

# GENDER DISPARITY IN EDUCATION SYSTEM OF INDIA

Khushboo Zeb<sup>1</sup>, Aarfa Mohammad<sup>2</sup>  
Research Scholars  
Department of Political Science  
AMU, Aligarh

## Abstract

The status of the education system of India is undoubtedly high, but still reluctant to solve the equity issues. The orthodoxy in societal norms and patriarchy is still carried out in many places in India. It has lowered the status of women as compared to the male counterpart. Regardless of the variety of opportunities available, women are still struggling for higher education and better employment opportunities. It has been claimed that female are denied for their basic 'Right to Education'. Their enrolments in primary and secondary education are low as compared to male. Many of the theories claim that education plays a pivotal role in shaping the personality of an individual. But the phrase "Education for All" has not been addressed appropriately as far as women are a concern. The present study deals with gender inequality issues against women, with special reference to the education system of India.

**Keywords:** *Social Exclusion, Education, Gender Disparity*

## INTRODUCTION

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world"

(Nelson Mandela)

Women comprise half of the total population of the country. The reduction in the gender gap in education is of utmost important for the overall progress of the country as well as for empowering women.<sup>1</sup> In a developing country like India, education level of the nation is considered as an important indicator as it influences the quality of life, awareness among the individuals and also plays a vital role in the social transformation of the society. Hence in order to achieve higher literacy rate, almost all the countries in the world have been striving to develop a strong education system.<sup>2</sup> However, in India gender disparity in education is a serious problem especially among girls in rural areas and other backward section of society. Since decades many policies have been enacted to address educational equity among women. Moreover, it has also succeeded in achieving a high enrolment rate in elementary education of girls. According to 2005 India Human Development Survey (IHDS), this study reviews many social background factors, such as access to learning resources and cultural attitudes regarding the education of girls that may contribute to

ongoing gender gaps in learning.<sup>3</sup> The biases against girl resume with access to schooling. Moreover, several dimensions of human and social development have a strong correlation with an education of girls. Since the female brings a low return, therefore the amount spends on female education is relatively low than male education. However, the gender gap in primary education is less but the disparity against a female in secondary and higher education continues to remain an issue.<sup>4</sup>

Higher education constitutes the most vital resource for building the nation and in improving the quality of life of women. It is also estimated that strengthening of the higher education would increase access to education for women and enable them to pursue careers of their choice and to contribute their full potential for building the nation. However, gender disparity is highly prevalent in higher education.<sup>5</sup>

In Indian society, the discrimination against girl child begins before her birth in the form of infanticides, abortion, and feticides which results in gender imbalances with 933 females per thousands of males (Census of India 2001). The data of 2001 census shows that the 75% males and 54% females were literate.<sup>6</sup> Women are considered as household breadwinner because of their lower education and less workforce participation rate.<sup>7</sup> Despite various measures undertaken by the government and local bodies to reduce the inequality in education, gender disparity still exist.<sup>8</sup>

## Review of Literature

**Jandhyala B.G. Tilak (1979)** in his study “Inequality in education in India” has discussed the concept of inequality in education in India. The author also scrutinizes inequality by caste in schools- inequality in educational opportunities, and in inequality in educational attainments, and the resulting inequalities outside the schools in the society in the attainment of occupational and economic positions. Further, the paper also critically evaluates the public policy towards reducing inequality and argues for a shift in emphasis from school reforms to in “out of school environment”.<sup>9</sup>

**Shiv Prakash Katiyar (2016)** in his article “Gender Disparity in Literacy in India” analyses gender disparity in literacy across the states and union territories. The first part of this paper examines literacy trends in India with special reference to the period 1901-2011. The second part examines patterns of literacy in India and last part provides details of gender disparity with respect to male and females across the country. The paper also tries to identify the major causes behind gender disparity by explaining the reasons for its presence despite several policies made by the government. The study looks at future projections of gender disparity in literacy levels and the possible impact on the overall development of women in this country. The paper concludes by saying that there are urgent needs to focus on female literacy to address the issue of gender inequality.<sup>10</sup>

## Objectives

1. To study the status of gender inequality in India regarding the education of girls.
2. The main objective of the research paper is to analyze the literacy gap between male and female at the primary, secondary and higher educational level.
3. To find out the factors responsible for educational inequality among the two genders.
4. The study attempts to throw some light on the educational policy of India.

## Research Methodology

The data based on research methodology is descriptive and analytical in nature. To analyze the table, data has been collected from secondary sources. Census wise literacy rate of male and female has been published by the Office of Registrar General, Govt of India. Secondly, a number of female per hundred male enrolled by stage of education has been taken from the website of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt of India.

**Table: 1 Census wise Literacy rates by sex in India (1951-2011)**

Year	Literacy Rates			Male-Female Literacy Gap
	Male	Female	Total	
1951	27.16	8.86	18.33	18.30
1961	40.40	15.35	28.30	25.05
1971	45.96	21.97	34.45	23.98
1981	56.38	29.76	43.57	26.62
1991	64.13	39.29	52.21	24.84
2001	75.26	53.67	64.83	21.59
2011	82.14	65.46	74.04	16.68

**Source: Census 2011, Office of Registrar General, India**

The table no (1) depicts the literacy rate of male and female since (1951-2011). According to the 1951 census, the literacy rate of male and female is 27.16% and 8.86%. The data from 1951 to 2011 shows that the literacy rate of female is increasing and is highest in 2011 with 65.46%. Despite increasing the literacy rate of female, the data represent that there is a large gap between the literacy rate of male and female and it can be due to the apathy towards the female child.

**Table: 2 Number of Female per hundred Male enrolled by stages of education (2005-2015)**

Years	Primary (I-V)	Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	Secondary (IX-X)	Senior Secondary (XI-XII)	Higher Education
2005-06	87	81	73	72	62
2006-07	88	82	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*	94	95	89	87	81
2013-14*	93	95	89	89	85
2014-15*	93	95	91	90	85

**Source: Department of Higher Education, 2016, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt of India, New Delhi**

The above table mentions the number of female per hundred male enrolled at primary, secondary and higher level (2005-2015). Under the 86th amendment Act, 2002 and the right to education act, 2009, the government has made education free and compulsory for all children between 6-14 years of age. But, in reality, the picture is somewhat different. According to 2014-15, govt report, the educational statistics indicate that the number of girls enrolled per 100 boys is 93 up to V class and 95 in class VI-VIII. As per 100 boys enrolment of girls in Secondary and senior secondary school is 91, 90 and in higher education enrolment of the female is 62. Being the third largest country in higher education after China and the United States, women accord lower position in many institutions of higher education. The table also indicates that the education of girls in the primary is high as compared to secondary and higher level. Above, all we can say that gender disparity still exists at primary, secondary and higher level of education.

### **Factors associated with educational achievement**

1. Despite improvements in educational access over the past several decades, social background is still found to be associated with learning outcomes, especially in primary education. In India, many children fight against historical inequality and attainment gaps and other social background factors often emerge in primary school. However, achievement gaps based on gender, region, and other social background factors are prominent in primary school and the children with impoverished backgrounds may also enter school with a diminished readiness to learn.<sup>11</sup> In India, the regional differences in educational background occur especially among rural female and those living in urban poverty.<sup>12</sup>
2. The poor families receive less access to high-quality education resources. The lower-income families may struggle to invest in educational expenses. Their children are more prone to child labor. It is a reality that insufficient finances among lower-income families reduces the chances of sending their girls to school and thus pushes them to household and child care responsibilities.<sup>13</sup> The researcher points out that the influence of socio-economic background and availability of educational resources is interconnected.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in developing countries like India research indicates that the quality of schooling may be influential in encouraging the academic success of students.<sup>15</sup> The girls enrolled in private schools are at lower rates than boys and are less engaged with private tutoring. Together all these factors contribute to overall expenditures on education is higher for boys than girls, even with the



existence of special fee reduction policies for girls in some areas.<sup>16</sup> Even with the existence of special fee reduction policies for girls in some areas, expenditure on the education of boys is higher than girls.

3. Historically, the enrolment rate of a girl child is less than the boys. The lack of a nearby school and cultural attitude of society towards female education reduces their growth of enrolment in upper primary level in a comparison to boys.<sup>17</sup> Both boys and girls are also moving from primary school to higher education levels at nearly equal rates (84% of girls and 86% of boys in 2006), however despite this improvement, still girls lag behind boys at the secondary level.<sup>18</sup> They may also dedicate less time to school learning activities such as completing their homework. Reasons for declining of girls in school-related activities include the need to fulfill household responsibilities such as domestic work and caring for younger siblings. Other grounds referred for girls dropping out or spending less time in school-related activities include the burden of school expenses, a lack of parental interest in educating girls, and also not allowed to travel to distant schools, and the lack of female teachers.<sup>19</sup>
4. Regarding the education of girl's attitudes of family and community are also related to gender differences in educational outcomes. These attitudes are embedded in cultural norms and are influenced by marriage and kinship patterns which may lead parents to spend more financial and emotional resources in educating boys than girls.<sup>20</sup> A number of factors influence negative attitudes toward the education of daughters. One concern relates to savings for dowry, which may limit the amount of money that parents have to spend on their education or generate a fear that having educated them may result in having to pay higher marriage costs and dowry. However, differences in educational expenditure may result from parents' dependence upon a son's support in old age.<sup>21</sup>

Although government primary schools do not charge tuition, parents must pay for school uniforms, books, and transportation. These items cost can be prohibitive for poor households with many children.<sup>22</sup>

## Educational Policy of India

In India, women face much discrimination at every level in society; they are not treated at par with men, socially, economically or politically, and as a result, they fall far behind men in almost all spheres of life.<sup>23</sup> The Yearbook of United Nations 1956 maintained, "... equality in educational opportunities was closely linked to equality in political, economic, civil and social matters. Education for girls should be compulsory and the curricula for boys and girls should be identical".<sup>24</sup> The state has played an influential role in providing women access to education. Moreover, the government has articulated provisions for education such as free and compulsory education until the age of 14, National policy on education or its various schemes and initiatives for enhancing access to education among them.<sup>25</sup> The few schemes and initiatives taken by the government of India are discussed below:

- The National Policy on Education 1986, revised in 1992, brought a revolution in women education. It focuses on gender imbalances in educational attainment and achievement. Similarly, it also

encourages infrastructure and empowerment of women through education .<sup>26</sup> The NPE / POA (1986) which contributed towards a significant increase in domestic and international investment in primary education.<sup>27</sup>

- The Mahila Samakhya programme aims at the empowerment of women in rural areas particularly of women from socially and economically marginalized groups. Women from remote, underdeveloped areas or from weaker social groups across more than 21,000 villages fell under the Mahila Samakhya Scheme.<sup>28</sup>
- The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) includes promoting gender equality and empowering women. The Yearbook of United Nations 1956 maintained, "... equality in educational opportunities It was articulated in the shape of Goal 3, which primarily emphasized education. The target set in consonance to goal 3 is:

To eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015.<sup>29</sup>

- The Beijing Plan of Action (1995) which outlined 12 critical areas including women's access to education, vocational training, science and technology, and non-discriminatory education and training.<sup>30</sup>
- In order to achieve the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), the Tenth Plan Document emphasized on four parameters. Firstly, it was to ensure Universal Access of elementary education. Secondly, it was to increase Universal Enrolment of school going age children. Thirdly, it was emphasized to control the dropout both at the primary and upper primary level. Alternatively, it ensures Universal Retention of enrolled children till they complete elementary education. Fourthly, it was to encourage enrolment of girls in order to ensure gender equity.<sup>31</sup>
- Another government initiative, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), was started in 2001, with the intent to provide education to children between 6 and 14 years by 2010. The programme focuses especially on girls and children with challenged social or financial backgrounds, charged with providing infrastructure and relevant resource material in the form of free textbooks to children in remote areas. The effectiveness of the programme is yet to be measured.<sup>32</sup>
- The District Primary Education Project (DPEP) helped augment resources and made primary education an important priority of the Government of India. The project sought "to increase coverage of girls, improve their academic achievements and reduce gender disparities in respect to enrolment, retention and learning achievements." DPEP adopted a two-pronged strategy to meet the gender and social equity goals:

Make the education system more responsive to the needs and constraints of girls and children from disadvantaged communities, and Create community demand for girls' education and enabling conditions for greater participation.<sup>33</sup>

- The enactment of the 93<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment Bill (passed by the Lower House of Parliament on 28 November 2001 and the Upper House of Parliament in December 2002), making universal elementary education a fundamental right of every child.<sup>34</sup>
- Further, the Eleventh five year plan has placed the highest priority on education. It viewed education as the critical input for achieving fast growth which also results in inclusive growth. The Eleventh Plan also presented an integrated and comprehensive strategy covering all aspects of different educational levels.<sup>35</sup>

Besides these recent policy interventions, specific dedicated policies were also framed since the early years of India's independence. For instance, government set-up the Kothari Commission in 1966, the commission recommended that the state expenditure on education in the country should increase to the level of 6 percent of the Gross National Product till 1986.<sup>36</sup>

The Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), which is the landmark scheme of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, highlights wide disparities in the higher education system. Higher education, perhaps, is the most crucial factor which leads to the accomplishment of human development and this, in turn, leads to gender equity and women empowerment.<sup>37</sup>

## Findings

1. Women are the essential element of society. The development of a nation is impossible without educated women. Therefore, to build a strong nation women education must be encouraged.
2. The patriarchal structure of society considers educating a male child is more important than the female child. The truth underlies in this proverb "If we educate a man, you educate an individual but if you educate women, you educate a nation".
3. The gross enrolment rate of girls at primary is satisfactory but poor in secondary and higher education level. The secondary educations always remain a question and the child marriage could be one of the reasons for dropout of a female child in secondary level.
4. The burden of household activities and care of siblings are one of the reasons of dropout of a female in primary education. In every decision making, girl's voice is excluded. Therefore, it is necessary to indulge female in decision making rather than complete submission to domestic work.

5. Most of the communities and families consider girl child a low return than boys. Therefore, they did not invest in educating a girl.
6. The poor families are unable to provide education to their girl child because of low income.
7. The gender stereotype in the society still exists which restrict the women to go out and receive an education. Some of the parents didn't send their girl child because of eve-teasing, and violence that is prevailing against women in India. Therefore, they have to be given complete safety by nullifying the risk of sexual assault in schools and surroundings. This gives strength and confidence among them to continue their schooling.
8. In higher education, they had to go through several barricades such as the parental pressure of marriage, societal pressure and other cultural norms.
9. It is deeply entrenched in people's mind that arts and education are suitable for women and science and technology are meant for a male. Therefore, girls must be raised with confidence to achieve excellence in all domains.
10. Educating mother will educate a whole family. In fact, an educated mother will enhance and empower their lives. Thus, empowering women will bring their daughters to schools.
11. The access to female education is increasing but with low pace. The better counseling for girls and parents is necessary to bring improvement in education. Hence, educated parents would help every girl child to explore themselves in a better environment.

## Conclusion

Education plays a vital role in influencing the quality of life and social transformation of society. It also creates awareness among the masses. Therefore, all the countries are trying to bring gender equality at all level of education through special benefits in the terms of fellowship and fees concession to girls to encourage them for education.

However, women are excluded from the various sphere of life which hampers the development of the nation. The inclusion of women in education develop self-esteem, confidence, helps to build a positive image, developing their ability to think critically, foster better decision making and help them to make a good choice in the education of their children. In addition, education brings awareness of rights and entitlement among women so that they could enhance their participation on an equal footing in all areas. The independence of women would contribute largely to society, polity and economy.



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