

Burgeoning Gender Disparity: An Analysis of Women's Education in India

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ABSTRACT

India is considered to be amongst the fastest growing economies of the world with world's second largest population which is home to 1.21 billion people. With a high spirited administrative structure, availability of vigorous young population, India has made remarkable progress in almost all the aspects, thus paving its way for a vivid future. Even with such a potential, our economy is burdened with curses of poverty, unemployment, growing inequalities etc. One such curse is problem of growing gender disparity, which is thus creating the problem of social exclusion in our country. Women being the lifeline of every economy, they play a pertinent role in overall socio economic fabric of any society. Despite abundant initiatives taken by the government both at centre as well as at state level for overall development and empowerment of the women their status is still unsatisfactory. The present paper is conceptual in nature highlighting the current position of the women education in India. Education is an important step towards enhancing the overall development of an individual thus paving way for a new perspective. In this context it can be stated that lack of quality education can serve as an impediment towards overall development of not only an individual but of entire nation. The study evaluates the women's position on various aspects related to women education in India like literacy rates, gross enrolment rates, dropout ratio etc. The study is based on secondary data collected from various sources like books, magazines, journals, Census Report 2011 and various other government reports wherever necessary.

Keywords: Gender disparity, inequality, Women, social exclusion

JEL Classification: Z13

1. INTRODUCTION

Since ages, high position and value of a society as whole is judged from the status and position enjoyed by the women with respect to their male counterparts. India's high cultural and traditional blend along with greatness in its history lies in the fact that it had always accorded a high status to women in its society. But soon various social economic evils crept into our society and deteriorated the status of the women. All these evils made women life more and more dependent on the male counterparts thus degrading them in terms of equality. As such their lives revolve around discrimination. In spite of the fact that female's contribution to the country's development is not less to that of their male counterpart but still they experience a number of drawbacks that restrict their potential for expansion (Sutapa and Saryal 2014). Their struggle not only deals with ending discrimination but also to attain equal status, generate a sense of self worth and justice for themselves. It is often seen that women all around the world are marginalized and excluded systematically in all spheres. Social exclusion from development point of view is very critical issue of economic development. Social exclusion of women perpetuates poverty both at the individual and household level by denying or limiting their access to education, health, resources, decision making, and employment. Their expectations and actual experiences of exclusion can develop feelings of powerlessness among those who are left out which may result in low esteem and diminished aspirations for the future (Kelly Hallman and Eva Roca, 2007).

Women in India as well as all over the world have been victim of male domination, humiliation, torture, discrimination and exploitation. They have faced social exclusion in the society from the very beginning in various spheres of life be it education, labour force participation, contribution in the working of the economy, political decision making etc. Social exclusion of women has many different forms. As soon as the child is born society starts the process of social exclusion. The birth of male baby is celebrated with great pomp and show and they health care in comparison to girl child. In 1901 India has a female to male sex ratio of 972 girls to every 1000 boys. In 2011 census it was 940 to 1000.

Gender equality or parity denotes women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in every sphere i.e. equal participation in education, the labour market, health services, decision making and politics etc. Gender inequality or disparity therefore means unequal participation or

the gap in the achievement of men and women in these spheres of life. Gender disparity hampers the overall wellbeing of society because blocking women from participation in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole society (Bhat et al. 2011). Among various forms of inequalities faced by the women in our society, one of the main issues is that women are not educated. Gender disparities in education can be eliminated only with the efforts of the government with more focus on women education. Education attainment is the very first and foremost step in improving the quality of life and becoming more aware about the world around us. It indeed develops in us a new perspective of looking at life. Improved education and higher literacy levels have an overall positive impact on overall development of an individual. Education forms a very basic indicator for women's equality and empowerment. Levels of female literacy, gender gaps in literacy levels are relevant indicators. Right to education is one of the fundamental rights under the Indian constitution. Literacy is the first step to formal education. Yet, there seem to be substantive educational disparities primarily impacting girls and women. India is still a long way from achieving gender parity in literacy. Women education would not only contribute towards the overall development of the nation but also in improving the quality of life both at home and outside. Educating women not only improves her own life but has a positive influence on the life of her family members. Educated women could easily inculcate new and progressive outlook in her children. Education makes women aware about their rights and not only helps them in fighting against any sort of discrimination but also helps them in recognizing the hidden potential, skills etc they possess. Thus women education is indeed the most significant way of reducing growing gender disparities between men and women ensuring maximum participation of women in developmental process of the nation.

Despite the significance contribution that can be made by women education towards Human resource development and empowerment in stages of growth of nation, participation of women in the field of education is far from being satisfactory. Thus it becomes important to address to this problem and introduce appropriate policy interventions.

2. Methodology and Objectives of the Study:

This section covers broad objectives and methodology being adopted in the study. The objectives of the study include:

1. The present study aims at studying the problem of gender disparity with special reference to educational status of women in India.

2. To highlight the various schemes and programs laid down for reducing gender disparity in education.

In order to fulfil the aforesaid objectives, the study adopts the following methodology. The present study is a review based study and it is based on secondary data. In this paper, all the information pertaining has been collected from different books, research studies, journals and also from internet. Data has been collected pertaining to male female literacy levels, urban rural literacy rates, enrolment ratios etc.

3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY:

3.1 Educational Status of Women:

Today, the country presents a very complex educational context where progress made in girls' education in the past 10 years is quite visible but more needs to be done to realize gender parity in several educational indicators (e.g. literacy, school enrolment, learning outcome, retention, survival and transition to higher educational levels) and attain gender equality. The rapidly growing economy is yet to bring equitable benefits for girls and women living in difficult situations in terms of their participation in education, overall wellbeing and empowerment (Shalnee and Priya 2014).

3.1.1 Trends in Male- Female literacy rate in India (1951 to 2011):

Table 3.1.1/ Figure 3.11 suggest that throughout the period from 1951 to 2011, level of female literacy rate has been showing increasing trends. Despite increasing share, their share relative to their male counterparts has declined over the study period.

Table 3.1.1: Trends in Literacy rates Post Independence (in %)

Year	Female	Male	Combined
1951	8.86	27.15	18.32
1961	15.35	40.4	28.31
1971	21.97	45.96	34.45
1981	29.76	56.38	43.57
1991	39.29	64.13	52.21

2001	53.67	75.26	64.83
2011	64.63	80.88	72.98

Source: Women and Men in India (2016), MOSPI.

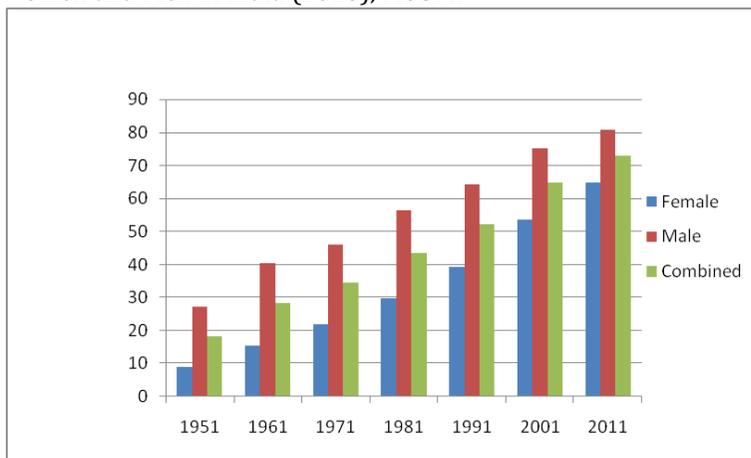


Figure 3.1.1: Trends in Literacy rates Post Independence

Source: Author's compilation

3.1.2 Rural and Urban literacy:

Table 3.1.2/ Figure 3.1.2a and 3.1.2b: taking into consideration the rural areas, female literacy rates show considerably poor rates in comparison to male's literacy levels. The situation however being better in urban areas when compared with rural areas, but still female literacy levels are far below their male counterparts.

Table 3.1.2: Trends in rural urban literacy rates

Year	Rural Areas			Urban Areas		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1951	19.02	4.87	12.1	45.6	22.33	34.59
1961	34.3	10.1	22.5	66	40.5	54.4
1971	48.6	15.5	27.9	69.8	48.8	60.2
1981	49.6	21.7	36	76.7	56.3	67.2
1991	56.96	30.17	36	81.09	64.05	67.2
2001	71.4	46.7	59.4	86.7	73.2	80.3
2010	77.15	57.93	66.77	88.76	79.11	84.11

Source: Women and Men in India (2016), MOSPI.

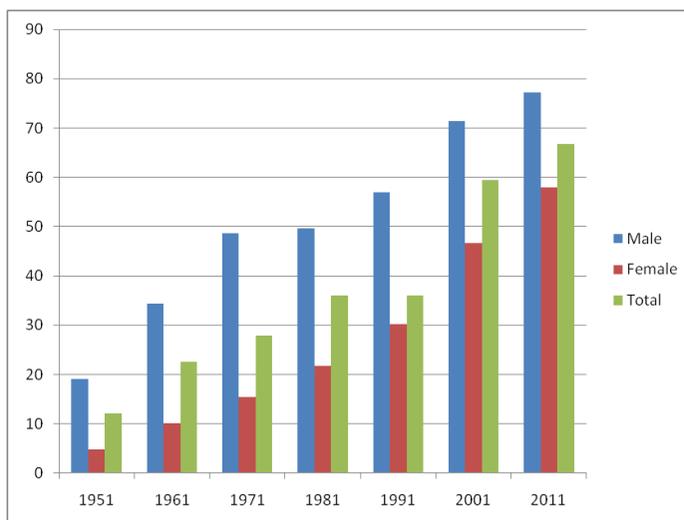


Figure 3.1.2a: Trends in rural literacy rates

Source: Author's compilation

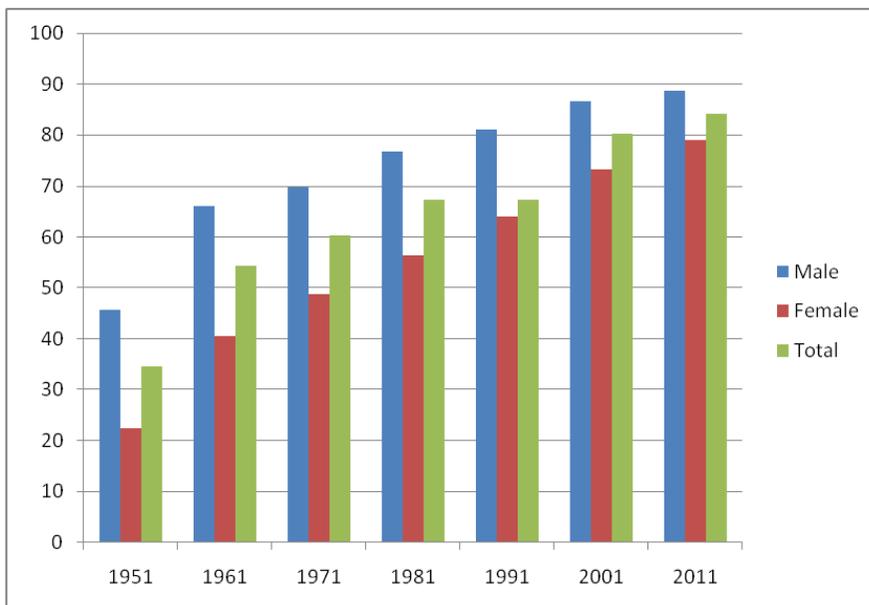


Figure 3.1.2b: Trends in urban literacy rates

Source: Author’s Compilation

3.1.3 Enrolment Ratio in school education: (Class 1 to 5)

Table 3.1.3/ Figure 3.1.3: the table/ figure shown below highlights an equally depressing situation when it comes to enrolment rates keeping in view that girls lack far behind considering the enrolment rates from 1950s to 2011.

Table 3.1.3: Trends in enrolment rates (in millions)

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1950-51	13.8	5.4	19.2
1960-61	23.6	11.4	35.0
1970-71	35.7	21.3	57.0
1980-81	45.3	28.5	73.8
1990-91	57	40.4	97.4
2000-01	64	49.8	113.8
2010-11	70.1	64.6	134.8

Source: Women and Men in India (2016), MOSPI.

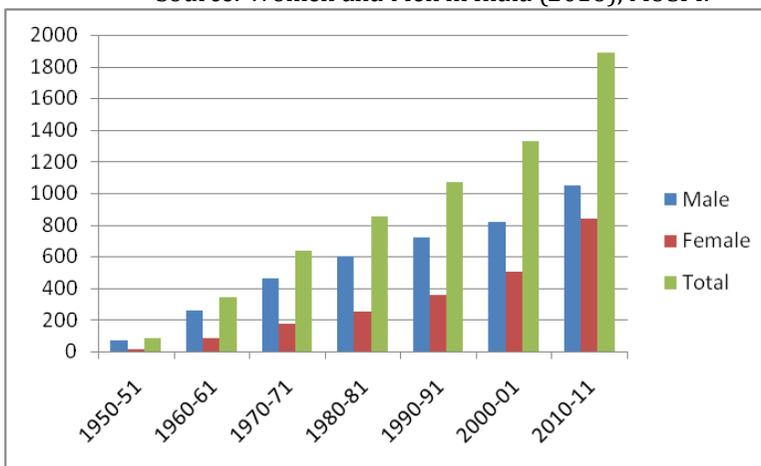


Figure 3.1.3: Trends in enrolment rates (in millions)

Source: Author’s Compilation

3.1.4 Number of teachers by type of school:

Table 3.1.4/ Figure 3.1.4a and 3.1.4b: suggests that as far as Upper Primary schools is concerned number of females teachers in comparison to male counterparts has increased significantly from 1950-51 to 2010-

11 however remaining low as compared to male teachers. As far as senior secondary schools are concerned the number of female teachers has increased from 1950-51 to 2010-11 but not as much as in case of Upper Primary.

Table 3.1.4: Trends in Number of teachers by type of school (in thousands)

Year	Upper Primary			Senior Secondary		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1950-51	73	13	86	107	20	127
1960-61	262	83	345	234	62	296
1970-71	463	175	638	474	155	629
1980-81	598	253	851	669	257	926
1990-91	717	356	1073	917	417	1334
2000-01	820	506	1326	531	225	756
2010-11	1048	839	1887	766	496	1261

Source: Women and Men in India (2016), MOSPI.

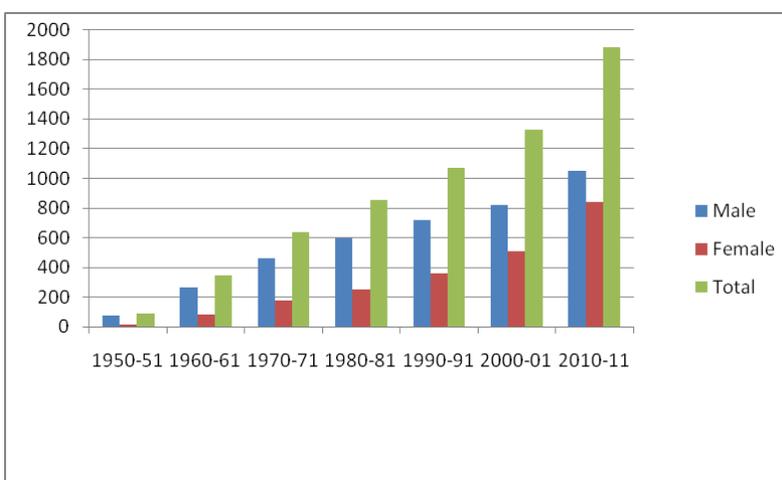


Figure3.1.4a: Trends in number of teachers in Upper Primary school (in thousands)

Source: Author's Compilation

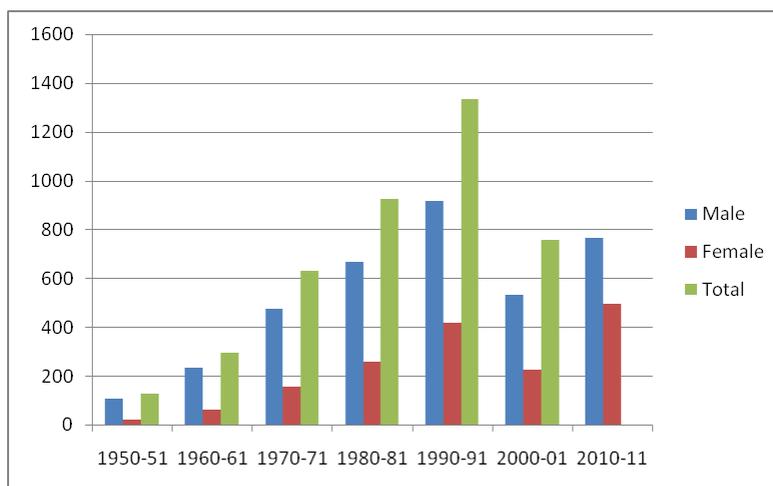


Figure3.1.4b: Trends in number of teachers in Senior Secondary school (in thousands)

Source: Author's Compilation

3.1.5 Number of Female Teachers per 100 Male Teachers:

Table 3.1.5 and Figure 3.1.5: suggests that whether it is Primary, Upper Primary, Secondary or Senior Secondary school, the number of female teachers per 100 male teachers has remained less from the period pertaining to 1050-51 to 2010-11.

Table 3.1.5: Trends in number of Female teachers per 100 male teachers

Year	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary
1950-51	18	18	-	19
1960-61	21	32	-	26
1970-71	27	38	-	33
1980-81	33	42	-	38
1990-91	41	50	-	45
2000-01	55	62	54	42
2010-11	76	80	61	65

Source: Women and Men in India (2016), MOSPI.

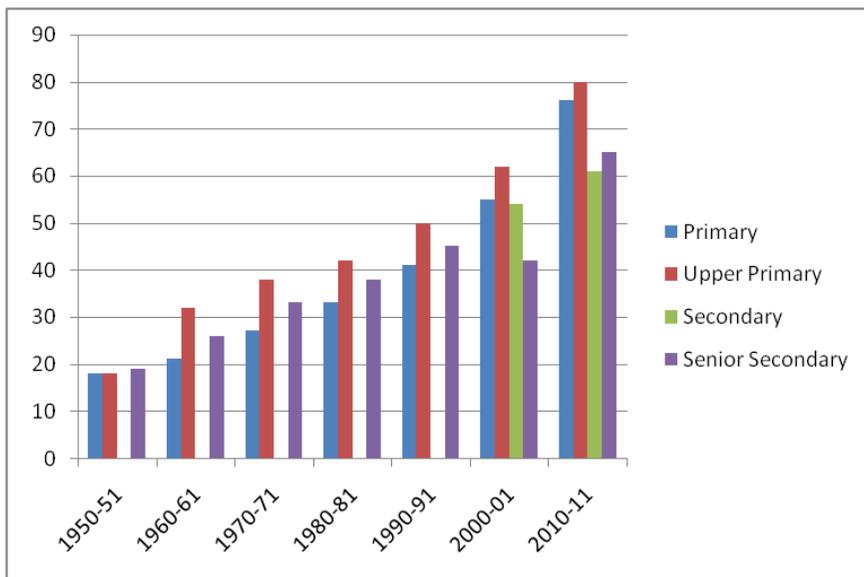


Figure 3.1.5: Trends in number of Female teachers per 100 male teachers

Source: Author’s Compilation

4. Major Schemes for Women Education:

From time to time efforts have been made by both the Central as well as by the State government in the form of various initiatives and policies to upgrade the education system in our country with special focus on women Education. Extension of education policies towards women/ girls has always remained an integral part of various government policies and plans. A path breaking step was taken by the government by introducing the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002, where in elementary education for children of age group 6 to 14 years was made free and compulsory thus bring change in not only the fundamental rights but also in Directive principles of state policy and Fundamental duties mentioned in our constitution.

Various schemes launched by the government to upgrade women education in India are mentioned below:

- In 2015, government launched “ Beti Bachao Beti Padhao” wherein INR 5 crore has been made available to foster girls education in 100 districts based on the Child Sex Ratio wherein INR 5 Lakh per district is allocated for the same.
- ‘Digital Gender Atlas for Advancing Girls’ prepared by Ministry of HRD and launched on the occasion of International Women Day 2015.
- National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE) wherein an amount of 3000 rupees is deposited for 16 years in the name of the girls which can withdraw at the age of 18 years and after passing 10th standard. Aim of this scheme is to reduce drop outs ratio among girls.
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has also targeted intervention of girls by opening schools in the neighborhood and promoting easy access to schools and various other facilities like free books, free uniforms, and separate toilets for girls etc. In addition, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBV) has opened in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) where female literacy in rural areas is below the national average.
- In higher education sector, University Grant Commission (UGC) has allocated grants for construction of women hostels.

- National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) was launched in July 2003 to reach out to the girls especially those which SSA was not able to reach out through other scheme.

5. Conclusion:

Women have been systematically excluded in their participation in various social, political, economical aspects of life across the globe. The situation in India is nonetheless different. Despite strong efforts made by the government in India, women still face barriers in achieving equal rights and position in the society. From the above analyses, it becomes clear that there is significant level of gender disparity in literacy levels in India with growing disparities in rural and urban areas. With almost half of the population being illiterate and low literacy levels among women, the dream of gender parity seems to be unachievable. Women are considered to be the backbone of any society and if they lag behind it will have an adverse impact not only on women themselves but on the society as a whole. Improved education has always been on our planning agendas with special allocation for improving the education system, setting up new institutions, providing scholarships/fellowships etc. But time has come that the government apart from such allocations starts focusing on the implementation part of such schemes launched with special focus on women, since it is believed that when a woman gets educated, the society gets educated.

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