

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION: A STUDY OF RURAL JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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India has made many strides in the field of education in the past few decades but still the fact remains that our country is the home to the largest number of illiterate population in the world. About one-third of India's population is currently functionally illiterate and about 50% of the entire adult female population cannot read or write. The rate of illiteracy is particularly high in rural areas, especially among women. Women's education is crucial to the overall development of any country. In India, though much emphasis is being laid on the gender equality in terms of education, yet discrimination in access to education does exist. There is a rural and urban divide in access to education for women. In Jammu and Kashmir too, female literacy rate is quite low and stands at 58.01 percent. The rural female literacy rate in J&K is 53.36 percent to 70.19 percent for urban females which earlier in the Census of 2001 was 36.7% at rural and 61.9% at the urban level, respectively. Also, there is a large gap in the male and female literacy levels in this border state. The present study examines the issues of education for empowering women in the rural areas of Jammu and Kashmir and seeks to address the challenges towards education of rural women in Jammu and Kashmir.

KEYWORDS: Women Education, Female Literacy Rate, Women Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Education is central to the process of sustainable development for any nation. It empowers people with skills and knowledge besides giving them access to

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productive employment in future. In the present era of globalization, education has become a very important tool for social mobility and empowerment. It not only opens numerous opportunities leading to both individual and group entitlements but it also empowers the most vulnerable groups of our society, that is, girls and women.

Since past many decades, the governments all over the world have taken initiatives regarding providing education to both men and women in their respective countries. In India also, there is a commitment to the “Millennium Development Goals” and “Education for All”. At the national level there is a commitment under National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) for increasing public expenditure on education to 6% of GDP for universalizing the elementary education of good quality. There is also an obligation, under the Constitution's 86th Amendment, for making available free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 06-14 years.

India has made many strides in the field of education in the past few decades but still the fact remains that our country is the home to the largest number of illiterate population in the world. In the past few years, both the centre and state governments initiated some good educational programmes such as the National Literacy Mission and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in an effort to combat the scourge of illiteracy in the country. As a result, the rate of literacy rose from about 18% in the 1950s to about 52% in 1991 and then to about 74.04 % in 2011. In spite of this, about one-third of India's population is currently functionally illiterate and about 50% of the entire adult female population (aged 15 years and above) cannot read or write. The rate of illiteracy is particularly high in rural areas, especially among women as given in Table 1.

Table 1
Crude Literacy Rates in India.

Year	Persons (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
1961	24.0	34.4	13.0
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India 2001 & 2011

WOMEN AND EDUCATION

Women education is a key to the development of any country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Acquisition of education by women empowers her to think positively, take proper decisions about her living and the society and acquire other skills that can empower her economically, politically and socially. With this, their level of awareness increases leading them to have a claim on their rights. Women's education is also of utmost importance because once they become educated, they develop the capacity to have the power to control their situations. In addition, the close connection between women's literacy awareness and education and women's health and reproductive role and behaviour (and its effect on the rate of population growth) has been observed in studies all over the world.

In India, one of the many factors hampering women's access to education and causing the gender gap is poverty. Besides, the cultural and social barriers such as seclusion of women, parental indifference to educating their girls etc. are other significant factors influencing the gender gap in India. In the recent years, much focus is being laid in the past couple of decades on gender equality in terms of education of girls and women. There has been an increase in education of girls and women in recent decades in both rural and urban areas. However, discrimination in access to education does exist. There is a rural and urban divide in access to education for women.

EDUCATION IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

According to Census 2011, the literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir is 78.26 percent for males and 58.01 percent for females. The female literacy rate is less than the male literacy rate. The literacy rate for rural females is 53.36 percent and 70.19 percent for urban females. Earlier in Census 2001, it was 36.7% and 61.9% at rural and urban level, respectively thus there is a large gap in the male and female literacy rates.

Over the years, government has announced several schemes to promote education among women which include Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) etc. With the help of these target oriented interventions, the number of educational institutions has increased over the years, resulting into maximum area coverage besides decreasing the average distance per school. The improvement in the statistics reflect the seriousness of the J & K Government towards the development of women in state, however, the fact remains that despite the progress made, the

female literacy has remained very low in the state as compared to men. Various factors like peculiar topography of Jammu and Kashmir state, the sparse network of schools in rural areas, the majority of populace living in far flung and inaccessible areas, lack of easy access to institutions, lack of infrastructure, weather vagaries, conflict situations etc. create hindrance in achieving the desired goal of universalization of literacy in the violence-hit state. Data regarding literate population and literacy rates in the state of Jammu and Kashmir are given in Table 2 and 3 respectively.

Table 2**Data on Literate Population in J&K**

S.No.	Literate Population									
	Name of the District	Total Rural & Urban			Rural			Urban		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	Kupwara	160215	72342	232557	150469	68258	218727	9746	4084	13830
2-3	Baramulla +Bandipora	297267	149808	447075	232205	111759	343964	65062	38049	103111
4-5	Srinagar + Ganderbal	405708	235559	641267	57062	26770	83832	348646	208789	557435
6	Budgam	148386	77781	226167	124557	64259	188816	23829	13522	37351
7-8	Pulwama + Shopain	178170	103348	281518	153351	88831	242182	24819	14517	39336
9-10	Anantnag + Kulgam	299910	163287	463197	240623	129659	370282	59287	33628	92915
11	Leh	43664	24614	68278	29253	17778	47031	14411	6836	21247
12	Kargil	41832	18971	60803	36219	16820	53039	5613	2151	7764
13-15	Doda + Kishtwar + Ramban	193834	80591	274425	171794	68308	240102	22040	12283	34323
16-17	Udhampur + Reasi	225888	117541	343429	169317	85812	255129	56571	31729	88300
18	Poonch	104051	52347	156398	92544	45078	137622	11507	7269	18776
19	Rajouri	150444	83784	234228	134741	74272	209013	15703	9512	25215
20-21	Jammu + Samba	625605	444969	1070574	324431	226231	550662	301174	218738	519912
22	Kathua	185654	121716	307370	153052	98625	251677	32602	23091	55693
	TOTAL	3060628	1746658	4807286	2069618	1122460	3192078	991010	624198	1615208

Source: Census 2001

Table 3
Data on Literacy Rates in J&K.

S.No	Literacy Rate in percentage									
	Name of the District	Total Rural & Urban			Rural			Urban		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	Kupwara	56.1	28.7	43.2	55.3	28.0	42.4	73.5	46.6	62.8
2-3	Baramulla + Bandipora	57.1	32.3	45.4	54.3	29.0	42.3	70.3	48.5	60.3
4-5	Srinagar + Ganderbal	69.6	48.1	59.8	49.9	26.1	38.7	74.4	53.9	65.1
6	Budgam	53.5	30.6	42.5	51.1	28.4	40.2	70.7	47.8	60.3
7-8	Pulwama + Shopian	60.7	37.7	49.6	58.8	36.3	47.9	75.0	50.2	63.4
9-10	Anantnag + Kulgam	57.6	34.4	46.5	54.7	31.9	43.7	73.4	49.8	62.6
11	Leh	75.6	52.7	65.3	70.6	57.9	59.9	86.0	78.3	81.8
12	Kargil	75.8	42.4	60.8	74.1	40.6	58.7	89.3	64.7	80.8
13-15	Doda + Kishtwar + Ramban	64.0	29.9	47.9	61.7	27.1	45.2	89.4	70.0	81.3
16-17	Udhampur + Reasi	67.1	41.2	55.2	61.6	35.2	49.2	91.1	76.7	85.4
18	Poonch	65.0	36.0	51.2	62.7	33.0	48.4	93.5	80.6	88.0
19	Rajouri	69.8	44.5	58.0	67.9	42.2	55.8	91.7	76.7	85.4
20-21	Jammu + Samba	84.4	68.5	77.0	80.9	61.7	71.7	88.6	77.4	83.5
22	Kathua	75.7	54.4	65.6	73.8	51.4	63.0	86.3	72.8	80.1
	TOTAL	66.6	43.0	55.5	61.7	36.7	49.8	80.0	62.0	71.9

Source: Census 2001

WOMEN AND RURAL EDUCATION IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Though both the centre and the state governments are committed to provide education to the children in Jammu and Kashmir, there are still many challenges before the universalization of education in the state which is faced with a conflict since past 24 years. The female literacy rate in J&K, as per Census 2011, is 58 %. Among the other Indian state and Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir has one of the lowest female literacy rates at 58 % besides Rajasthan (52.7%), Bihar (53.3%), Jharkhand (56.2%), Uttar Pradesh (59.3%), Arunachal Pradesh (59.6%) and Andhra Pradesh (59.7%). There is a large gap in the male and female literacy rates. The literacy rate of district Ramban is the lowest with 56.90%, the male literacy rate being 71.97% and female literacy rate 40.04% only. Jammu district has the highest literacy rate of 83.98% with 89.77% males and 77.41% females are literate. The lowest female literacy rate is 40.04% in District Ramban and the highest female literacy rate of 77.41% in Jammu district. There are 7 districts where female literacy rate is even below 50%. There is a huge gap in male female literacy ratios also.

To increase enrolment and decrease female dropouts, a large number of programmes have been implemented in Jammu and Kashmir including Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), a flagship programme aimed at achieving the objectives of Universalisation of Elementary Education, retention and bridging all gender and social gaps, strives to secure the right to quality basic education for all children in 6-14 years age group. This scheme is being implemented in the State of Jammu and Kashmir for improvement in Gross Enrolment ratio apart from UEE and Universal retention like rest of the country. Girls Education is one of the important components of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan recognizes that ensuring girl's education requires changes not only in the education system but also in societal norms and attitudes. A two-pronged gender strategy has therefore been adopted, to make the education system responsive to the needs of the girls through targeted interventions which serve as a pull factor to enhance access and retention of girls in schools and on the other hand, to generate a community demand for girls' education through training and mobilization.

Education of girls, especially those belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, OBC and minority is the primary focus in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Efforts are being made to mainstream gender concerns in all the activities under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme. Mobilization at the habitation/village/urban slum level, recruitment of teachers, up gradation of primary into upper primary schools, incentives like midday meals, scholarships, educational provision like textbooks and stationery, all takes into account the gender focus.

CHALLENGES TO RURAL WOMEN EDUCATION IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Despite the efforts being made for rural education of girls and women in Jammu and Kashmir, there are still many challenges in the area. The gender gap in J&K is also higher than the national average.

Jammu and Kashmir is a Muslim dominated state which is a conservative and religious society also. Though urban areas have witnessed a lot of change in terms of education of girls and women in the past few years, in rural areas the parents still prefer girls to stay at home till they go to their 'own homes' after their marriage. The conflict in Jammu and Kashmir has resulted in a breakdown of the society. Many rural families are without any earning member. The girls have become orphans and there is no source of sustenance in their families. This has also prevented them from seeking education. As the economy of rural Jammu and Kashmir has met with severe set-back during past years, parents are not in a position to educate their girl children. If they have to make a choice between educating a male child and a female, they prefer

the former. Poverty, undoubtedly, is one of the main reasons of the inability for the girl child in rural areas to obtain basic education. Hundreds of girls in rural areas are not able to attend schools because their families are not able to provide money for the education.

Though situation in improving in Jammu and Kashmir, yet the prolonged violence in J&K since past 24 years have prevented the girls from going to schools and colleges, as their parents are worried about the physical security of the girls. There are issues like lack of accountability/ Teacher absenteeism, paucity of Women Teachers and deterioration in the quality of instructors and instruction which are still creating hurdles in education of girls in rural areas. Accountability factor in the schools has gone down in these past years in Jammu and Kashmir. Teachers do not go to their places of postings as they do not want to serve in rural areas. Even those teachers who hail from rural areas like Kupwara, Baramulla etc want to be posted in urban areas or at least in district headquarters. Majority of schools particularly in the rural areas are suffering because of lack of supervision. Attendance of teachers in these schools is always very thin and many schools having single teachers remain closed for days together. In rural and remote areas attending schools is the last priority of most of the teachers and it has in fact become a subsidiary occupation for them while as their primary occupations are fruit, walnut and other businesses.

Jammu and Kashmir has hilly mountainous terrain mostly close to border areas. The variations in literacy rates from district to district are very large because of some social taboos, geographical location and poverty. The large gaps in the literacy rates from district to district and from rural and urban areas are mainly due to variegated geographical features of the state. The mountainous regions have lower literacy rates because these areas are victims of double marginality. Gender based inequalities are prominent. Issues like social discrimination and economic exploitation, occupation of girl child in domestic chores, girls working in the households and taking care of the younger siblings or needed to earn money for their families by working in the agricultural field are quite visible.

The state has inadequate schooling infrastructure. 33.68% of primary schools are without their own buildings and are being run in private accommodations which are not generally conducive for good teaching atmosphere. 25.74% of upper primary schools have inadequate accommodation as per DISE data 2010-11. In fact, most of the schools upgraded to the upper primary have only three rooms against the requirement of at least 6 rooms. Teachers' absenteeism in rural areas, the costs of transportation, materials and uniforms are among other impediments to rural women education. Thus, the significance of education for girls and women is shaped by the existing gender division in society. Rural Kashmir also echoes the

popular sentiment is that an educated daughter can be a liability to her family.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Of the total population of Jammu and Kashmir State, around 72.79 percent live in the villages of rural areas. In actual numbers, total population of rural areas of Jammu and Kashmir state is 9,134,820. In rural areas of Jammu and Kashmir, literacy rate for males and female stood at 75.51 % and 53.36 %. Average literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir for rural areas was 64.97 percent. Total literates in rural areas were 4,898,008.

Keeping in view the fact that a significant number of population resides in rural areas of Jammu and Kashmir, these people should have the same quality of life as is enjoyed by people living in sub urban and urban areas. However, this is not the reality. A plethora of government initiatives to provide access to primary education may be underway, but issues of equity, quality, and access remain areas of concern in rural schools. Children in rural areas continue to be deprived of worth education owing to factors like lack of competent and committed teachers, lack of textbooks or teaching-learning materials, and so on. Present Scenario of rural education in Jammu and Kashmir is quite poor. Persistent female illiteracy is a major impediment to women's empowerment; empowering women and adolescent girls through literacy and education can enable them to develop analytical skills on gender, development and other issues.

Rural women of J&K should be empowered through education as they form an important part of the society worldwide. Education would help them to be aware of new productive opportunities in the areas of entrepreneurship skills acquisition, greater income generation and better opportunities in the world of employment greater income opportunities to better their lot in the worldwide communities. Rural women should be encouraged to enrol in literacy programmes. They should be encouraged to know that the benefits that would accrue to their being literate is greater than the economic benefits they are currently enjoying and so they should take bold steps to leave their trades at the stipulated time for literacy classes. Awareness programmes should be floated on posters, and media houses and children in schools should be made to encourage their mothers on literacy education. The government at all levels should fund literacy programmes, make it interesting to women so as to entice them to enrol for literacy classes.

Teachers and teacher educators need to be trained for gender sensitization. Additional Early Childhood Care centres need to be opened up to meet gaps in the Integrated Child Development Scheme and relieve girls from the burden of sibling care. In addition to the provisions already available under SSA, community mobilization should be exclusively in enrolling out of school girls, retaining and enhancing the learning ability of the girls already in the schools.

In fact, girls' education should be made a community agenda. More women teachers need to be appointed in the institutions in order to attract more girls. Besides, special allowances can be given to those women teachers who volunteer to work in rural areas.

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