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Impact of Enhanced Women Education on Social and Economic Development in India: A State Wise Comparative Study

Dr. Rina Seraphim Deen

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Christ Church College, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract:

Indian population is almost one sixth of the total world population and half of them are women. For the welfare of India in particular and the world in general, it is necessary that Indian women are well educated. This paper deals with a state wise comparative study of the improvement in India of women literacy and its impact on the social and economic development of Indian society. The importance of Indian women in Indian society has gone through various changes over the times. Though they had right to education in Vedic period, they gradually lost the right to such a level that they were considered inferior to men. During the British rule there were attempts to improve women education. After the Independence in 1947, women education saw a rapid improvement because the Indian government has taken various measures to provide education to all Indian women. As a result, women's literacy rate has grown tremendously so much so that the growth of female literacy rate has in fact, become higher than that of male literacy for a few years in the past. According to latest Indian census, among the Indian states, Kerala has the highest female literacy rate (92%) whereas, Rajasthan has the lowest (52.7%). It is also observed that the women from Kerala are well employed resulting in higher standard of living and the infant mortality rate is very low depicting proper childcare. This means there is socio-economic balance in the lives of people from Kerala. Whereas, in Rajasthan, people are facing many social and economic problems which could be solved through enhanced women literacy. Thus enhanced women literacy results in women empowerment leading to reduction in poverty through employment, removal of income disparity and an increased social awareness for the betterment of life.

Keywords: India, women literacy, empowerment, income disparity.

1. Introduction

Literacy refers to an individual's ability to read and write. It adds value to a person's life and plays a critical role in their overall development. Literacy also plays an important role in social development. As such literacy rates are included directly as indices of human welfare.

As regards women's education, it has acquired a great significance in much of developmental planning and programming. Literacy is now regarded as a fundamental right of women. In 2010, Irena Bekeva, director general of the UNESCO rightly said "newly literate women have a positive ripple effect on all development indicators".

The development of any nation or region is indicated by the level of overall education. Indian government has been committed to provide education to all Indians and is focused in its efforts to attain higher level of education in India. As result, literacy rate increased enormously from 12% in 1947 to 74% in 2011.

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Some of the governmental schemes are Mahila Samakhya Programme, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBV), and National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL).

As per the census of 1991 the effective literacy rates for men and women are 64.1% and 39.3% respectively and in 2011 they are 82.14% and 65.46% respectively, which shows increase in the number of literate women and the literacy rate gap between men and women is narrowing.

The work in this paper is divided into two parts. The first part deals with a comparative study of state wise female literacy rate and gender gap in the literacy rate in the last three decades according to 1991, 2001 and 2011 census. The second part of the paper deals with the relevance of women education in development in India. The study will be based on the data relating to some representative states.

2. Women Literacy in India

Census Year	Persons	Males	Females	Gender Gap
1951	18.33	27.11	8.86	18.25
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.99
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.52
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.84	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Table 1: Gender-wise literacy rate (%) in India from 1951 to 2011

Source: Census of India, Office of Registrar General, India

A careful study of Table 1 reveals that though the literacy rate during the first five-year plan of 1951 is not very high the gender gap is initially quite low. However, in spite of a steady growth in the male and female literacy rate the gender gap is almost constant during next three decades. From 1991 onwards, as a result of an enhanced awareness due to globalization, there is an accelerated growth in the female literacy rate so much so that there is an obvious reduction in gender gap.

In Table 2, the literacy rates (%) for 1991, 2001 and 2011 are given along with the gender gap for some representative states to make a comparative study. Literacy rates given pertain to the population aged seven years and above.

The last column of Table 2, $\Delta(GG)$, gives the change in gender gap over the 20 years' period i.e. from 1991 to 2011. From these values, it is evident that states like Mizoram, Kerala and Delhi have attained higher level literacy rate for both men and women. On the other hand, states like Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh are showing the change in gender gap to be much higher than the Indian average of 8.5. This indicates that in these states the female literacy rate has shown greater increase over these two decades. As far as Rajasthan is concerned the female literacy and gender gap is studied to be very much region dependent probably due to the fact that most of Rajasthan is desert land. The gender gap as well as rural urban gap in literacy rates are very wide. Indian and state governments are making concentrated efforts to reduce this gap in Rajasthan as well as in similar states.

3. Impact of Women Education on Indian Economy

Profitability of education is indisputable, universal and global. This principle holds particularly for women because women education is beneficial to individuals as well as nations. Education leads to employment which leads to improvement in the economic status of females in the near future as well as over a long time. Women empowerment is of utmost importance for the inclusive growth and development of a nation like India which is emerging as a country to reckon with in the world.

State	1991			2001			2011			$\Delta(GG)$ (1991-2011)
	Female	male	GG	Female	male	GG	Female	male	GG	
Andhra Pradesh	32.7	55.1	22.4	50.4	70.3	19.9	59.1	74.9	15.7	6.7
Arunachal Pradesh	29.7	51.5	21.8	43.5	63.8	20.3	57.7	72.6	14.9	6.9
Bihar	22.0	51.4	29.4	33.1	59.7	26.6	51.5	71.2	19.7	9.7
Chhattisgarh	27.5	58.1	30.6	51.9	77.4	25.5	60.2	80.3	20.0	10.6
Delhi	67.0	82.0	15.0	74.7	87.3	12.6	80.8	90.9	10.2	4.8
Gujarat	48.6	73.1	24.5	58.6	80.5	21.9	69.7	85.8	16.1	8.8
Himachal Pradesh	52.1	75.4	23.3	67.4	85.4	18.0	75.9	89.5	13.6	9.7
Karnataka	44.3	67.3	23.0	56.9	76.1	19.2	68.1	82.5	14.4	8.6
Kerala	86.1	93.6	7.5	87.9	94.2	6.3	92.1	96.1	4.0	3.5
Madhya Pradesh	29.4	58.5	29.1	50.3	76.1	25.8	59.2	78.7	19.5	9.6
Odisha	34.7	63.1	28.4	50.5	75.4	24.9	64.0	81.6	17.6	10.8
Rajasthan	20.4	55.0	34.6	43.9	75.7	31.9	52.1	79.2	27.1	7.5
Uttar Pradesh	24.4	54.8	30.4	42.2	68.8	26.6	57.2	77.3	20.1	10.3
Goa	67.1	83.6	16.5	75.4	88.4	13.0	84.4	92.6	8.2	8.3
West Bengal	46.6	67.8	21.2	59.6	77.0	17.4	70.5	81.7	11.2	10.0
Mizoram	78.6	85.6	7.0	86.8	90.7	3.9	89.3	93.3	4.0	3.0
INDIA	39.3	64.1	24.8	53.7	75.3	21.6	65.5	82.1	16.3	8.5

Table 2: State wise literacy rate (%) with gender gaps (GG)

Source: Office of registrar General, India

As per Census 2011, the total number of female workers in India is 149.8 million and female workers in rural and urban areas are 121.8 and 28.0 million respectively. Among the female workers in rural areas some are cultivators while the others are agricultural labourers.

In the urban areas, 8.5 million are in household Industry and the rest are classified as other workers.

Among the States/Union Territories, workforce participation rate of females in the rural sector was the highest in Himachal Pradesh at 46.8% and in the urban sector it was the highest in Mizoram at 28.8. This can be related to the female literacy rates shown in Table 2. About the state of Kerala, it is said that its development model is comparable to that of many developed countries.

In the past decades, more and more women are employed in agricultural sector in rural areas while the percentage of women employed in public and private sector in urban areas is much less than that of men. However, with increase in the female literacy rate more and more women are gravitating towards cities for regular paid jobs in various fields like banks, schools, colleges, hospitals, and international trade and government sectors.

In addition, women are diversifying into fashion, beauty, retail, real estate, insurance, hotel etc. as entrepreneurs. These days, women can be found in equal numbers in multi-national companies dealing with Information Technology (IT) as software engineers, developers and managers. Women are now found in armed as well as police forces. Women can be seen to be occupying high level administrative posts in Government of India.

As the overall female work force is increases, the per capita income of an Indian family increases. A woman is financially more independent with enhanced buying capacity. This results in reduction in poverty and income disparity as well as enhanced standard of living.

4. Women Education and Social Development

The social influences of women's work are multifaceted. As she shares the financial burden along with her husband, she is no longer considered as simply dependent. A women's education and her economic contribution empowers her to be an active member in decision-making regarding matters related to the welfare of the family. Educated woman who is working outside her home is exposed to the world and becomes well aware of things around her like legal rights, social welfare programmes and medical issues. As a result, she is able to decide about her family size, quality of family life and works towards providing congenial family environment where there is no scope for domestic violence. An educated woman is able provide proper child care to her offspring and thereby endeavours to contribute to overall reduction in infant mortality rate in India. Due to well informed post and pre natal care, maternal mortality rates are also reduced.

5. Conclusions

In the present paper, the variation in female literacy rate over the past few decades in India is studied and an increase in the female literacy rate with reduced gender gap is observed.

Literate women of India are now competing with men for employment in all fields and hence more women are becoming financially independent. Such women are contributing toward the economic and social development of the country leading to a noteworthy positive change in the civilization of the country. It is hoped that with the concentrated efforts of the Indian Government and with the cooperation of people of India, India is able to attain higher literacy rates for women and successfully minimize the gender gap.

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