9.5
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8	10.4
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9	12.7
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3	17.6
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.99
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	65.38	75.85	54.16	21.69
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India 2011.

Figure 1: Literacy rates in India since 1901 to 2011

Source: Census of India 2011

Table-2: Literacy rates state wise, gender wise in India (2011 census)

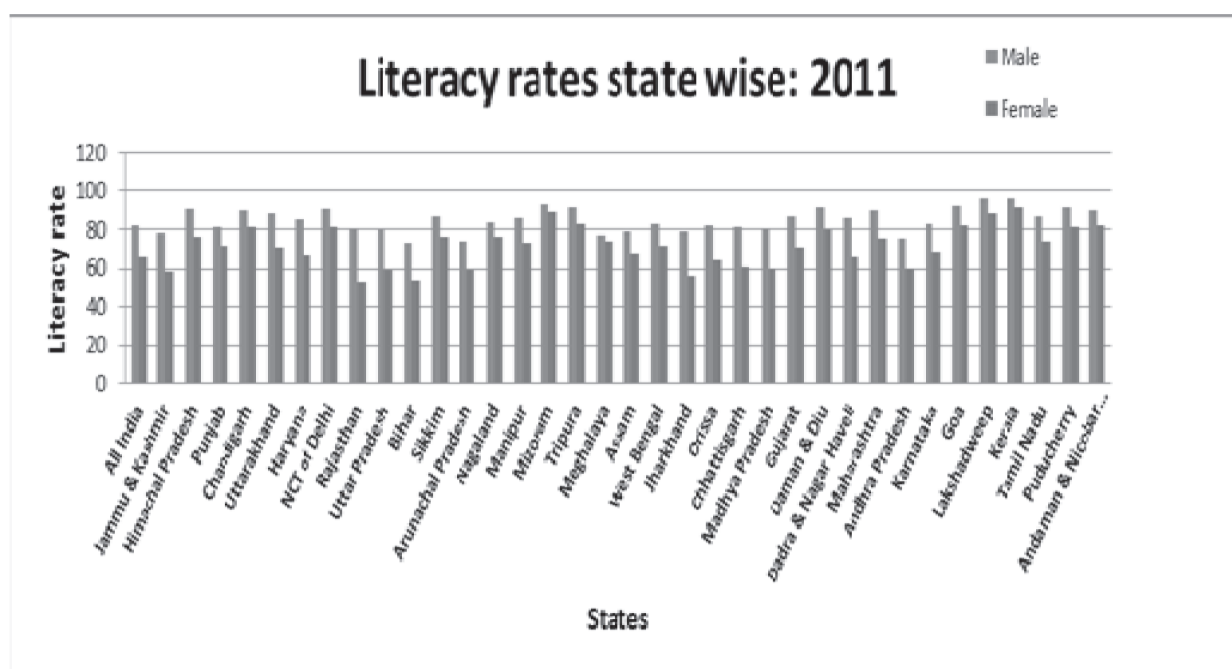
States/UT	Total Literates	Male Literates	Female Literates	Total Literacy Rate	Male Literacy rate	Female Literacy Rate
INDIA	77,84,54,120	44,42,03,762	33,42,50,358	74.04	82.14	65.46
01 Jammu & Kashmir	72,45,053	43,70,604	28,74,449	68.74	78.26	58.01
02 Himachal Pradesh	51,04,506	27,91,542	23,12,964	83.78	90.83	76.60
03 Punjab	1,89,88,611	1,06,26,788	83,61,823	76.68	81.48	71.34
04 Chandigarh	8,09,653	4,68,166	3,41,487	86.43	90.54	81.38
05 Uttarakhand	69,97,433	39,30,174	30,67,259	79.63	88.33	70.70
06 Haryana	1,69,04,324	99,91,838	69,12,486	76.64	85.38	66.77
07 NCT of Delhi	1,27,63,352	72,10,050	55,53,302	86.34	91.03	80.93
08 Rajasthan	3,89,70,500	2,41,84,782	1,47,85,718	67.06	80.51	52.66
09 Uttar Pradesh	11,84,23,805	7,04,79,196	4,79,44,609	69.72	79.24	59.26
10 Bihar	5,43,90,254	3,27,11,975	2,16,78,279	63.82	73.39	53.33
11 Sikkim	4,49,294	2,53,364	1,95,930	82.20	87.29	76.43
12 Arunachal Pradesh	7,89,943	4,54,532	3,35,411	66.95	73.69	59.57
13 Nagaland	13,57,579	7,31,796	6,25,783	80.11	83.29	76.69
14 Manipur	18,91,196	10,26,733	8,64,463	79.85	86.49	73.17
15 Mizoram	8,47,592	4,38,949	4,08,643	91.58	93.72	89.40
16 Tripura	28,31,742	15,15,973	13,15,769	87.75	92.18	83.15
17 Meghalaya	18,17,761	9,34,091	8,83,670	75.48	77.17	73.78
18 Assam	1,95,07,017	1,07,56,937	87,50,080	73.18	78.81	67.27
19 West Bengal	6,26,14,556	3,45,08,159	2,81,06,397	77.08	82.67	71.16
20 Jharkhand	1,87,53,660	1,11,68,649	75,85,011	67.63	78.45	56.21
21 Orissa	2,71,12,376	1,53,26,036	1,17,86,340	73.45	82.40	64.36
22 Chhattisgarh	1,55,98,314	89,62,121	66,36,193	71.04	81.45	60.59
23 Madhya Pradesh	4,38,27,193	2,58,48,137	1,79,79,056	70.63	80.53	60.02
24 Gujarat	4,19,48,677	2,39,95,500	1,79,53,177	79.31	87.23	70.73
25 Daman & Diu	1,88,974	1,24,911	64,063	87.07	91.48	79.59
26 Dadra & Nagar Haveli	2,28,028	1,44,916	83,112	77.65	86.46	65.93
27 Maharashtra	8,25,12,225	4,62,94,041	3,62,18,184	82.91	89.82	75.48
28 Andhra Pradesh	5,14,38,510	2,87,59,782	2,26,78,728	67.66	75.56	59.74
29 Karnataka	4,10,29,323	2,28,08,468	1,82,20,855	75.60	82.85	68.13
30 Goa	11,52,117	6,20,026	5,32,091	87.40	92.81	81.84

(Cont'd)

States/UT	Total Literates	Male Literates	Female Literates	Total Literacy Rate	Male Literacy rate	Female Literacy Rate
31 Lakshadweep	52,914	28,249	24,665	92.28	96.11	88.25
32 Kerala	2,82,34,227	1,37,55,888	1,44,78,339	93.91	96.02	91.98
33 Tamil Nadu	5,24,13,116	2,83,14,595	2,40,98,521	80.33	86.81	73.86
34 Puducherry	9,66,600	5,02,575	4,64,025	86.55	92.12	81.22
35 Andaman & Nicobar Islands	2,93,695	1,64,219	1,29,476	86.27	90.11	81.84

Source: Census report 2011.

Figure 2: Literacy rates state wise, gender wise in India (2011 census)



Source: Census of India 2011

Bottom five districts according to Female only literacy rate in India are:

1. Alirajpur in **Madhya Pradesh** with 30.97% female only literacy rate.
2. Bijapur in **Chhattisgarh** with 31.56% female only literacy rate.
3. Dakshin Bastar Dantewada in **Chhattisgarh** with 32.88% female only literacy rate.
4. Jhabua in **Madhya Pradesh** with 34.29% female only literacy rate.
5. Shrawasti in **Uttar Pradesh** with 37.07% female only literacy rate.

The participation of girls at all stages of education has been increasing steadily through the years as may be seen from Table-3. Since 1950-51 to 2010-11, the girls' participation has increased many folds in Primary, Upper Primary, Sec./Sr.Sec. stages and Hr. Education levels from 28.1% to 47.9 %, from 16.1% to 47.1 % from 13.3% to 44.7 % and from 10.0% to 40.1 % respectively. However, the girls' participation is still below fifty per cent at all stages of education.

Responsible factors for Low Literacy Rates among Women in India:

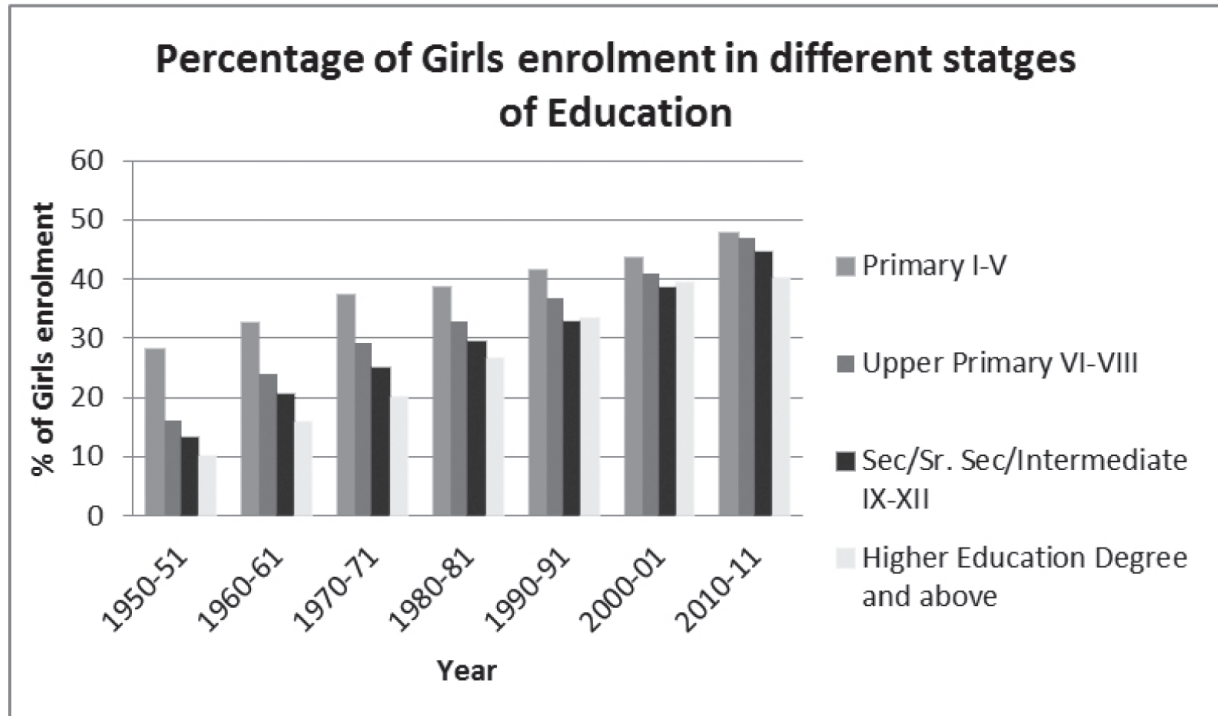
The literacy rate in the country has increased from 18.33 per cent in 1951 to 74.04 per cent in 2011 census. The female literacy rate has also increased from 8.86% to (in 1951) to 65.46 % (in 2011). It is noticed that female literacy during the period 1991-2011 has increased by 26.17 % whereas male literacy has rose by 18.01 %. Though there is an increase in female literacy rate, still 34.54 % of women are illiterates in India. (2011 census). Since 2001 the difference between male and female literacy has been in decreasing trend viz, 21.69% in 2001 to 16.68% in 2011.

Table-3: Percentage of Girls enrolment to total enrolment by stages in India,
1950-51 to 2010-11

year	Primary I-V	Upper Primary VI-VIII	Sec/Sr. Sec/Intermediate IX-XII	Higher Education Degree and above
1950-51	28.1	16.1	13.3	10.0
1960-61	32.6	23.9	20.5	16.0
1970-71	37.4	29.3	25.0	20.0
1980-81	38.6	32.9	29.6	26.7
1990-91	41.5	36.7	32.9	33.3
2000-01	43.7	40.9	38.6	39.4
2010-11	47.9	47.1	44.7	40.1

Source: Reports of the Ministry of HRD, Govt of India.

Figure3: Percentage of Girls enrolment to total enrolment by stages in India, 1950-51 to 2010-11



Source: Reports of the Ministry of HRD, Govt of India.

In spite of a number of National and International Programmes are in implementation to eradicate illiteracy from our country, especially among women, the gap between male and female literacy still persists. In this context, the factors responsible for low female literacy rate in India are identified and listed below:

- Gender based inequality.
- Social discrimination and economic exploitation
- Occupation of girl child in domestic chores
- Low enrolment of girls in schools
- Low retention rate and high dropout rate.
- Deprived of access to information and alienated from decision - making processes.

- Absence of female teachers in schools.
- Schools established in faraway places etc

Barriers to Education: (past findings)

There are several reasons for the low levels of literacy in India, not the least of which is the high level of poverty. Over one-third of the population is estimated to be living below the poverty line (The World Bank, 1997a). Although school attendance is free, the costs of books, uniforms, and transportation to school can be too much for poor families. Poor families are also more likely to keep girls at home to care for younger siblings or to work in family enterprises.

If a family has to choose between educating a son or a daughter because of financial restrictions, typically the son will be chosen. Negative parental attitudes toward educating daughters can also be a barrier to a girl's education. Many parents view educating sons as an investment because the sons will be responsible for caring for aging parents. On the other hand, parents may see the education of daughters as waste of money because daughters will eventually live with their husbands' families and the parents will not benefit directly from their education. Also, daughters with higher levels of education will likely have higher dowry expenses as they will want a comparably educated husband. However, education sometimes lowers the dowry for a girl because it is viewed as an asset by the husband's family.

Another barrier to education in India is the lack of adequate school facilities. Many states simply do not have enough class-rooms to accommodate all of the school-age children. Furthermore, the classrooms that are available often lack basic necessities such as sanitary facilities or water. In Uttar Pradesh, a recent survey found that 54 percent of schools did not have a water supply and 80 percent did not have latrines (The World Bank, 1997b). Lack of latrines can be particularly detrimental to girls' school attendance.

In some states, the inadequate supply of classrooms is further compounded by the large increase in the number of school-age children due to high population growth rates.

Lack of female teachers is another potential barrier to girls' education. Girls are more likely to attend school and have higher academic achievement if they have female teachers.

This is particularly true in highly gender-segregated societies such as India (Bellew and King, 1993; King, 1990). Currently, women account for only 29 percent of teachers at the primary level (MHRD, 1993). The proportion of teachers who are female is even lower at the university level, 22 percent of instructors (CSO, 1992). These proportions reflect the historic paucity of women with the educational qualifications to be teachers. However, the proportions are likely to change in the future as women currently account for nearly half of those being trained as teachers. Again there are differences among the states; the states with the highest literacy rates are also the states with the highest proportion of female teachers.

As long ago as 1965, the Indian government agreed to rewrite text-books so that men and women would not be portrayed in gender-stereotyped roles. However, a study of Indian textbooks done in the 1980s found that men were the main characters in the majority of lessons. In these lessons, men held high-prestige occupations and were portrayed as strong, adventurous, and intelligent. In contrast, when women were included they were depicted as weak and helpless, often as the victims of abuse and beatings (Kalia, 1988). These depictions are strong barriers for improving women's position in society.

Although, most of these limitations in women education have been minimized by the Government of India but still the threats persists.

Women's Education-The International and National Initiatives

International Initiatives: India has ratified various International Conventions and Human Rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) in 1993. CEDAW was adopted by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in December 1979, and there are more than 150 states parties to the convention.

CEDAW - 1979: This Convention calls for equal rights for women regardless their married status in all fields - political, economic, social, cultural and civil. It appeals for a national legislature to ban discrimination; recommends temporary special measures to spread equality between men and women and actions to modify social and cultural pattern that perpetuates discrimination (CEDAW - 1979).

UNICEF, Report in 1992 Conference on Education for All Girls:

Programmes of Women's Studies have attempted to dismantle stereotypes and build up women's esteem. Special studies reveal both the extent to which women have been deprived and oppressed and elements in the tradition of all civilization that promote positive images to and ease the conflicts experienced by many women in pursuit of their advancement and new roles in society.

The UAC's programme for promoting Women's Studies envisages assistance to Universities for setting up centers and cells for Women's Studies. The centers and cells are required to undertake research, develop curricula and organize training and extension work in the areas of gender equality, economic, self reliance of women, girl's education, population issues, issues of human rights and social exploration (Vina Mazumdar, 2003).

Beijing Conference: Platform for Action 1995: The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform of Action (1995) and the outcome Document adopted by the UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) Session on "Gender Equality and Development and Peace for the 21st century", titled Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform of action have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up.

Beijing Conference adopted a Declaration and Platform of Action on the concluding day. The Platform of Action is addressing the unequal access to and inadequate educational opportunities to women suggested the following strategies to be adopted by the Governments.

Strategic objective 1: Ensure equal access to education

Strategic objective 2: Eradicate illiteracy among women

Strategic objective 3: Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology and continuing education.

Strategic objective 4: Develop non-discriminate education and training

Strategic objective 5: Promote lifelong education and training for girls and women (Beijing Platform of Action - Five Years After 2002).

Education for All : The World Conference on Education for All, sponsored by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and the UNDP, held in 1990 took stock of the persistence and dimensions of the gender gap. Its final Declaration stated that drawing attention to poor environments experienced by hundreds of millions of girls, it calls for ensuring that all learners receive the nutrition, health care and general physical and emotional support they need.

National Initiatives: The development strategy in Independent India in the 1950s depended heavily on planning. Therefore the development plans prepared for Five years are referred as the FiveYear Plans. The first two plans referred to the problems of women's education and occupation. The Report of the Committee on the 'Education of Women' 1959, made extensive recommendations which led to a more focused thrust in the subsequent plans. But disparities in the literacy rates between men and women continued. These were amply substantiated by the Report of Committee on the 'Status of Women, 1974'. This led to a broader perspective and the Sixth Plan linked education to the participation of women in the development process (Status of Women, 1974).

The National Policy on Education (NPE) - 1986 revised in 1992 took an even broader view in underscoring the role of education in empowering women in order to overcome inequalities and disparities. It has been regarded as a land mark in the approach to women's education and also attempted for the first time to address itself to the basic issues of women's equality.

Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortion of the past, there will be a well conceived edge in favour of women. The National education system will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values, through redesigned curricula, text books, training and orientation of teachers, decision makes and administrators.

The NPE also provided detailed information about the recommendations of the Rammurthy Committee and Education for All by 2000 AD. This has presented an over view on the status of women's education in India since 1995 in all its aspects,

particularly empowering women through 'Mahila Samakya Programmes'. These programmes are directed to create a learning environment where women can collectively affirm their aim, the strength to demand information and knowledge and move forward towards attaining a quality life (New Education Policy, 1986, 1992).

The Eighth Five Year Plan marked the adoption of two National Plans for Action in 1992. One for children and the other one exclusively for the girl child (VIII Five Year Plan, 1992-97).

In the Ninth Plan the thrust was on strengthening the early joyful period of play and learning in the young child's life to ensure a harmonious transition from the family environment to the primary school. Towards this, special efforts were made to develop linkages between ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) and primary education. Their operational linkage aimed at reinforcing coordination of timings and location based on community appraisal and micro planning at grass root level. Girl's education was viewed as a major intervention for breaking the vicious inter-generational cycle of gender and socio-economic disadvantages. The effective expansion of day care services, linkages of child care services and primary schools was a major input to promote developmental opportunities for the girl child for participation in primary education and supportive services for women (IX Five Year Plan, 1997-2002).

During X Five Year Plan a programme called 'Sarva Siksha Abiyan' was launched with an objective - that all the children in the school going age (below 14 years) in India, must be in schools and should complete five years of schooling by 2007 (X Five Year Plan, 2002-07).

Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India has termed the XI Five Year Plan as India's Educational Plan. The NDC (National Development Council) in December 2007, places the highest priority on education as a central instrument for achieving rapid and inclusive growth. It aims at:

1. Increase literary rate for persons of age 7 years or more to 85%.
2. Lowering gender gap in literacy to 10 percentage points.
3. Reduction of dropout rate of children from elementary school from 52.2% to 20% by 2011-12.
4. Developing minimum standards of education attainment in elementary school, and by regular testing, monitoring the effectiveness of education to ensure quality (XI Five Year Plan, 2007-12).

Education for All (EPA) - Education for all, means extending educational opportunities to all, regardless of race, colour, creed, sex or ability. In the Indian context, EPA implies the following:

- Universalisation of Elementary Education - UEE.
- Expansion of Early Childhood Care and Education - ECCE.
- Equalization of Educational opportunities for women.
- Removal of regional and gender disparities
- A systematic programme for Non-Formal Education
- Imparting basic education
- Providing vocational training etc.

Gender Sensitization: Government attaches greater importance to those efforts which trigger changes in social attitudes towards women. The women's development division of the National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, New Delhi, organizes training programmes with a focus on gender issues. These programmes include para-legal training, training of elected women representatives of panchayats, leadership and organization, training of voluntary agencies reaching women awareness and gender sensitization programmes, incorporation of gender issues in development programmes etc

In addition to this the Women's Studies Centers established in various Institutions and Universities have been imparting training on Gender Sensitization to different target groups (students, officials, administrators, police personnel, Panchayat Raj functionaries etc.)

The programme of education for prevention of atrocities against women was started in 1982. Based upon the recommendations made in the National Perspective Plan (1988), and the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) the proposal for setting up 'National Resource Center's for women is now at an advanced stage.

Strategies adopted by the Government for increasing female literacy in the country:

The main strategies adopted by the Government for increasing female literacy in the country include (National Literacy Mission, 1988):

1. National Literacy Mission for imparting Functional Literacy.
2. Universalisation of Elementary Education.
3. Non-Formal Education.

Contribution of Literacy Campaigns to Female Literacy: The provision of educational opportunities for women has been an important part of the national endeavour in the field of education since India's Independence. Though these endeavours did yield significant results, gender disparity persists with uncompromising tenacity, more so in the rural areas and among the disadvantaged communities. This is not only a matter of national anxiety and concern but also a matter of national conscience. It is with this concern that the Government of India launched the National Literacy Mission in 1988 for eradication of adult literacy. Since women account for an overwhelming percentage of illiterates, the National Literacy Mission - Mission of imparting functional literacy to women was launched in 1988.

The total Literacy Campaigns launched since 1988 under the aegis of the National emphasis are making efforts to:

"Create an environment where women demand knowledge and information, empowering themselves to change their lives. Inculcate in women the confidence that change is possible, if women work collectively. Spread the message that education of women is a pre-condition for fighting against their oppression. Highlight the plight of the girl child and stress the need for universalisation of Elementary Education as a way of addressing the issue".

Some of the significant ways in which the literacy campaigns have contributed to the promotion of female literacy and women's empowerment are as follows:

- Heightened social awareness among women
- Increased school enrolment rate of girls.

- Increased self-confidence and personality development
- Promoted gender equity and women's empowerment
- Improved the status of women in the family
- Educational equity - Gender gap in literacy levels have gradually reduced
- Encouraged Women to take up entrepreneurship.
- Increased household savings and access to credit
- Provided awareness about health and hygiene

Some of the significant ways in which the literacy campaigns have contributed to the promotion of female literacy and literacy campaigns have heightened social awareness among women regarding the importance of education, both for themselves as well as for their children. Large numbers of women have been participating wholeheartedly in the literacy campaigns as learners and volunteers. Because of the campaign mode and creation of a positive environment for literacy, women receive a social sanction to participate in the literacy programs. As women came out of their homes and take part in the campaigns with great enthusiasm, they acquire a heightened sense of self-awareness and desire to gain knowledge of host of women's issues.

The literacy campaigns have also motivated and encouraged women learners to educate their children, particularly girls by enrolling them in formal schools. An evaluation study of the literacy campaign in Birbhum District of Bihar has shows that the biggest achievement of the adult literacy program in Birbhum has been its impact on girls' education. The confidence of the girls, as they perform drill or play football, is the result of the awareness among neo-literate parents that girls need to be educated and outgoing. The need to provide equal opportunity to both girls and boys has also had effect of generating greater demand for the quantity to both girls and boys has also had effect of generating greater demand for the quantity and quality of primary schooling.

In our neighboring Country Bangladesh, more than 90 lakh women are being empowered by the Grameen bank to restart their basic level of education and understanding of economic system of the country through micro-credit. Even the most illiterate women, who have not seen the school in life, are being considered as most respected member of their families by their orthodox husbands. Therefore, no one can avoid education, and no one should be allowed to run out of the education system, if a country needs to be developed socially and economically.

Considering the above, the following are the some strategies recommended to encourage girls/women's education in India.

- Involving women's groups like DWCRA and Self Help Groups in promoting women's literacy
- Providing free and compulsory education for all girls up to 20 years.
- Establishment of more number of primary school.
- Bringing out changes in the attitudes of parents and in the society.
- Inclusion of Literacy programmes in all governmental schemes.
- Effective implementation of follow up programme.
- Removal of gender bias in the school curriculum
- Establishment of more number of NFE (Non-Formal Education) schools to enroll girls and women of different age groups.
- Widening the scope of Distance Education Programme to cover all categories of people especially rural women.

Conclusion

The right of every individual to education is one of the first provisions of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. But education is often neglected in societies struggling to meet the many needs of their people. Recently education has received

greater priority as Planners and Policy makers finally recognized it as a key factor in determining the pace of development. Creating educational opportunities for girls and women is strongly emphasized in the work of the UN. CEDEW suggests 'encouraging co-education' as one way of eliminating the stereotyping of women. Education, being the most powerful instrument for empowering women assumes special priority in the recent plans and programmes of National and International action. Concerted efforts are also made to bring more women into the purview of education. In spite of these many provisions, still there is a wide gap between male and female literacy levels in India. Keeping this in view the programme of action for future has to be formulated so as to reduce the gender gap as well as illiteracy rate among girls and women.

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