



GENDER DISPARITY IN EDUCATION: A STUDY OF POONCH DISTRICT IN J&K

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ABSTRACT

The importance of education as an instrument of social change is widely recognised. It is equally important for both man and woman but women's education is considered particularly important for setting a country on the path of development. Various studies and reports however, indicate that despite their considerable representation in the population of a country they constitute the most backward section of the society particularly in Indian society. Indian women have been subjugated, treated with a different set of norms and suffered discrimination at all levels because of gender bias that is ingrained in the cultural heritage of Indian society. In post independent India, however, both central and state government launched various schemes and programmes to eliminate the gender disparity and improve the educational conditions of women. But in spite of constitutional provisions, policies and programmes in favour of women, increase of literacy rate and promotion of women's education, many evils social practices and customs still exist in India society which prevents women from availing opportunities available for them. Thus, the educational backwardness of women is to be understood in terms of socio-economic, cultural and regional variations. Census data reveals an increase in female literacy rate during successive years, there is still a wide gap between male and female literacy rate. This gap is clearly visible in the state Jammu and Kashmir where women constitute about half of the population. Within Jammu and Kashmir rural- urban differentials in terms of literacy rate are quite wide. Literacy rate is quite high in districts with higher urban population which are concentrated mostly in plain areas as compared to those districts which are primarily mountainous and have low level of urbanisation and resultant low level of literacy in general and female literacy in particular. Poonch is one among these educationally backward districts of Jammu and Kashmir. Thus, based on secondary sources, the present paper focuses itself on educational backwardness of women in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir with particular emphasis on the need of policy intervention as well as concrete efforts at community level for improving educational and overall status of women.

KEY WORDS: Education, policies and Programmes, Women Education, Poonch District.



INTRODUCTION

Women represent about half of the world's population but widespread patriarchal ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied status and opportunities equal to men. They have been subject to exploitation, domination and discriminate by men that have resulted in gender inequality in almost all walks of life. The rise of various feminist movements like Radical, Marxist, Socialist, Liberal, Black and Postmodern aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal political, economic, cultural and social rights for women. The development of feminism has led to attention being focussed on the subordinate position of women in society. These movements have led to the remarkable enhancement of women's condition in recent times. Increasing interest and attention on women's issues has led to the realisation that balanced socio-economic development requires capacity building, contribution and participation of both men and women as equal partners. Gender equality in educational field can go a long way in not only ensuring healthy human resource development but which also be helpful in providing respectable and empowered position to women in society because of instrumental role of education in achieving long term development goals.

In a broader sense education refers to any process that shapes the potential of a growing individual mind through teaching and learning. Education as the process of learning finds different theoretical explanation. From a liberal perspective "education fosters personal development and self-fulfilment. It encourages the individual to develop his mental, physical, emotional and spiritual talents to the full". Functionalists are concerned with understanding positive contribution of educational institutions in the maintenance of social system by transmitting the knowledge and skills to the next generation. According to Emile Durkheim education teaches basic skills to individual which help them to perform roles in increasingly specialised occupation and develops the habits of self-control and restraint. Talcott Parsons argues that an essential function of education is to instill in pupils the value of individual achievements and socialize the younger generations for their future roles. Education helps to raise people's consciousness of opportunities and scope for development. All these meanings and explanations show that education seeks to nurture the good qualities in man and depict out the best in every individual. Education seeks to boost the innate capacities of man.

The educational system of a nation not only transmits and preserves existing culture but also the master determinant of all aspects of change. Education is the main factor in the progress of human capital which is imperative for advancement of a country. Education is equally important for both male and female. But Women's education is considered particularly important for overall development of a society. As rightly said by Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru "if we educate a man, we educate a man only, but if we educate a woman, we educate the whole family".

Apart from the role of women education in the social and economic development education of women leads to overall improvement in the status of women in a society but unfortunately their contribution to the economy and society has largely been ignored in almost all societies including Indian society. Women in India have been subjugated, treated with a different set of norms and suffered discrimination at all levels because of gender bias that is ingrained in the cultural heritage of Indian society.

Women's status in India has not been uniform during different historical periods. During Vedic period women had equal rights with men. All the privileges entitled to a son were given to the daughters. During the post-Vedic period the status of women started deteriorating and continued the same Mughal period and first half of nineteenth century. But towards the second half of nineteenth century women's education started improving with the efforts of enlightened Indians, Christian Missionaries and social reformers. Education of women has been among the top most priorities of developmental planning. The concept of women empowerment is enshrined in the constitution of India-in its preamble, fundamental Rights, fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. Indian Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to take on ways of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the increasing socio- economic and political disadvantages faced by them. Be it constitutional law, criminal law or family law, women in India have always found favour from law makers. Various programmes at central and state level have been launched to eliminate the gender disparity and improve the educational conditions of women. These include Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, National Commission for women, National Policy, Pre Matric Scholarship.

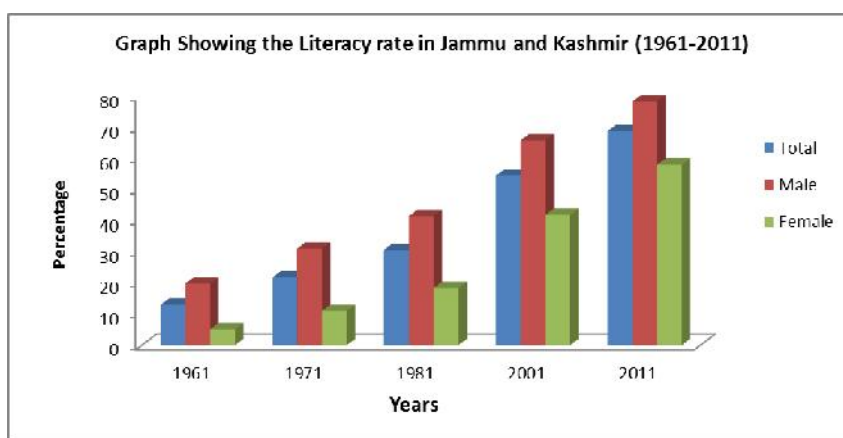
In spite of good constitutional provisions, policies and programmes in favour of women many evils social practices and customs still exist in Indian society which prevent women from availing opportunities available for them. As a result they still constitute educationally and socially backward and deprived section of Indian society as is evident from poor literacy rate and educational achievement of

women. According to the 2001 Census, the male literacy rate was more than 75% and the female literacy rate was 54.16% and according to the 2011 Census, the male literacy rate is 82.14% while female literacy rate is 65.46% only. Same is the case in the state of Jammu and Kashmir as per 2001 census report total literacy of the state was 54.46% in which females had 41.82% and males had 65.75% literacy rate.

Table-1, Literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir (percent) 1961-2011

Census Year	Person	Male	Female
1961	12.95	19.75	5.05
1971	21.71	31.01	10.94
1981	30.64	41.46	18.37
2001	54.46	65.75	41.82
2011	68.74	78.26	58.01

Source: 1981, 2001 and 2011 census



An analysis of census data on male and female literacy from 1961 to 2011 reveals that despite remarkable progress in female literacy rate, there is still a wide gap between male and female literacy rate. This gap is more clearly visible in the state of Jammu and Kashmir where women constitute 47 percent of the total population. Women development, no doubt, has been part of the development planning in the state since the inception of Five Year plans but the shift in approach from welfare to the development of women took place in the Sixth plan onwards. But despite so many positive outcomes in the successive Plans and the progress made over the past 60 years, female literacy has remained very low in Jammu and Kashmir state as compared to male literacy. Gender disparity in literacy in Jammu and Kashmir is a historical phenomenon. (Ruchi, 2013 pp: 100) Though the census data from 1961 to 2011

shows a substantial growth in female literacy rate from 5.05 percent to 58.01 percent but male literacy rate is still high to female literacy rate.

An analysis of literacy rate at district level in Jammu and Kashmir shows that the districts which have a low level of literacy are primarily mountainous, have low level of urbanization and non- primary sector work force as also less number of schools in relation to their population. The opposite is true for the districts with relatively higher literacy. These districts occupy either relatively plain areas or have a major concentration of their settlements in the plain areas. Secondly, these districts have higher urban population and workforce in non-primary sector as also more number of schools. The government of Jammu and Kashmir has taken various steps to lower the gap between rural- urban and male- female literacy rate

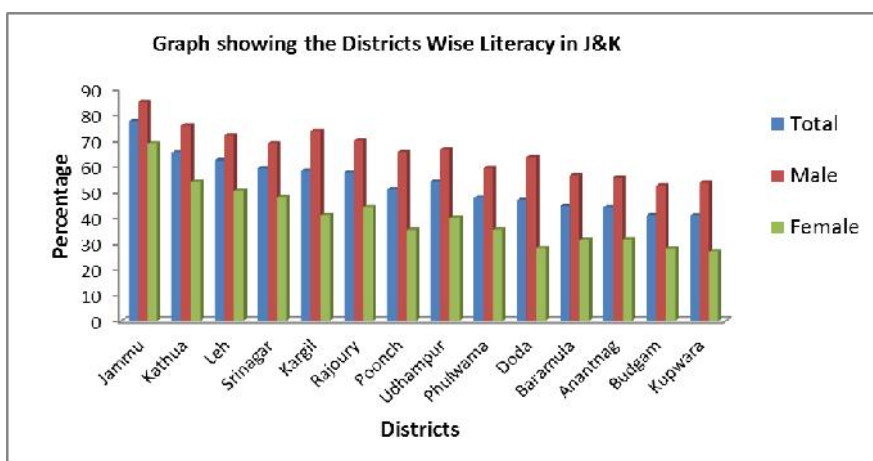
Table-2, Literacy Rate of Districts in descending Order (percent) 2001

District	Total	Literacy Rate	
		Male	Female
Jammu	77.30	84.92	68.79
Kathua	65.29	75.73	53.92
Leh	62.24	71.98	50.53
Srinagar	59.18	68.85	47.97
Kargil	58.21	73.58	40.96
Rajoury	57.65	69.94	44.14
Poonch	51.07	65.41	35.30
Udhampur	54.16	66.43	39.89
Phulwama	47.76	59.24	35.40
Doda	46.92	63.56	28.35
Baramula	44.57	56.39	31.42
Anantnag	44.10	55.51	31.51
Budgam	40.94	52.51	28.14
Kupwara	40.80	53.55	26.83

Source: 2001 Census

Within the state, the spatial variations in literacy are quite wide. The gap between the highest (Jammu, 77.30 percent) and lowest (Badgam, 42.94 percent) literacy districts for instance, is almost 25 percent. Only 6 districts out of a total of 14 have literacy rate higher than the state average figure the remaining 8 have almost two-fifths of their population without the ability to read and write (Census, 2001). These educationally, most backward districts viz.

Kupwara, Baramula, Pulwama, Anantnag, and Badgam in the valley and Doda, Udhampur and Punch in Jammu province form a contiguous belt in middle of the state covering the mountainous and forested region which separates two clusters of high literacy rates- one in south and the south- west comprising Jammu, Rajouri and Kathua and the other in the north-east comprising Srinagar, Kargil and Leh.



It is well-known facts that about 80 percent of the people in Jammu and Kashmir live in rural areas, where the educational facilities beyond the mixed primary schools are hardly sufficient.

Rural-Urban differentials in literacy are also wide. It is evident from the census report that educational development has remained urban-centric both among males and females in the state. The literacy rate for rural areas is 48.22 percent against 72.17 percent for urban areas according to 2001

census. Again female literacy in rural areas at 35.09 percent is very low and is less than half of the literacy in urban areas. (Ruchi, 2013 pp: 101-102)

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Available literature on women’s education in Jammu and Kashmir reiterates that educational status of women in India is inferior as compared to their male counterpart. Fayaz (2011) in his study “Gender Disparity and Policies of Inclusion” mentions that the participation of women in the field of education

in Jammu and Kashmir is not very satisfactory. There is a wide gap between male-female literacy rates. Although women have equal rights in the constitution, the gender disparity in number of institutions, enrolment, teachers and teachers-student ratio still persists. Shokeen (2014) in his study shows that educationally women in the state of Jammu and Kashmir are very backward when compared to the women at national level. The level of education among women is very low. He shows some of the factors which hinder women education in the state of Jammu and Kashmir such as poverty, child marriage, custom and cultural practices, lack of hostel facilities etc. Gurcharn (2013) in his study shows that educational status of women in Jammu and Kashmir has been improving decade after decade but not up to satisfactory level. The literacy rate of women has increased from 42.22% in 2001 Census to 58.01% in 2011. He further states that majority of the women in the state engaged in household activities. Thus, their share in the employment sector is very low and this reflects their low status in the society. He shows some of the problems which women faced in the state during the last 24 years such as bloodshed, violence, torture, killing and most of the women have lost their male bread-earners in the family. Suri (2010) in her paper shows that the literacy rate of women in Jammu And Kashmir State has remained very low as compared to men. This Gender gap in literacy in the state is a historical phenomenon. She also highlighted some of the problems which women face while acquiring education like the mountainous topography of the state is major hindrance in achieving the desired goal of complete literacy and lack of school within reachable areas, lack of infrastructure, weather vagaries and lack of employment opportunities. Ruchi (2013) shows in her study that there is a wide gender disparity in the education of both male and female in Jammu and Kashmir State. This wide disparity is due to the poverty, lack of female teacher, lack of infrastructure facilities, early marriage and parental illiteracy especially of mothers had always been an obstacle in the spread of women education. Within Jammu and Kashmir rural- urban differentials in terms of literacy rate are quite wide. Literacy rate is quite high in those districts with higher urban population which are concentrated mostly in plain areas as compared to those districts which are primarily mountainous and have low level of urbanisation and resultant low level of literacy in general and female literacy in particular. Poonch is one among these educationally backward districts of Jammu and Kashmir.

WOMEN EDUCATION IN POONCH

Poonch bounded by the Actual Line of control (ALC) from three sides. The ALC is about 103kms. from Tarkundi in Balakot to Sawjian in Mandi Block. Poonch is situated between 33°25' to 34°01' North latitude and between 73°58' to 74°35' east longitude. It is surrounded by Kashmir valley in the North; district Rajouri in the South and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) in the West. It consists of 04 Tehsil, namely Mendhar, Haveli, Mandi, Surankot, 06 Blocks, (Poonch, Mandi, Surankot, Buffleiaz, Mandhar, Balakot,) 191 Panchayats and 179 villages comprising of 172 inhabited and 07 uninhabited as per 2001 census. (Maini, 2009) The total population of the district as per 2001 census was 3.73 lacs, out of which 1.94 lacs are male and 1.79 lacs are female. The density of population was 223 per Sq Kms. The percentage of population belonging to Muslim Community is 91.93%, Hindu 5.20%, Sikh 2.76%, Buddhist 0.03% and Christian 0.08%. Out of total population 40% population consists of Gujjar and Bakarwal, 52% Pahari while remaining 6% are kashmiris, Dogres and Punjabi. The rural population is 3.49 lacs and 0.24 lacs is urban population. The growth rate was 28.16% during the period 1991-01. Working force consists of 65.855 cultivators, 3.77% agricultural labourers and 2.17% works in household industry and 28.21% are of "others" category. The population of Poonch district is heterogeneous, with people possessing different ethnic backgrounds, possessing diverse religion, language and culture. The educational scenario in the district of Poonch clearly shows that educationally women are the most backward section of the society and there exists a wider gender gap in education. It is evident from the data of district Handbook that during the years 2011-2012, there were 4 degree college, 104 High and Higher secondary, 529 Middle and 1042 Primary school exist in the Poonch district both government as well as private having the enrolment of 122856 students in which 56986 are women. The enrolment ratio of women as compared to men is low, total enrolment of women in the primary school is 17008, and men is 18104, in the Middle schools 22407 women are enrolled and 24881 are men and 16649 women and 21407 men are enrolled in the High and Higher secondary schools, at the college level their enrolment ratio is 922 and men have 1627. We can observe from this that the number of girls enrolment start decreasing after high and higher secondary schools and only 922 women reach at the college level. This

variation is due to high dropout rate of girls in comparison to boys. The gap between male and female is high in Poonch, Mendhar and Surankot Block. But in some other Block Balakot and Bufliaz women enrolment is high as compared to men. (District Handbook, 2011-12) Dropping out of school which is a worldwide phenomenon is closely related to the socio-economic and the physical wellbeing of a society besides the standard of education. A numbers of factors responsible for this high drop out such as reluctance shown by some parents in allowing their daughters to study in co-educational institutions stems from their concern regarding bad arrangement of bathrooms at the schools, lack of schools within walkable distance, non-availability or deficient of transport from home to school etc. (Suri, 2014) The literacy rate among women in Poonch district was 36.00 percent as against 65.00 percent among men with a total of 51.20 percent for both sexes as per 2001 census.

From the preceding conversation it is depicted that there exist gender disparities in education in the Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir state. A few studies conducted on educational status of women in Poonch district have pointed out various reasons for educational backwardness of women, which may be discussed as follows.

POVERTY

Majority of the people in Poonch district are not in a position to give proper education to their children. Children are compelled for child labour, such as collecting fire wood, fetching water from far furlong areas, caring their young siblings, cooking and helping parents in agriculture fields. Main occupation of the people is cultivation they get their day to day requirement from it, so the parents are unable to provide education to their children due to heavy expenditure on their children's education. Those who are in a position to educate a limited number of their children, majority of them give preference to son's education as compared to daughters, especially because daughters help them with household activities and care for their siblings. So, the poverty badly affects the education of women. (Maini, 2009)

EARLY MARRIAGE

The daughters are considered as a load on their parents until they were married. It is evident from the past that early marriage prevailed mostly in rural society. Customs of early marriage was deeply rooted in the Poonch because majority of people in

Poonch district live in rural areas, thus the question of daughter's education was hardly thought of. The evil custom of early marriage can be considered an important factor responsible for educational backwardness of women in Poonch district.

LACK OF PARENTAL MOTIVATION

Parents do not feel motivated to get their daughters educated because majority of parents are illiterate. They do not understand the importance of girls' education. Illiteracy of parents and traditional thinking directly contributes to the low level of girl's education. (Suri, 2014)

PATRIARCHAL NATURE OF SOCIETY

The Poonch district as a whole is male dominated and patriarchal in nature. The final authority is vested in the hand of male members and this adds to lower down the status of women in the society, who are mostly confined to, looking after children, elders and their cattle. They have a very little say in the decisions regarding their children's particularly daughter's education.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Employment opportunities for the women are very limited because they have access to only government job which is very limited. they are often prevented from carrying out private job outside the state. Those women who opt for and allowed to get education, often do not get satisfying jobs because of lack of job opportunity in private sectors. This is major reason for their lack of interest in higher education. (Maini, 2009)

Other problems which are proved as an obstacle against women education include the problems like inadequate facilities, domestic work, and lack of transportation and communication facilities, conflicting societal role expectations etc. It has been observed that women in Poonch district are lagging behind their counterparts in Jammu and Kashmir due to the late start in educating them. This is caused by our culture and traditions which has been unreceptive to the needs of women.

CONCLUSION

From the above examination, it can be concluded that women in Poonch district are educationally backward. There exists a wide gender disparity in literacy as evident in census data, District Handbook and a few studies on issues related to women's education in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir. Women in the district have been generally subjected to discrimination, exploitation, oppression and inequality. Their role remained confined to

household activities and they were given limited opportunities for educational pursuit. The efforts made by the central as well as state government and various NGO's through various means have not completely succeeded in satisfying the special expectations and aspirations of women in the state because there is shortages of female teachers, lack of infrastructural facilities and lack of schools within walkable distance. To promote the education of women at all levels and lessen the gender disparity in providing knowledge and education government should establish schools, colleges and universities exclusively for women in the state. Gender Mainstreaming should be done through initiation of various sectoral programs. Gender sensitization, education and public consciousness must be a pivotal part of such programs. Economic upliftment of women must be ensured by starting small, medium and large scale projects. To make effort to generate educational awareness and attitudinal changes among the masses regarding women's education, the role of women's families, community leaders and media is the need of the hour. Little has been achieved in the area of women empowerment by the efforts of both government and civil society but more improvement is required.

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