

Women and Education in Odisha

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ABSTRACT:

Education is the most important driving force for the progress and development of a nation. Both men and women have to play an equal role in contributing to the nation's development. Therefore, equal opportunities of education should be provided to all. A study by World Bank in 2003 says that educating women is not a charity, it is good economics and if developing nations are to abolish poverty, they should educate their women. As per Niti Aayog's national Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2021 report 29.35 percentage of the State's population is multidimensionally poor. The MPI index in almost half of the Districts of the State is alarming and in tribal districts it is more than 40%. As per Niti Aayog data (2011-12) 32.59% of Odisha's population is below the poverty line, 2nd in the country while Bihar ranks first. It is also an admitted fact that the society can progress only when it's women are educated. India ranks 140 out of 156 countries in the Gender Inequality Index(GII)2021. Moreover, India has the potential to become one of the greatest economies in the world but lack of opportunities of education for women will act as a strong barrier in realizing the goal. We are living through a global crisis and the road ahead is uncertain. This will have long standing effects on the adolescents and youth.

Introduction:

Of all recommendations and sincere attempts by the Government at all levels, the progress of women's education is not yet satisfactory in certain regions in India particularly in rural areas. Women are still lagging behind men in respect of educational advancement. The literacy rate of Odisha as per 2011 Census is 72.9 per cent. In rural areas the literacy rate is 70.2 per cent where as in urban areas it is 85.7 per cent. The male literacy rate is 79.6 per cent whereas the female literacy rate in rural area is 60.7 per cent. The lowest literacy rate of 43.9 per cent is recorded in the rural areas of Nabrangpur district and whereas the lowest urban literacy rate of 74.5 per cent is recorded in the district of Malkangiri. There is a gap of 18.9 per cent between the male and female literacy rate. Due to the regional imbalances in respect of development of educational opportunity in different parts of Odisha; disparity of inequality of education in girls are evident. One of the striking features of 2011 Census is that the sex ratio has drastically gone down from 927 in 2001 to 914 in 2011. This shows the Indian people have more preferences for boy child than the girl child. Female feticide is increasing in alarming rate in India and this is more so among the states having high literacy, this is matter of great concern and a lot introspection is needed.

Women play a prominent role in the cultural and socio-economic status of a country because they constitute almost half of the society and they are the most potent agents of change in the society. The ancient people recognized the importance of women education and they were given equal opportunities to learn the Vedas. In Vedas the women were called the "Upadeshtri" of knowledge.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AND LOCATION OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

The seventh All India Educational Survey NCERT 2006, the details of no. of primary schools in Odisha as under: -

Type of School	Boys	Girls	Co-Education	Total
Rural	218	197	33991	34406
Urban	26	42	2059	2127
Total	244	239	36050	36533

Even though primary schools are present almost at Gram Panchayat levels, the literacy rate among the girls is lower than the males. The literacy rate for women with disabilities continue at a dismal of 37 percent while the national average being 54 percent for girls.

LITERACY PERCENTAGE OF WORLD, INDIA AND ODISHA:

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
WORLD	88.03	79.2	83.7
INDIA	82.14	65.46	74.4
ODISHA	82.04	64.04	73.5

LITERACY GAP BETWEEN MALE & FEMALE (1951-2011):

Census Year	INDIA				ODISHA			
	Total	Male	Female	Male Female Gap %	Total	Male	Female	Male Female Gap %
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30	15.80	27.30	4.50	12.80
1961	28.31	40.40	15.35	25.05	21.70	41.04	10.28	26.10
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.99	26.18	44.50	16.29	24.37
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62	41.00	56.45	25.14	25.79
1991	52.20	64.10	39.30	24.80	48.60	63.09	34.68	28.41
2001	65.38	75.85	54.16	21.69	63.61	75.95	50.97	24.98
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68	73.50	82.04	64.04	18.00

- Baring 1951, in Odisha, male –female gap in literacy % is always more, needs to be bridged

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION FOR GENDER EQUALITY:

- Article 15(1) states: “the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of religion, caste, race, sex, place of birth or any of them”
- Article 15(3) states: “nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children”
- Article 16(1) states: “there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment in any office under the state”
- Article 39(a) states: “the citizens, men and women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood”

Therefore, in the Indian constitution it is assured that no one is discriminated against on the basis of sex. This implies in the arena of education too.

Women's equality and empowerment are seen as pillars of holistic approach towards new patterns and processes of development. The development is measured on account of women work force, quality of work allotted to them and their contribution to GDP and in all these parameters the women in India fare worse than men and the challenge is to bridge the inequality. In recent years, the SHG approach has emerged to be one of the most aggressive and effective strategies for empowering rural women and alleviating the rural poverty. Therefore, SHGs have been evidently instrumental in bringing about structural changes in rural economy as well as across rural societies of India towards a progressive and positive direction.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda "There is no hope for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness. For this reason they have to be raised first".

While emphasizing too much on quantity factors, the quality of education for women should also be taken care of side by side.

PROGRAMMES UNDERTAKEN FOR THE WELFARE OF GIRL'S EDUCATION IN ODISHA

The following programmes were undertaken for betterment of women education in Odisha: -

1. District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)
2. Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA)
3. National Programme for Education of Girl's at Elementary level (NPEGEL)
4. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)
5. Condensed Course of Education for Adult Women.
6. Balika Samridhi Yojana (BSY)

COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS ON WOMEN EDUCATION

The following committees and commissions have been set up for elevating the women's education: -

1. University Education Commission (1948-49)
2. Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh Committee (1959)
3. Smt. Hansa Mehta Committee (1962)
4. M. Bhaktavatsalam Committee (1963)
5. Indian Education Commission (1964-66)
6. National Policy on Education (1968)

The Government and policy makers are doing their best for providing every kind of educational rights and opportunities for women even in rural villages of India. We can see it through various Acts, Laws, Commissions, Committees, Plans, Policies, Operations, Incentives etc passed in favour of them. Moreover, today there are huge number of Cells and Bodies who are functioning for the welfare of women education. So, it will be unfair to blame the government for this cause of inequality. In India 65% of people live below the bare subsistence level. When parents do not have the bare necessities of life and struggle for existence; it is unthinkable and unjustified to imagine that they would think of education of their daughters but, they can be motivated to have their children educated only if educational system is directly linked with economic and social development. As long as our education system remains ignorant of the felt needs of the people to solve their immediate problems and at the same time alienates them from their natural, social and cultural surroundings, they will rightly resist sending their children to school and equalization of educational opportunities for women will remain only a distant dream.

ADVERSE IMPACT OF COVID'19 PANDEMIC ON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EDUCATION:

Schools have been closed for almost two years, with no clarity on their resumption. The country has promoted online classes and e-connectivity as the solution, The focus has been on secondary and higher secondary education, with most states ensuring some form of online classes for this segment. However, due to lack of connectivity as well as lack of access to e-devices, only a fraction of children in this age group has had online education of any kind. When it comes to children in the primary and upper primary cases, even such access has been limited to a minuscule fraction. Children of poor, studying in government schools, have been especially disadvantaged in this regard.

Further aggravating the situation is the quality of online education. As most studies show, the percentage of teachers in the country capable of handling digital platforms for teaching is very small. The educational material provided by them has also been mere reproduction of what is used in a physical classroom. Hence, even where online classes have taken place regularly – as in case of urban schools, with students largely from middle and high-income groups the teaching-learning processes have by and large been poor.

According to a study by the **Azim Premji Foundation in January 2021**, covering more than 16,000 children in the age group six to eleven years and across five states, 92 % of children on average have lost at least one specific language ability from previous year across all classes; the figure is 82% when it comes to mathematical ability.

Now our state government has ensured that automatic enrollment into higher classes will take place. A question that looms large in the minds of teachers, parents and especially the children is a basic one: Will a child who was in Class four in March 2020 and did not get to attend a single class during the academic year 2020-2021, be admitted into class six now in August 2021. Then question comes whether the child will start with class five text books or class six text books or some new bridge material. The state government has to take a pragmatic decision in this regard.

CAUSES OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

- Poverty and conservative outlook of parents.
- Early marriage of girls.
- Parents preference of boy's education over girls education.
- Lack of qualified women teachers.
- Lack of proper security measures for girl students and women teachers.
- Lack of awareness of the necessity of education for girls in rural areas.
- Girls involvement in household work.

MEASURES UNDERTAKEN FOR REMOVING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY:

- Awareness for educating the girls should be developed in the parents specially in the conservative one's.
- Facilities like- flexibility in the time table, provision of uniforms, midday meals, books, incentives and scholarships, means of transport etc.
- Government should try to establish schools in every village.
- Non- formal education facilities may be provided to suit convenience of the girls.
- Lady trained teachers should be appointed.

- Mass media like television and radio should broadcast programmes which help in creating a conducive atmosphere in favour of girl's education in the rural villages.
- Efficient ladies may be appointed in the administrative field of women's education for they will be in a better position to understand the problem of girls.
- Ensuring safety of girl students and women teachers.
- Providing better service condition and residential facilities for teachers in rural areas.
- More special arrangements and provisions should be made for the proper education of disabled child.

CLOSING THE GAP

A thorough study of the impact of the government flagship programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan State wise to record the actual success of the programme in achieving its goals is mandatory. Free uniforms, free bicycles, mid-day meal scheme, provision for food and lodging and gender sensitive schools will go a long way to retain girls. Once they drop out, the incentive to go back to school is very less for the girl child due to her responsibilities in her family, compulsion to get married or earn for family. So, the priority should be her retention in schools as long as possible through scholarships and financial assistance. Sensitizing the parents through programmes at rural level should create a demand for education among the families for their daughters. Inclusion of vocational courses and bridge courses will also attract and retain girls in schools. A comprehensive assessment of the impact of elementary education should be taken up at the earliest. Only by assessing the situation of the disadvantages that children face based on economic situation, caste, gender and other indices can we bring out a speedy remedial action and eventually include every child in orbit of his/her fundamental right to learn and grow.

RESUMPTION OF SCHOOL EDUCATION AFTER PANDEMIC:

Given the state of preparedness of our education system and based on what we have seen during the last year, it is hard to see our schools taking up a curriculum based on where the children are, in terms of what they have learnt from life during novel corona virus pandemic. The most likely event is that schools will simply revert to business as usual, with a reduced syllabus. Children who cannot keep up would simply be left behind. This would be great disaster. It is very likely that children from the poorest sections will be the ones who are affected the most, by having to race in accelerated learning programmes with no support at homes. Teachers, without preparation for handling such a new context, can fall back on covering the syllabus, leading to the alienation of already marginalized girl students.

What we need to know is nothing less than a national rejuvenation programme for elementary education. The school system cannot do what is needed by itself. We need a vast body of volunteers engaging in small groups with children from the most disadvantaged sections working in tandem with schools, which will need to focus on safety measures and average performance. It is critical that we should not reduce education foundational literacy and numeracy, but treat children as they are, study the experiences they bring, and address their nutritional, emotional and intellectual well-being as a whole. This requires a flexible curriculum rooted in local reality.

The country has already shown during the pandemic that it lacks the capability to re-imagine examinations, whether it be at the secondary school levels or at university. Now, with the education of small children, a similar lack of imagination in curriculum and pedagogy will be splendidly ironic: without ourselves learning any lesson from the pandemic, we would be demanding that the children learn their lessons.

CONCLUSION

India is now a leading country on the basis of women education. Indian History is not devoid of talented women. It is full of women philosophers like Gargi, Vishwavara and Maitreyi. Other renowned women include Mirabai, Durgabati, Ahalyabai and Laxmibai All legendary and historical women in India are an inspiration and motivation for today's women. We salute the spirit of some valiant women of Odisha who plunged into the freedom struggle to free Odisha and India from British Raj, they are Kuntala Kumari Sabat, Rama Devi, Sarala Devi, Malati Choudhuri and Annapurna Maharana. In this context it is worthwhile to remember the contributions of Sailabala Das as social worker, politician and educationist. She was the pioneer of women education in Odisha. She was instrumental in creation of first women's college of Odisha at Cuttack.

In the words of mahatma Gandhi "By educating a man, we educate one person but by educating a woman we educate one generation".

Educating women results in promoting self-respect and also helps in raising the status of women. Nobel Laureate Mr Desmond tutu has rightly said "if we are going to see real development in the world then our best investment is WOMEN".

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