

A Gender Gap in Literacy and Women's Participation in Higher Education

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The spread of literacy over the years in any nation is generally associated with socio-political and cultural environment. It acts as a catalyst for social upliftment initiation or taken up for health, hygiene, environmental degradation control, employment of weaker section of the society. This article intends to explain the population in India over the years, the literacy rate of the population, gender gap in literates, women's participation in higher education and the secondary data is taken from Census report of India. To identify the participation of women in higher education All India Survey on Higher Education conducted by Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, New Delhi is considered for the study.

Key Words: Gender, Literacy, Higher Education, Enrolment, Drop out.

Introduction

Literacy and level of education are the basic indicators of the development achieved by the society. The spread of literacy over the years in any nation is generally associated with socio-political and cultural environment. Thus, literacy forms the important input for the overall development of the nation. It enables both men and women to comprehend their social, political and cultural environment better and respond to it appropriately. When it comes to higher level of education it leads to a greater awareness and also contributes in improvement of economic and social conditions. It acts as a catalyst for social upliftment initiation or taken up for health, hygiene, environmental degradation control, employment of weaker section of the society.

Hunter (2017) documented that today around 900 million people in the world cannot read or write. According to UNESCO, 287 million, or 37% of the world's illiterate people, are Indian. While education is every child's basic right, severe poverty and deprivation, population growth, war zones and natural catastrophes are depriving many children of a world of books and learning. India's literacy rate is about 74% - leaving a quarter of the population without basic reading and writing skills. Poverty and illiteracy are closely linked - and with the second largest population in the world, India is home to one-third of all world poverty. While 22% of Indians fall below the poverty line, it has been estimated that more than half of the nation's population lacks

even basic literacy skills. India's poverty situation is improving but problems related to poor health and sanitation, low levels of education, unemployment and malnutrition, remain.

Dhawan (2013) reported the All India Education Survey conducted by NCERT that despite the overall growth in enrolment, there is cause for worry. A comparison of enrolment data from 2002 to 2009 for primary schools shows a drop in enrolment in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu . The data confirms the disquieting fact that girl's education continues to be interrupted after primary school with the percentage of enrolment declining at the higher secondary school stage. While there is a maximum increase of 48.13% in girl's enrolment in primary schools, the figure dips to 42.56% in higher secondary schools. Similar trend is observed in percentage of girl's enrolment in schools in rural areas. The article intends to explain the population in India over the years, the literacy rate of the population, gender gap in literates and women's participation in higher education.

Methodology

To understand the literacy rate, secondary data is taken from Census report of India. To indentify the participation of women in higher education, All India Survey on Higher Education conducted by Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, New Delhi is considered for the study. The survey covered all the institutions in the states of India engaged in imparting the higher education.

Results and Discussion

In India gurukul system began to decline as the education system promoted by the British began to gradually take over. Number of English primary schools grew from 82,916 to 134,866 and the number of students in English Schools grew from 2,061,541 to 10,525,943 between the year 1881–82 and 1946–47, The number of Literacy rates in accordance to British in India rose from an estimated 3.2 per cent in 1872, to 16.1 per cent in 1941 and it was only 0.35 per cent of the women literate during the British rule in India. In a country like India, literacy is the main foundation for socio-economic status of women. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India. Over the years India has seen tremendous changes socially, economically and globally. After 2011 census, the literacy rate was found to be 74.04 per cent. Again to note that compared to the male literacy, female literacy rate is about 9 per cent higher, though this is a great achievement, it is still a matter of concern that people in India are illiterates who cannot read and write. The number of children especially the female illiterates is high in rural India.

Table1 shows the trend in literacy in India with rural urban difference since 1951. It is observed that there is an increase in literacy rate over the years both in urban and rural area. When compared between sexes, the female literacy rate is always lower to men. Between the year 2001 and 2011 female literacy rate has increased to 26

per cent in rural and in urban it is 22 per cent. Though increase in literacy rate of male found to be less when compared to female both in rural and urban areas the overall rate shows increase in difference for male population.

Every year there is a school going dropouts in India (Table 2). In the year 2001 the female dropouts in class 1-10 was 71.50 per cent and male dropouts were only 66.40. The same difference between male (46.70) and female (48.10) dropouts was observed during the year 2013-2014. In the year 2013-14 it was observed that female dropouts have declined over the years tremendously from 71.50 to 46.70 when compared to male dropouts which only 48.10.

The rural urban differences based on the age wise shows that (Table 3) in the rural area, female dropouts are higher i.e., 62.7 per cent in the age group of 5-15 years whereas, in the age group of 16-24 years male dropouts are high in number with 41.5 per cent compared to female drop outs (36.7%). Between the ages of 25 to 29 years, the drop out in both the gender is 4 per cent and 0.6 per cent in rural area.

According to National Sample Survey 2014 (Table 4), major reasons for dropouts of women in higher education is mainly due to the engagement in domestic activities (329 per 1000 in rural 231 per 1000 in urban) men dropout to this reason is very less (24 in urban and 59 in rural) where as men's dropout is higher both in rural (299 per 1000) and urban (366 per 1000). Lack of interest in pursuing higher education was found to be one of the major reasons for drop outs which show higher than women ration both in rural and urban area. Financial constraint is the second largest reason for the rural population to discontinue the education (Male: 236, Female: 154 per thousand). The reason for dropout clearly indicates due to the patriarchal dominance women are considered for domestic work. Marriage plays a vital role in women dropouts both in urban and rural areas.

Between the census years 2001 and 2011, number of female per 1000 male in higher education in major discipline (Table 5) evidenced that in all the discipline women enrollment has increased over the decade. In arts discipline it is higher i.e., 81.40 in the year 2001 and has increased to 86.00 for every 1000 male. The least enrolment is 28.7 for 1000 male in 2001 in the engineering and technical courses and has increased tremendously to 40.3 for 1000 male in 2009-2010. In medicine during the year 2005 and 2006 and 2009 & 2010 there was an increase in enrolment ratio of 90.1 in 2005-06 onwards and in 2009-10 enrolment ratio is 90.90.

The choice of higher education for women in table 6 found to be humanities which comes under general course (54.3%) Engineering- technical programmes (29.4%) and other include agriculture, education, and charter accountancy (28.5%). Women also opt engineering as one of the major professional course to pursue their

higher education. Whereas engineering is the first choice of preference for (46.2%) of men, humanities are the second choice (45.7%) and commerce (19.8 %).

Conclusion

In general, the female literacy rate in India is always lower to that of the male literacy rate which shows the gender gap. This is due to socio-economic and cultural issues that exist especially among rural families. In terms of social stigma, lack of commuting facilities to reach the schools and colleges and other safety issues are some of the major factors that stops families with female children to let children attend schools or to go for higher education. Though the literacy rate of women has increased the gender disparity is wider in India. The increase of female literacy rate in India has provided a positive indication in terms of women in leadership and women in decision making. Studies have indicated that female literacy in India is a strong predictor of the use of contraception among married Indian couples even when women does not otherwise have economic independence.

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Table 1 Literacy Rate in India 1951-2011

Year	Rural			Urban			Combined			Male-Female Gap in Literacy Rate
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Person	
1951	4.9	19.0	12.1	22.3	45.6	34.6	8.9	27.2	18.3	18.3
1961	10.1	34.3	22.5	40.5	66.0	54.4	15.4	40.4	28.3	25.1
1971	15.5	48.6	27.9	48.8	69.8	60.2	21.9	46.0	34.5	24.0
1981	21.7	49.6	36.0	56.3	76.7	67.2	29.8	56.4	43.6	26.6
1991	30.2	56.9	36.0	64.1	81.1	67.2	39.3	64.1	52.2	24.8
2001	46.7	71.4	59.4	73.2	86.7	80.3	53.7	75.3	64.8	21.6
2011	58.8	78.6	67.8	79.9	89.7	84.1	65.5	82.1	74.0	16.7
% increase in 2011 over 2001	26%	10%	14%	9%	3%	5%	22%	9%	14%	

Source: http://populationcommission.nic.in/content/933_1_LiteracyRate.aspx

Note:

- Literacy rates for 1951, 1961 and 1971 Census relate to population aged five years and above.
- The rates for the 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011 Census relate to the population aged seven years and above.
- The 1981 Literacy rates exclude Assam where the 1981 Census could not be conducted.
- The 1991 Census Literacy rates exclude Jammu & Kashmir.

Table 2 Year Wise Drop-out Rate at Different Stages of School Education

Year	I-V Classes		I-VIII Classes		I-X Classes	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
2000-01	41.90	39.70	57.70	50.30	71.50	66.40
2001-02	39.88	38.36	56.92	52.91	68.59	64.16
2002-03	33.72	35.85	53.45	52.28	64.97	60.72
2003-04	28.57	33.74	52.92	51.90	64.92	60.98
2004-05	25.42	31.81	51.28	50.49	63.88	60.15
2005-06	21.77	28.70	49.00	48.67	63.56	60.10
2006-07	26.80	24.60	45.20	46.40	61.50	58.60
2007-08	24.41	25.70	41.34	43.72	57.33	56.55
2008-09	25.80	29.60	36.90	41.10	54.40	54.00
2009-10	28.50	31.80	44.20	41.10	51.80	53.30
2010-11	25.40	29.00	41.20	40.60	47.70	50.20
2011-12	21.00	23.40	40.00	41.50	52.20	48.60
2012-13(P)	19.40	23.00	35.70	41.80	50.30	50.40
2013-14(P)	18.30	21.20	32.90	39.20	46.70	48.10

P-Provisional

Source: Educational Statistics at a Glance 2014

Table 3 Age Wise Percentage Distribution of Education Dropouts/Discontinued across Place of Residence

Age-group of Dropout/ Discontinued	Rural			Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
5-15	58.1	62.7	60.3	45	41.4	43.3
16-24	41.5	36.7	39.2	53.6	57.4	55.4
25-29	0.4	0.6	0.5	1.4	1.2	1.3
All	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: NSS 71st Round 2014

Table 4 Per 1000 distribution of dropout/discontinued by reasons

Major Reasons	Rural		Urban		Both	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Not interested in education	251	162	208	143	238	156
Financial constraints	236	154	237	149	236	152
Engaged in domestic activities	59	329	24	231	48	297
Engaged in economic activities	299	39	336	69	310	49
School is far off	6	42	2	18	5	34
Unable to cope up with studies	55	51	53	36	54	46
Completed desired level/class	45	43	83	113	57	65
Marriage		124		171		139
Other reasons*	48	57	58	70	51	62
All	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000

Source: NSS 71st Round 2014

*include (for all): timings of educational institution not suitable, language/medium of instruction used unfamiliar, inadequate number of teachers, quality of teachers not satisfactory, unfriendly atmosphere at school, preparation for competitive examination and others. For girl students only, additionally: non-availability of female teacher, non-availability of girls' toilet.

Table 5 Year wise Number of Females per 100 Males in Higher Education in Major Disciplines

Year	Arts	Science	Commerce	Engineering & Technical	Medicine
2000-01	81.40	61.40	55.30	28.7	68.20
2001-02	77.80	64.20	63.10	33.1	68.40
2002-03	82.24	60.55	57.95	29.17	71.19
2003-04	85.70	75.90	51.20	17.5	72.50
2004-05	87.30	84.30	51.60	31.1	53.10
2005-06	77.70	71.20	65.20	36.1	90.1*
2006-07	76.90	71.20	60.90	35.8	89.5*
2007-08	79.60	71.00	63.53	39.3	79.66
2008-09	86.80	66.90	65.30	39.7	88.31
2009-10	86.00	72.70	67.30	40.3	90.90

Source: Department of Secondary & Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

* Includes dentistry, nursing, pharmacy, Ayurvedic and Unani.

Table 6 Percentage distribution of students by course for general and Technical/Professional Education

Course	Male	Female
General		
Humanities	45.7	54.3
Science	34.5	27.8
Commerce	19.8	18
All	100	100
Technical/Professional		
Medicine	3.9	13.7
Engineering	46.2	29.4
Law	1.5	1.6
Management	6.8	7.9
IT/Computer Courses	10.1	12.4
Courses from ITI/ recognised vocational institutes	16.1	6.5
Others*	15.4	28.5
All	100	100

Source: NSS 71st Round 2014

* Includes agriculture, education, chartered accountancy & similar courses not mentioned anywhere

