

Gender Inequality and Education: An Analysis in Indian Context

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Abstract:

Gender equality is not just a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Realizing this universal reality, as part of its Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations has placed emphasis on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Promoting gender equality and empowering women was one of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals which have recently been expanded into the Sustainable Development Goals. Human capital is the most important ingredient in the overall development of a society. Education is a key element as it has the potential to increase human capital; it removes inequality from society, impacts the growth of employment and improves a country's GNP. Literacy is the basic building block and a crucial element in the development of education in society. The major objectives of the research paper are to analyze the gender disparity from 1901–2011 based on Literacy Rates in India and to discuss the role of education in reducing gender disparity in the society.

Keywords: Gender, Inequality and Education

Introduction:

Gender disparity has been considered as one of the major problem of present society. Lack of proper education, poverty, employment, violence and discriminations are the common issues of gender inequality in the society. Girls are not a homogeneous category, yet nowhere do they enjoy a status which is equal to that of men. In their case, the dimensions of reality, class, caste and tribe, religion, and disabilities are further complicated by contemporary political and socio-economic forces to create cumulative disadvantages. As a result of this, girls have to bear multiple burdens of inequality. Human capital is the most important ingredient in the overall development of a society. Education is a key element as it has the potential to increase human capital; it removes inequality from society, impacts the growth of employment and improves a country's GNP. Literacy is the basic building block and a crucial element in the development of education in society. In the context of Indian society, which is essentially patriarchal, it is women and girls who suffer because of low accessibility to education. In other words, gender becomes an important factor in determining the education level of an individual (India Human Development Report, 2011). Women constitute approximately half, that is, 48.46 per cent of the total population of India (IAEA Newsletter, 2014). However, a large gap exists between the male and female population if we examine their levels of literacy. There is a large male–female gap of literacy in India. According to the 2011 Census of India, it is about 16 per cent between the two reference groups. The

problem of illiteracy, especially among women, is a huge area of concern not only in India but also across the world as it directly impacts development efforts.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyze the gender disparity from 1901–2011 based on Literacy Rates in India.
2. To discuss the role of education in reducing gender disparity in the society.

Methodology:

The methodology of the present study is descriptive in nature. The study is purely based on secondary sources. All the necessary data are collected from books, journals, research articles, doctoral theses, dissertations etc.

Discussion on Findings:

In Indian context, women are not treated at par with man because in patriarchal society the status of man is always higher than women in all spheres of life. Women face much discrimination in social, economic or political aspects; as a result they fall far behind men. This simple fact is evident from the reports of several committees constituted at various levels for the development of women. The National Committee on Women's Education (1957–1959), chaired by Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh, made a strong recommendation for the education of women. Stating that it should be a top priority, the report suggested that bold and determined efforts should be made to narrow down the existing gap between the education of men and women in as short a time as possible. The National Policy on Education, 1968 stressed that the education of girls should receive priority, not only on grounds of social justice but also because this would be a way to accelerate social transformation. It was the National Policy on Education, 1986 that stressed that this new policy would lay a special emphasis on the removal of disparities and equalize educational opportunities by attending to the specific needs of those who had been denied equality so far.

Gender equality is not just a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Realizing this universal reality, as part of its Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations has placed emphasis on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Promoting gender equality and empowering women was one of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals which have recently been expanded into the Sustainable Development Goals. It included the equal participation of girls at the primary and secondary levels and literacy parity between young women and men. To achieve this goal, the Government of India launched the Saakshar Bharat Mission, a new scheme of the National Literacy Mission on International Literacy Day, 8 September 2009. This scheme covered 365 districts in 26 states and UTs, all of which had adult female literacy rates below 50 per cent according to the 2001 Census of India. The primary focus of the mission was on women and its target was to cover a total of 70 million adults for 15 years and above age. The Mission aimed to reduce gender and other disparities by providing basic education in the country (Government of India, 1999).

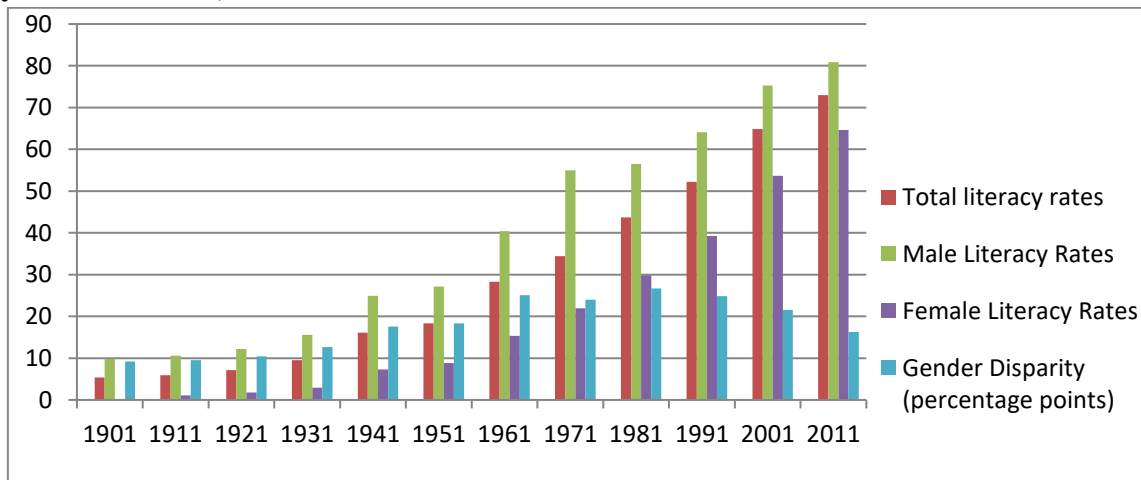
Table 1. Literacy Rates in India, 1901–2011

Serial No	Year	Age Group	Total literacy rates	Male Literacy Rates	Female Literacy Rates	Gender Disparity (percentage points)
1	1901	All population	5.39	9.83	0.06	9.23
2	1911	All population	5.92	10.56	1.05	9.51
3	1921	All population	7.16	12.21	1.81	10.40
4	1931	All population	9.50	15.59	2.93	12.66
5	1941	All population	16.10	24.90	7.30	17.60
6	1951	5 and above	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
7	1961	5 and above	28.30	40.40	15.34	25.06
8	1971	5 and above	34.45	54.95	21.97	23.98
9	1981	7 and above	43.67	56.50	29.85	26.65
10	1991	7 and above	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
11	2001	7 and above	64.84	75.26	53.67	21.59
12	2011	7 and above	73.00	80.90	64.60	16.30

Source: Shah (1999); Encyclopedia of Indian Adult Education, 1999 and Census of India website, www.censusindia.gov.in

Table 1 reveals that the literacy rate for people, both males and females, has been increasing continuously from 1901 to 2011. These figures also reveal that gender disparity in literacy has increased continuously from 1901 to 1961 and it decreased by 1.08 percentage points for the first time in 1971. Then it again increased by 2.67 percentage points and became 26.65 in 1981. Thereafter, it had been decreasing continuously until 2011. When we compare gender disparity across different years, we found that gender disparity was the lowest (9.23 per cent) in 1901, while it was the highest (26.65 per cent) in 1981. The rate of gender disparity was the highest at 6.76 per cent during 1951–1961 and the lowest, 0.28, during 1901–1911. The maximum decrease, 5.29 per cent, in gender disparity was recorded during 2001–2011.

Literacy Rates in India, 1901–2011



Source: Census of India 2011

Table 2: Sex Ratio in India

Year	Sex Ratio
1901	972
1911	964
1921	955
1931	950
1941	945
1951	946
1961	941
1971	930
1981	934
1991	929
2001	933
2011	940

Source: Census of India 2011

Without analyzing the sex ratio of India, it will be incomplete to put any conclusions on gender disparity. Sex ratio is used to describe the number of females per 1000 of males. Sex ratio is a great source of finding out the disparity between men and women. According to the census data of India 2011 showed that the sex ratio in the country was 1000:940 i.e.940 females against 1000 males. In 2001, this ratio was 1000: 933.This shows that there is a rise in the sex ratio from 2001 to 2011. The sex ratio in India was not good at all since decades. But in the last five decades it is revolving around 933:1000.

Role of Education in Reducing Gender Disparity in the Society:

Education is one of the most powerful tools for promoting gender equality and empowering individuals to create a more equitable society. Access to quality education has the potential to transform lives, break down barriers, and challenge stereotypes. Education plays a key role in reducing gender inequality by providing girls and women with the skills and confidence to challenge discrimination. Education can also help break cycles of gender inequalities that are passed down through generations. While government initiatives like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao aim to improve these statistics, ongoing support is required to create a more equitable environment that supports every child's educational journey (source: pib.gov.in, 2016). Gender equality is a basic human right and described as, “all human beings are born equal”. It means that everyone, whether born as male, female or intersex, should be able to develop their full potential and live in freedom and dignity. Education is the only means through which we can reduce the gender inequality in the society. Following measures needs to be employed for reducing gender inequality from the society.

Education:

Education is a powerful tool that we can use to combat gender inequality. It provides individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to understand the dynamics of unequal power relationships between genders and methods for challenging existing structures. Education also allows people to develop more nuanced and informed views on gender roles in society, which can help reduce discrimination against women.

Increased Employment Opportunities for Women:

By increasing employment opportunities for women in every sectors of the society will help them to gain greater economic independence from men and become financially self-sufficient. If all the women of the society will become economically independent that will reduce the concept of gender disparity.

Conducting Gender Awareness Campaigns:

Organizing gender related seminars, awareness programs through traditional media and digital platforms to challenge existing stigmas regarding female education, we can begin to bridge the gender gap and create greater equality between men and women globally.

The Constitution of India (1951) not only grants equality to women and forbids any discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, but also empowers the state to practice protective discrimination in favor of women. Under the protective discrimination clause, the State has passed several social and labour legislations and drawn up special programmes and schemes for the welfare and development of women and children. Additionally, women have reservation in many educational and training institutions, development schemes, local bodies and in certain categories of government jobs.

The ground situation however, is quite the reverse of the above proclaimed position. Sex ratio does not favor women in India and a majority of women go through life in a state of chronic stress, even facing nutritional discrimination within the family. Fewer girls than boys attend school. Even when enrolled, fewer girls manage to stay in school and complete schooling. Most girls who drop out of school are working in homes and fields of their parental or marital families. Women's work is undervalued and unrecognized and women generally earn a far lower wage than men in spite of doing identical work. Most of the women do not have their own property. The growing violence against women inside and outside the family continues to further marginalize women. The deeply ingrained system of patriarchy describes women's identity and role through her (subordinated) relationship to men. She is, therefore, cast in a clearly. The National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 and its Programme of Action (revised in 1992) gives education a mandate to work for women's equality and empowerment. The effort in this document attempts not only to provide equality of educational opportunity, but to transform the entire content and process of education for achieving gender equality and a realignment of gender roles, to make them more equitable and harmonious. Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions 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, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering. Women's studies will be promoted as a part of various courses and educational institutions encouraged taking up active programmes to further women's development. The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in elementary education will receive overriding priority, through provision of special support services, setting of time targets, and effective monitoring. Major emphasis will be laid on women's participation in vocational technical and professional education at different levels. The policy non-discrimination will be pursued vigorously to eliminate sex stereotyping in vocational and professional courses and

promote women's participation in non-traditional occupations, as well as in existing and emerging technologies'. – National Policy on Education, 1986.

Conclusion:

Gender inequality is an issue that has long plagued society, yet education can be a powerful tool to overcome it. Education allows individuals to gain knowledge and skills which improve their economic opportunities, provide them with better decision-making abilities and make them more aware of their rights. As such, access to quality education for women is essential in combating gender inequality. By providing educational resources and programs dedicated to helping girls reach their potential, we can work towards reducing the effects of gender discrimination on our societies. The Indian situation, with respect to gender equality, presents a situation of sharp contrast between what is on paper and what actually obtains on the ground. If one looks at the constitutional guarantees, a strong affirmation of non-discrimination is clearly on record.

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