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**SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS IN EDUCATIONAL ACCESS TO INDIAN RURAL WOMEN:
AN ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

The expansion of education has been remained as an agenda of the state since pre independence period. Education has been recognized as the most powerful tool for empowerment, in accelerating development and bringing social change. Education means enhanced prospects of social, cultural and economic development for any nation. The movements for improving the women's status all over the world has also emphasized education as the most significant instrument for changing women's' subjugated position in the society. The availability of information, which education provides, leads to new ideas, a clear understanding of one's position or state, a change of outlook, questioning and challenging of rules and regulations in one's community. It is the index of human resource development. Women's educational status makes path towards empowerment. Most of the women population in India resides in rural areas. Being born as females and brought up in the deprived rural setup, rural women always remained in double deprivation in terms of availing equal opportunities of life. The prevailing feudal setup, the overriding economic constraints and strong social prejudices against women particularly in rural areas restricted the women's education and empowerment. Present paper highlights constraints confronting educational access to Indian rural women with empirical evidences.

INTRODUCTION

Education means enhanced prospects of social, cultural and economic development for any nation. The movements for improving the women's status all over the world has also emphasized education as the most significant instrument for changing women's status in the society. Indian Constitution emphasized on empowering the society and ensuring the dignity of individuals and equality of the status among all citizens of India. Education is the most powerful weapon which we can use to change the world. Information and communications are closely linked to power and the ability to affect change. Empowerment through education is ideally seen as a continuous holistic process with cognitive, psychological, economic and political dimensions in order to achieve emancipation. Given the complexity of political, societal and

international interrelations, one has to systematically think about the strategies and concrete proposals for future action if one hopes to achieve such a goal.

In any society education is a reasonably good indicator of development. Spread and diffusion of literacy is generally associated with essential trait of today's civilization such as modernization, urbanization, industrialization, communication and commerce. Therefore to acquire a better quality of life, education is highly essential. The word 'education' implies the characteristics of both the types of knowledge, material as well as spiritual. Education stands for the balanced and harmonious development of all the aspects of human personality. Moreover, the 'Human rights' concept also tells that each human being has right to live with human dignity (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Articles 14-26)

Women need educational empowerment to come out of the pitiable position in the society. Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets. Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (World Bank, 2002).

Women's equality and empowerment framework emphasizes women's access, awareness of causes of inequality, capacity to direct one's own interests, and taking control and action to overcome obstacles to reducing structural inequality (UNICEF 2010).

Educational empowerment for women is confronting with various constraints. In the Indian context means the development of women capacity to make informed choices and expansion of their capacity to manage their domestic and economic environment efficiently. Empowerment is both a process and a result, that cannot be measured nor can it be taken by some individual or institution/ organization and given to somebody else.

LITERACY STATUS

Indian government launched various schemes and programmes for the expansion of women education in the country but gap has been remained wider between the literacy rates of

male female and also among the rural and urban people so far. The fruit of various policies has not reached to rural sector from urban areas due to urban bias of educational expansion. In spite of the forceful intervention by state female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programmes over the last 66 years and above all, the United Nation’s enormous pressure with regard to the uplift of the plight of women in terms education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons (Rao, 2004). The enrolment of girls and women has increased considerable and the gender gap (GG) is also decreasing. But there is still a long way to go. About 35 percent of Indians are still illiterate and the percentage is much higher for girls and women residing in rural areas.

Table 2
Literacy Rates in India

Year	Persons	Males	Female
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	34.4	13
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	54
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Census of India (2011)

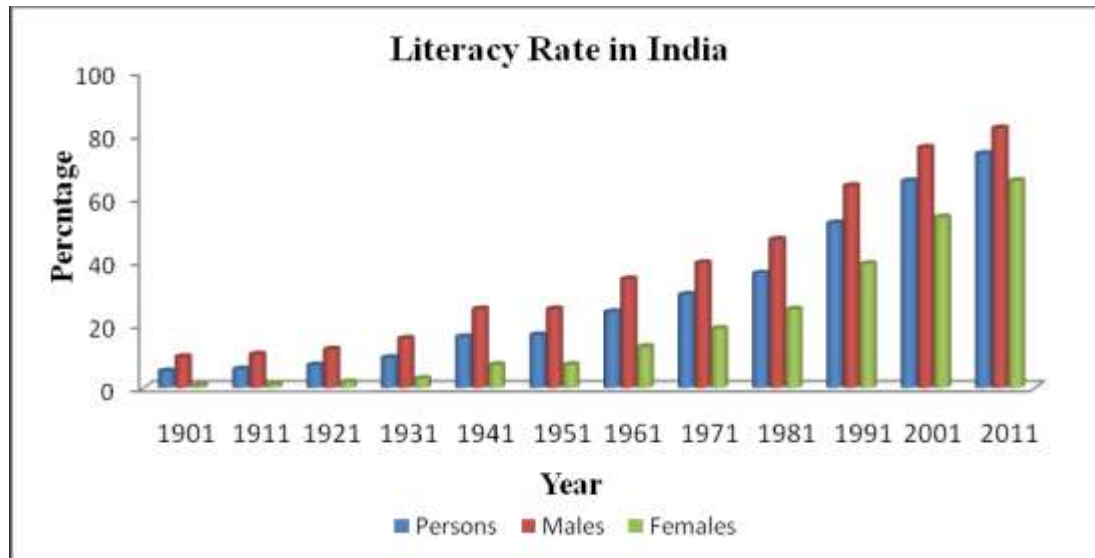


Figure 2

As per table-1 and figures in pre-Independence time literacy rate for women had a very poor spurt in comparison to literacy rate of men. This is witnessed from the fact that literacy rate of women has risen from 0.7 percent to 7.3 percent whereas the literacy rate of men has risen from 9.8 percent to 24.9 percent during these four decades. During the post-independence period literacy rates have shown a substantial increase in general. However the literacy rate of male has almost tripled over the period e.g. 25 percent in 1951 and 76 percent in 2001. Surprisingly the female literacy rate has increased at a faster pace than the male literacy during the decade 1981 - 2001. The growth is almost 6 times e.g. 7.9 percent in 1951 and 54 percent in 2001. From this analyze one can infer that still the female literacy rate (only half of the female population are literates) is wadding behind male literacy rate (three fourth of the male population are literates). The rate of school drop outs is also found to be comparatively higher in case of women. This higher rate of illiteracy of women is undoubtedly attributing for women dependence on men and to play a subordinate role. The lack of education is the root cause for women's exploitation and negligence especially in rural areas. Only education can help women to understand the

Indian's constitutional and legislative provisions and to take participation in the socio-political decision making which ultimately made to strengthen them. Thus promoting education among women is of great importance in empowering them to accomplish their goals in par with men in different spheres of life.

REGIONAL CONSTRAINTS

The educational standards differ from rural to urban areas. The rural women being born as females and that too in rural areas are facing double deprivation in terms of these educational outcomes and empowerment. There are too many reasons of their denied condition. The education of rural children especially the girls is lagging behind than boys at all levels of school education. In rural areas the dropout rate of girls is higher than boys at all levels of education. There are many constraints, which hinder their participation in education. These are poverty, economic status, narrow thinking, gender discrimination, customs, child marriage, lack of girls' school etc. The impact of the patriarchal structure can be seen in rural and urban India, although women empowerment in rural India is much less visible than in urban areas.

Table 1

Rural Urban Differences in Literacy Rates

	Male	Female	Total
All India	82.1	65.46	74.07
Urban	84.9	79.92	82.4
Rural	68.9	58.8	63.9

Source: (Census 2011)

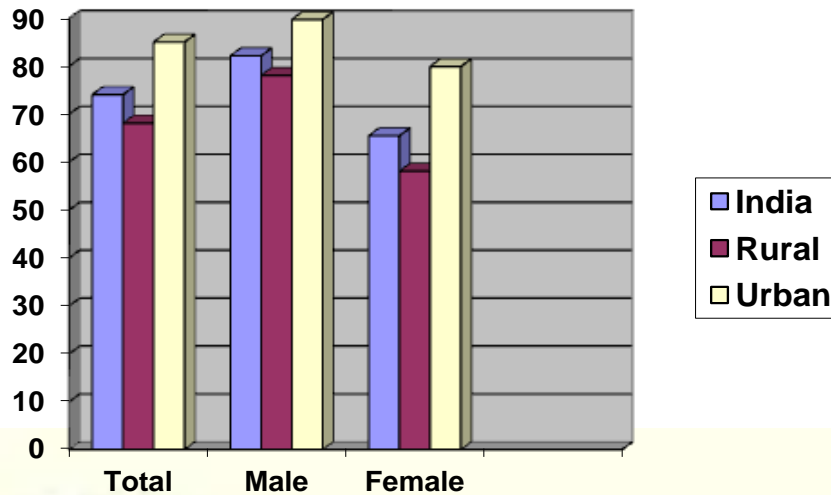


Figure 1

In table and figure 1, national literacy rate is 74.07 percent. Male literacy rate is 82.1 percent and female literacy rate is 65.46 percent. In urban areas literacy rate is 84.9 percent but in rural areas literacy rate is just 68.9 percent. In which rural women literacy rate is only 58.8 percent, whereas urban women literacy rate is 79.9 percent, which is comparatively very less. The literacy rate in Punjab is 76.68 percent. Out of which the rural male literacy rate is 77.92 percent as well as female literacy rate is 66.47 percent. Mere increase in literacy rate does not mean that the educational status of rural women is increased. Most of the literate women in rural areas do not complete the fifth standard of schooling. Despite the established importance of female education, women continue to lag very much behind men in educational development in countries like India. In rural areas the illiteracy rates is at least 42 percent for women in India (census 2011).

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it is obvious that rural women lagged behind in terms of their access to educational opportunities as compared to urban women. Undoubtedly most of the Indian population resides in villages and out of which a vast majority are the females. Although literacy is not the guarantee of educational attainment but this is one minimum parameter which depicts that the rural women cannot simply literate to the basic numeric and words in their own

native language. There is imperative need for the expansion of education among women of rural areas and the backward section of society as they are unable to get benefits of various government programmes due to lack of access and awareness. There is a need for educating rural women so that feelings of self-confidence can be generated among them. It is matter of concern that women are subjective to domestic violence. It is argued that women education has a direct relation with the education, health and status of the children and the family.

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