
ACCESS TO RURAL WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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“Woman must not accept; she must challenge. She must not be awed by that which has been built up around her; she must reverence that woman in her identity which struggles for expression. Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience,” -- Mary Wollstonecraft-Great Feminist

Abstract: Women have always played an important role in any society as daughter, sister, wife, mother, and mother in law, grandmother and in various other manifestations. As nature has bestowed the ability to conceive, nurture and bring forth the offspring into this universe on the woman in her role as a mother, she assumes great significance in myth as well as in reality. Man realized this truth even during the ancient ages that resulted in the worship of mother goddesses. While as a daughter and as a wife, the woman is subjugated and leads a protected life under the care of man, as a mother she is love and devotion personified and at times raises above common norms of human behaviour to such an extent that she is venerated.

Introduction: As times changed, women have left the safe precincts of home and taken up jobs to play the roles of bread winners and share the burden of adding significantly to the family income. Studies show that, in most of the world, women spend more hours per week working than men do. However, for women, a larger proportion of time spent working is devoted to unpaid work i.e. housework, childcare, cooking, laundry, housecleaning, ironing, gardening and carrying water and wood and other domestic activities that are not counted when economists try to quantify work. In most countries, women spend about twice the amount of time doing unpaid work as men do; in Japan, that is nine times. Even women who are employed full time do most of the domestic work in their households.¹

Women's total work time per week is 53 hours in Bangladesh, 69 in India and 77 in Nepal as compared to men's work time in these countries of 46, 56, and 57 hours respectively. There is one remarkable similarity among countries, the role played by fathers in child care - they do it for, on average, less than one hour per day!² For many women, the reality is a great lack of support and a continuous struggle to make and maintain arrangements for childcare. Moreover, a large chunk of their already smaller than men's income, often goes to pay for this childcare. And the responsibility for solving these problems falls disproportionately on women, even in couples where both members have equally demanding professional careers. In the field of higher education, advanced science and technology Women are universally underrepresented. Indian women society is a potential powerhouse of innovations and explorations.

Empowerment: The word Empowerment has become a new 'buzzword' in international development language but is often poorly understood. The need to 'empower' women responds to the growing recognition that women in developing countries lack control over resources and the self-confidence and/or opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. At the same time, the realisation that women have an increasingly important role to play in social and economic development has become widely accepted.³ Unless women are 'empowered' to participate alongside men in

the development process, development efforts will only have partial effect. Empowerment strategies must carefully define their meaning of 'empowerment' and be integrated into mainstream programmes rather than attempted separately.

Since the mid-1980s, the term empowerment has become popular in the development field, especially with reference to women. However, there is confusion as to what the term means among development actors. The concept of women's empowerment is the outcome of important critiques generated by the women's movement, particularly by 'third world' feminists. They clearly state that women's empowerment requires the challenging of patriarchal power relations that result in women having less control over material assets and intellectual resources. Women participate in their own oppression so they must first become aware of the ideology that legitimises male domination.⁴ The empowerment process starts from within but access to new ideas and information will come from external agents. With new consciousness and the strength of solidarity, women can assert their right to control resources and to participate equally in decision making. Women can be empowered only if they have given education. Unfortunately these women are encouraged to go to higher education. In this paper a serious attempt has been made to explain the importance higher education for rural women

In Asian countries, education of women is one of the most fiercely debated issues. This debate, accompanied by social and political change, resulted in significant progress of women's emancipation. The accessibility of education for rural women at primary and secondary levels increased greatly but their accessibility to higher education is a question in the present century however women were allowed to enter universities in urban areas. The challenge of providing higher education to rural Indian women must be put in the context of the demographics and cultural traditions of the country.⁵ While great efforts have been made at population control resulting in a rate of population increase of just 1.8% per year, in a country of 1 billion people, that still means an annual population increase of some 18 million

people who require all the essentials of life as well as education at all levels. The population increase in and of itself presents a staggering educational and financial challenge.

For women, participation in higher education faces additional hurdles of culture and tradition that militate against their post-graduation education opportunities. And these cultural problems are even more pronounced for rural women where the old traditions of protection of young women, subordination to their husbands and the place of women in society as focused on the home and child rearing are the strongest and exposure to feminist reforms are the weakest. Nevertheless, the Government has declared policies of educational equality and opportunity and, within its limited resources, has made remarkable accomplishments.

Women Education in Post-Independence: India acquired independence from British colonial rule in 1947. The Constitution of India declared in 1951 firmly affirms the equality of all citizens before the law. Impressively it goes far beyond this, by identifying the country's aboriginal tribes (indigenous people), former untouchable castes, and women as weaker sections of society, wronged and discriminated against for generations, and therefore deserving special facilities and support for advance. In the five-year plans that followed, the Indian government has consistently emphasized education as one of the principal instruments for the advance of each of these categories of people. Because of these provisions Indian women have had the benefit of affirmative action by the government long before the practice was accepted in other parts of the world.

It is now more than five decades since the Constitution of the country promised free and compulsory elementary school education to all children up to the age of fourteen. Nevertheless barely 70-80 percent of the children in the country are in school. Only 65% of those who join school complete the four years that mark the completion of primary school. Just 35 per cent complete higher secondary schooling that is the qualifying requirement for entrance to university education.⁶ The inability to enroll all children in school, and to retain those who are enrolled until they complete their primary school education, is acknowledged to be one of the most serious failures of development. It is, as may be imagined, not only a source of great embarrassment to the government but a matter of grave concern from the point of view of the country's future. All government and public effort is therefore currently concentrated on universalizing elementary school education. And thus, although in principle there is a strong commitment to the higher education of women, for purposes of funding and concentrated action the country has to make way for the urgent and more compelling responsibility to universalize primary school education.

The Indian Government has made heroic efforts to provide universal literacy and education. The literacy rate (ages 5 & up) of India increased to 62% in 1997 from

52.21% in 1991, but the 1997 female literacy rate was just 50% and the rural female literacy rate was just 43%. The adult rates (ages 15 and up) were 54% total, 40.7% for women. The total enrolment in secondary schools in 1997-98 was still only 50% of the eligible population of which 44% were girls in primary school, 40% in middle school and 37.1% in secondary school.⁷ So the percentage of students who qualify for higher education is still small, particularly among female students. And while the Government has aggressively promoted the construction of facilities and preparation of teachers, there still is a distressing inadequacy. On top of this, the vast majority of the population is very poor, so that attendance of students must be subsidized. Education is free through the 12th grade and scholarships are available for university education. There are set-aside positions and counseling provisions for special cast and tribal students at all levels of the educational system. While again, the Government has made great efforts to address all these problems, higher education funding has suffered by the priority placed on universal availability of primary education and literacy, leaving inadequate resources for higher education. The end result is that only 6% of the eligible population attends institutions of higher education today, 34.7% of them women, about 2% of the eligible women and less than 1% of the eligible rural women.⁸

On the other hand, as of 1997-98 there are 229 universities in the country, 16 central universities and remaining operated by the states. And there are some 9,274 colleges, 7,199 of them colleges for general education and 2,075 colleges for professional education. Together they enroll some 7 million students and employ 331,000 teachers.⁹ In addition the Indira Gandhi National Open University provides flexible higher education opportunities to large segments of the population who have no access to the colleges and universities. Established in 1987, it now has 47 programs consisting of 553 courses. In 1999, it reached over 172,000 students.

However, after sixty five years of freedom it is apparent that Constitutional assurances, policy provisions and government programs are insufficient. Not much can change unless cultural constraints to equality for women are wiped out and unless real opportunities are made available for women to exercise the equality made legally available to them. With reference to education for instance, the opportunity for education, particularly higher education, is important.¹⁰ But, higher education cannot take women very far unless they also have opportunities to earn, to pursue careers, to participate in democracy and development, and generally to function as independent individuals. In fact, unless a society is sensitive, open and committed to all this for women, policy remains empty rhetoric.

National Commission on Higher education

Almost immediately after independence, in 1948-49 the government of India appointed a major national Commission focusing on higher education. Known as

the University Education Commission, this Commission was headed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, one of India's most distinguished scholars and philosophers and a man very sympathetic to the cause of women.¹¹ He later became the President of India. In the report of this Commission the chapter on university education for women, leads with an angry statement on how the British government had done nothing to advance women's university education in India. The report makes some powerful statements about the importance of women's education and underlines the government's obligation to provide equal educational opportunities for women.

Despite the powerful statements on equalization of opportunities for women, however, the Commission seemed to be guided by the conviction that motherhood and home making are, and will remain, central to the lives of women. And yet the fact that the Commission specifically mentions the possibility of the employment of unmarried girls must be conceded as an impressive advance. At the time at which the Commission submitted its report, young unmarried girls were not exposed to the world of work. On completion of their education they were expected to stay at home until they were married. This was basically to protect their virginity and to keep them under control.¹² But also because, according to then prevalent norms, the course of a girl's life is to be determined as per the wishes of her husband and her in-laws after her marriage, particularly in matters that involved her interaction with others, or stepping out of the home. Parents were expected to facilitate this by keeping their daughters in a "neutral" state at home before they gave them away in marriage. By acknowledging the possibility that unmarried girls may want to work, the Commission made a bold and radical departure from this norm.

The other major contribution of the Commission is that it recommended that the number of women's colleges in the country should be increased. Over the course of the decades since it was made this recommendation have had positive returns. There were less than a hundred women's colleges in the country when the Commission submitted its report. Today there are more than twelve hundred.

In 1958-59, almost ten years after the appointment of the University Education Commission, the government of India appointed a National Commission on Women. The National Commission on women recommended special hostels, special colleges and special scholarships for women. It recommended special syllabi for women and specified that these syllabi should focus on creating the right attitudes among them.¹³ The recommendations of the Commission lead to the establishment of the National Council for Girls, the establishment of a Comprehensive Development Plan for Women, to the allocation of special funds for women, and in the central and state ministries of education, to the establishment of separate units to attend to the educational needs of women. The Commission said nothing about equipping women for equal careers, but it did make one major

contribution on this issue. It looked carefully into the needs for occupations in which women were preferred, and pointed out that qualified women were needed, in large numbers, to function as pre-primary school teachers, nurses, midwives, women doctors, pharmacists and social workers. On this basis it firmly recommended the promotion of education for women in these fields.

In the mid seventies, in response to the feminist movement and declaration of the International Women's decade, the Government of India appointed a Parliamentary Committee on Women. In 1978 this Committee submitted its report entitled *Towards Equality*. It quotes on education points out how difficult it is for girls in villages to go to schools and how irrelevant most school and college education is to the lives of women. It complains that education does not equip them to earn nor empower them to be more independent, autonomous and effective in their personal lives, or in carrying out their political and civic responsibilities. With carefully documented data the report illustrates the educational backwardness of women and indicates how unfortunate the consequences for the country are. It also points out those policy statements on the education of women are ambivalent. It is particularly critical of the fact that although policy statements emphasize equality for women, they do not accept the idea that every woman has the right to pursue a fully fledged career or acknowledge that women's ambitions in life may extend far beyond their roles as wives, mothers and home makers.¹⁴ The findings and statements in this report shook the government of India out of its complacency concerning the status of women in India, and forced the issue of their education into a new focus.

National Educational Policy on Women education:

From the decade of the seventies onwards there is a visible change. The National Policy on Education declared in 1986, talks of education for the "empowerment of women." It further promises that "this will be an act of faith and social engineering". The Eighth Five Year Plan of the country launched in 1991 categorically states that education of women is imperative in order to improve health and nutrition levels in the country and to succeed with the country's efforts to control its population explosion. It speaks of women as "partners in development." In the Ninth Five Year Plan, which became operative in 1997, the title of the chapter on women's education is *Education for Women's Equality*. It is pertinent to point out that the ambivalence about equality and about the objectives of education, which were so conspicuous earlier, are now completely gone. Both the tone and the substance of these documents and other policy statements of the eighties and nineties exude a new urgency and determination.¹⁵ Three different factors seem to have contributed to the change. First the findings from the country's review of its development efforts, second the feminist movement, and third the revolution of rising expectations and standards of living which has made it

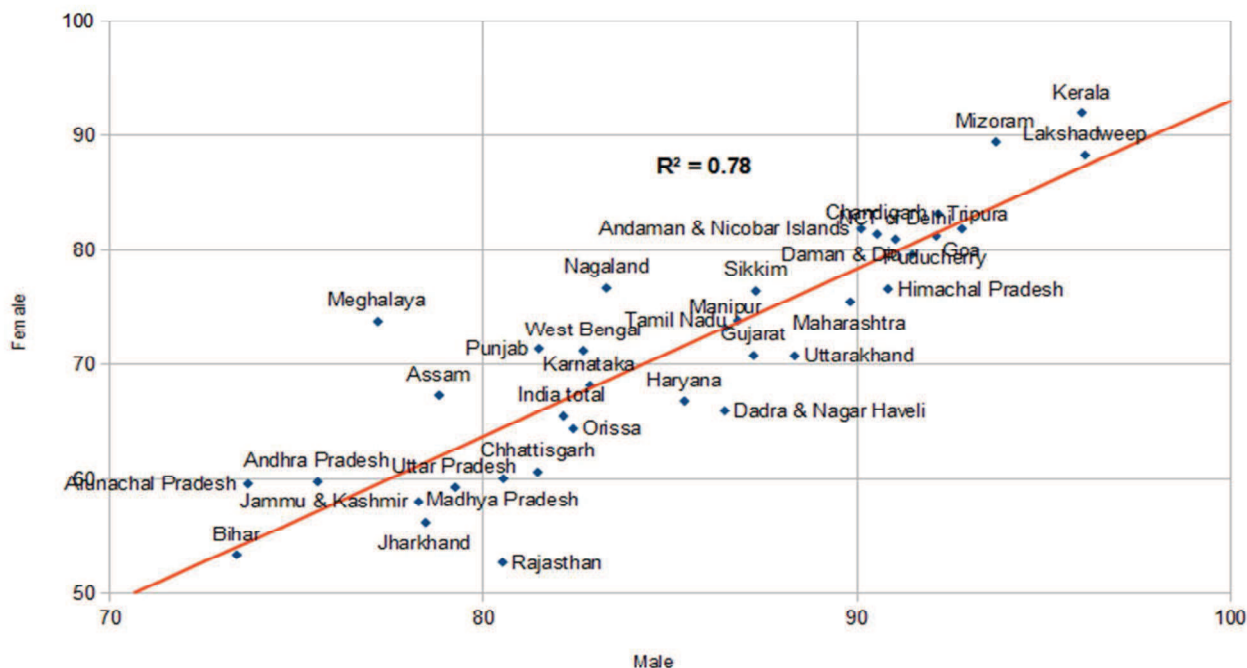
necessary for women to be gainfully employed.

Education and Eleventh Plan:

It is heartening that both the tenth and the eleventh Plan are clear and unambiguous about education particularly higher education for women as an instrument of equality for women. However what really matters is that attitudes and aspirations have changed. At the societal level the education of women is now considered to be the cornerstone of development. At the family level the education of women is slowly being accepted as an economic investment in the same

manner as the education of men. It is also seen as a multi-faceted investment in the enrichment of family life. At the personal level education is seen as an instrument for the empowerment of women and the foundation of a new, independent, self-reliant and richer selfhood for women.¹⁶ In a sense the change that has taken place is rooted in a century and a half of efforts to promote the education of women and to advance their status. It is almost as if these efforts seemed finally to have matured after a long period of gestation.

Female vs. male literacy



Women in Higher Education: Returning to the statistics and focusing on the role of women in higher education, more than two million women are enrolled for higher education in India today. The figure may sound impressive to those who are not fully aware of the size of the population of the country. But it is not, as may be acknowledged from the fact that these 2 million women constitute just 34% of the total enrolment of 6.5 million students in higher education.¹⁷ It is interesting that the percentage of women is slightly higher at the postgraduate level (39%) than at the under graduate level (34%), and that this is higher at this level than the enrolment in the diploma level (26%). Data on the faculty-wide distribution of women show that of all the women enrolled in higher education the largest percentage (54%) are enrolled in the faculty of Arts and the Humanities, 20% are enrolled in the faculty of Science, 14% in the faculty of Commerce, 4% in Medicine, Agriculture, Management, 2% in law and 1% in Engineering.¹⁸ The data clearly reveal that the overall representation of

women in higher education is poor, and that they are poorly represented in the faculties that lead to prestigious and lucrative occupations such as engineering and management. However it is significant that the decadal increase of enrolment in higher education has consistently been larger for women than for men. The figures are as follows. In the 1950's enrolment of women in higher education increased by 27.5% and of men by 12.64%, in the 1960's women's enrolment increased by 187.33% and men's by 108.78%, in the 1970's women's by 73.55% and men's by 31.60%, and in the 1980's women's by 92.11% and men's by 49.18%. General literacy in 2001 was 64.83 it is increased into 74.04 in 2011. Male literacy in 2001 was 75.26 it is increased into 2011 in 82.14. Women literacy in 2001 was 53.67 it is increased into just 65.46 in 2011. Women's representation, in all disciplines, has also gone up substantially.¹⁹ Today one sees increasingly larger numbers of women in every field, including those from which they were practically excluded until a few years ago. In fact women are moving steadily towards equality

in higher education.

| Literacy table 1901 to 2011 | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|------|--------|-------|---------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| S.No | Year | Total% | Male% | Female% | Urban female% | Rural female% | Money allotted |
| 1 | 1901 | 5.35 | 9.83 | 0.60 | 0.55 | 0.05 | NA |
| 2 | 1911 | 5.92 | 10.56 | 1.05 | 1.50 | 0.05 | 50.0000 |
| 3 | 1921 | 7.16 | 12.21 | 1.81 | 1.45 | 0.10 | 75.0000 |
| 4 | 1931 | 9.05 | 15.59 | 2.93 | 2.00 | 0.93 | NA |
| 5 | 1941 | 16.1 | 24.9 | 7.03 | 6.45 | 1.98 | NA |
| 6 | 1951 | 16.67 | 24.95 | 7.93 | 7.00 | 0.93 | NA |
| 7 | 1961 | 24.02 | 34.44 | 12.95 | 11.00 | 0.95 | NA |
| 8 | 1971 | 29.45 | 39.45 | 18.69 | 15.29 | 3.50 | NA |
| 9 | 1981 | 36.23 | 46.89 | 24.82 | 20.00 | 4.82 | NA |
| 10 | 1991 | 42.84 | 52.74 | 32.17 | 24.07 | 6.10 | 500 crore |
| 11 | 2001 | 64.83 | 75.26 | 53.67 | 33.30 | 20.30 | 1000crore |
| 12 | 2011 | 74.04 | 82.14 | 65.46 | 40.26 | 25.20 | 1500 crore |

However the more important issue to take cognizance of is the generally limited access to higher education in the country. The 6.5 million students enrolled for higher education in India constitute only 6% of the population in the relevant age group, as compared to 25-30 per cent in Europe and 50-60 per cent in North America.²⁰ Thus when we talk about equality for women in higher education we are talking about equality within a very privileged sector, namely the 6% that has made it to college.

Colleges for Women: There are about 400 women's colleges and a few women's universities in India. The history of women's colleges in the country traced to Bethune College, Calcutta established in 1879 which is considered to be the first women's college in India.²¹ The vast number of such institutions clearly points to the relevance of single sex educational institutions for girls as demanded by our society. It may be observed that institutions exclusively for boys are on the verge of extinction. There are a number of advantages of a woman studying in a women's college. At the same time some argue studying in a women's college curbs the abilities of a student to imbibe the complexities of social life. Whatever be the arguments, still – when the societies are overcoming all the gender barriers – colleges exclusively for women are being established, even in the professional sector. It may be recalled that in 2009 the UGC / AICTE announced special scheme to establish women's colleges.²²

However one should admit that the number of women's colleges being established has declined in recent years. This prompts one to pose some question: Are women's colleges any longer relevant? Why should this particular type of educational experience continue to exist? Answering this question requires understanding a true complex set of issues that have been the subject of much research and inquiry –for instance studies such as Carol Gilligan's 'In a Different Voice' (1982), Mary Belenky and others, 'Women's Ways of Knowing' (1988), and Sally

Helgesen's 'The Web of Inclusion' (1995). These studies and others have argued over several decades that women communicate, learn and lead differently than men. Hence, women learn best from women-centred education. In this context, it seems meaningful to look into the significance, purpose, advantages, disadvantages, implications, challenges and opportunities of women's higher education institutions in India.

Women in Medical, Advanced Science Education: In India it is only a century since women were accepted as fully-fledged professionals on parallel lines to male doctors. Since Independence, governmental policies ensuring equal opportunities for women to work and health care for all have provided an impetus to women's involvement in the medical profession. The expansion in the facilities for professional knowledge and training as well as socio-cultural factors have allowed a substantial increase in the participation of women doctors, yet their number seems to be low compared with other women professionals as well as compared to male doctors.

The prestigious Shanti SwarupBhatnagar Prize, 2010, had nine awardees, of which three were women. Considering that in the 52-year history of these awards only 14 women have won this coveted prize out of 463 scientists, this year's list clearly indicates that women scientists are now winning greater recognition for their work.²³ Interestingly, it is young women who are making waves with their outstanding research. Are these women an exception to the surveys conducted or is the Indian Scenario changing? Indian women have the best multi-tasking abilities.

A recent study busted the myth that women do not devote enough time for work and research post-marriage. A study on women in science was sponsored by Indian Academy of Sciences (IASc) and National Institute of Advanced Sciences (NIAS). It involved at least 568 women scientists, of which 312 were engaged in scientific research, 182 not engaged in positions other

than long-term research and 74 not working at all. AnithaKurup and R Maithreyi, who did the study, said: "Despite family and childcare responsibilities, women work in different ways to put in the required 8 to 10 hours daily for research".²⁴ True, the subcontinent's institutes of scientific learning are open to all its citizens, but potential female researchers still hesitate at the thresholds of laboratories. Space Applications Centre has 16.1589% women in scientific and technical fields. But those holding a post are only 3.97%. Is this because they have seen few role models of their gender in such establishments or are there unwritten codes of conduct by their male counterparts and male dominated hierarchy?

Gender gaps in University education: Currently, a very small proportion of both men and women have a college education, just over 3 percent of men and 1 percent of women. Although a very small proportion of the Indian population attends college, women account for a third of the students at this level (Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), 1993). This sex ratio is found for most fields of study except: 1) engineering and commerce, where women account for a much smaller proportion of the students; and 2) education, where women account for nearly half of all students.

Barriers to women education: There are several reasons for the low levels entry of rural women in higher education in India, not the least of which is the high level of poverty. Over one-third of the population is estimated to be living below the poverty line.²⁵ (The World Bank, 2011). Although school attendance is free, the costs of books, uniforms, and transportation to school can be too much for poor families. Rural girls are encouraged by their parents due to high fees structure in the higher education. Poor families are also more likely to keep girls at home to care for younger siblings or to work in family enterprises. If a family has to choose between educating a son or a daughter because of financial restrictions, typically the son will be chosen. Negative parental attitudes toward educating daughters can also be a barrier to a girl's education. Many parents view educating sons as an investment because the sons will be responsible for caring for aging parents. On the other hand, parents may see the education of daughters a waste of money because daughters will eventually live with their husbands' families, and the parents will not benefit directly from their education. Also, daughters with higher levels of education will likely have higher dowry expenses as they will want a comparably educated husband. However, education sometimes lowers the dowry for a girl because it is viewed as an asset by the husband's family.

Basic reasons for empowerment: The greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. It is indispensable that education enables women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside of her hearth and home but helps her to get status, positive self-esteem,

and self-confidence, necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Thus there is no denying fact that education empowers women. Indeed the different organs of the United Nations and experts on women's liberation argue for women's education as the basic step to attain equality with men. The low literacy among Indian rural women is associated with combination of many factors including social, cultural, economic, educational, demographic, political and administrative and so on. The following are the some of the important factors which could be attributed for the present poor state of affairs of womenfolk in education.

- The Lower Enrolment
- Higher drop-out rate among girls from schools
- Girl Child as Second Mother
- Bonded Labour System
- Cast System as a Barrier
- Dowry as cordon
- Child Labour Practice
- Poor School Environment for girls
- Female age at marriage:
- Inferiority, subservience and domesticity
- Poverty as a Barrier
- Ineffective Law Enforcing Machinery
- Demographic Factors
- Poor Political Will and Conviction

If we see the differences across the states statistics, it can be seen that Kerala has highest female literacy; Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have the lowest. India dreams of becoming a superpower by 2020, but quite ironical is the fact that the country whose population has crossed one billion mark, has literacy rates quite comparable with the underdeveloped countries (and in some cases even less than these countries). While the male literacy rate in urban areas is high, rural female literacy rate is less. Several plausible reasons explain this difference. The first and foremost of course, is the way the parents perceive the female education. Since the very beginning the role of female is confined to domestic work and looking after children. The tradition of settling at husband's place after marriage, does not offer enough incentive to parents for spending on girls' education. A boy's education is far more important as it enhances the chances of his being employed. Another reason is the prevalent trend of early marriage in rural areas. In most villages, girls' education, rather than being seen as an incentive is seen as a liability. It is difficult to find a groom for an educated girl.

These are not the only reasons responsible for the low level of female education. Though one cannot deny that gender inequality is, by and large, responsible for the situation, but several other factors also work in this direction. Very often, the parents who are willing to educate their daughters are discouraged by the absence of school within the surrounding area and it is not considered safe to send girls to another village to study. However, this is not true for most of the villages now. But even in villages where there are schools, the

standard of infrastructure is abysmally low, be it management of classes, student-teacher ratio, availability of text books, or even furniture, these schools lack in every sense. This discourages the parents to get their children enrolled in these schools. There are incidences of under qualified staff being employed in educational institutions. The meagre salaries that are offered by the government do not provide enough incentive to attract the talent to these schools for employment. Grimmer is the condition of scheduled caste female education.

However, talking of female literacy, one cannot ignore the achievement of southern states in terms of female education. The states' performance in terms of social indicators is often proportional to economic growth. But in India's case rich states like Punjab and Haryana have lower literacy rates as compared to Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Kerala has performed really well since 1990s in fields of health and education, mainly due to the matriarchal pattern of their society.²⁶ Himachal Pradesh has also managed to do significantly better than other states in relatively shorter span of time. Major credit for this goes to the political action in the state. The success of government's initiatives often depends on the cooperative action of the community. The illiterate people are often unable to put pressure on the state governments and school authorities, and so, they can easily get away with the blame. Huge amount provided in the budget for expenditure on education does not reach to the grass root level due to the endemic corruption. Thus lack of accountability is often responsible for ramshackle infrastructure of government institutions.

Education, under nutrition, and gender discrimination are all interrelated. For example, infant's health depends on the care taken by mother during pregnancy which in turn depends on her education and also the education in the community. Further, an educated mother is better equipped to help her children in studies. So, there is a need for change in the social attitude of rural people towards women. Also, the standard of government schools' infrastructure needs to be raised. The salaries of staff should also be raised to make them more committed. Other states should learn from Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu so that the goal of achieving universal education does not remain a distant dream.

Summary And Conclusion: This paper examined the need for women education. The study revealed that there had been significant progress in the performance of women education. It exposed female literacy in higher education levels and its change over time. It was also observed that the gaps between rural and urban female literacy rates are narrowing down.

It explored that rural poverty, urbanization and drop-out rate on the educational attainment of women, a multiple regression equation was estimated. It was observed that rural poverty acts as a push factors for women's education rather than as an obstacle to

women's education. The significant influence of urbanization on women's education implied that urbanization had been playing a beneficial role in the attainment of women's education in India. At the same time, the drop-out rate had a negative effect on women's education. It revealed that that reduction of girl's drop-out rates is necessary for achieving women's education.

The initiatives of the government through investment and infrastructure in developing education in India were examined. With regard to facilities in institutions, it had improved significantly, but a lot more need to be done. In sum, the study revealed that there have been concerted efforts to encourage women to go to higher education, which would lead to higher literacy in future. The study also revealed that there are several infrastructural barriers to rural women education in India. The study calls for focused approach towards increasing women centred educational infrastructure so as to reduce the women drop-out rates and to improve higher literacy levels in India.

Call for holistic and developed linked cooperation to rural women literacy. It is said that education is critical for achieving growth in a knowledge based society. Without women literacy, people were excluded from access to circuits of knowledge and even from the most basic information they may need for daily life. Increasing female higher education had the potential of believing a force multiplier in pushing forward the socio economic development of the nation. If we make women literate they will be self reliant and the beneficial impact in the society will be manifold. It has been estimated that where rural women are literate the rate of infant mortality comes down and the quality of life improves. Literate women are more aware about diseases and their treatment with better capability to deal with sickness; they in turn would begin to send their girls to school, breaking the pattern of social gender discrimination. Imparting education to rural women and girls is important for bringing about social change and for the full development of societies. Recommended suggestions are follows

- As per the National Knowledge Commission more number of colleges and universities for women should be established.
- More awareness should be given to rural women about higher education.
- Priority to be given for women in academic non academic research programme
- More colleges and institutions of higher learning should be opened in rural areas.
- Especially suburban and rural area women should be encouraged to pursue higher education
- Hostel facilities for women should be increased and made available in and around the existing educational institutions. There should be a special scheme for construction of hostels, especially for women.
- The existing institutions of higher learning

exclusively for boys should also admit women wherever possible. Every institution should have women study centres.

- With the increasing number of private institutions entering in the field of higher education, the fees payable are observed to be too high for the disadvantaged groups. In view of this more scholarships, free textbooks, free hostels, subsidized facilities in institutions/hostels should be extended to this group.
- There should be subsidized loan facilities for the fees/hostel expenditure from the financial institutions like banks etc. for rural women
- An in-built system of upgrading the educational needs of the disadvantaged groups should be provided in all institutions through coaching classes for them.
- More scholarships should be extended to women for taking up professional courses.

- 30% of the financial allocation for an Educational Institution should be earmarked for women.

Women; the word sounds so powerful. Since eternity, women have played a role more important than men and that is no exaggeration. The world would not have been the same lovely adorable and liveable place without the wonderful contribution, so selflessly made by women. It has been said that, you teach a female and you build up a nation and truth can't be closer than that. Indian women have mastered anything and everything which a woman can dream of. But she still has to go a long way to achieve equal status in the minds of Indian men. The desire of Indian women can be best summed up in the following lines of 'Song of a Woman':

*I have only one request; I do not ask for money
Although I have need of it, I do not ask for meat
I have only one request, and*

all I ask is that you remove the road block from my path.

Let's open the door for rural women to excel in education.

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