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Gender equality and women empowerment in India

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Abstract

Gender equality is a human right which entitles all persons irrespective of their gender to live with dignity and with freedom. Gender equality is also a precondition for all round development and reducing poverty. Empowered women make invaluable contribution to the improvement of health conditions and educational status and productivity of whole families and communities, which in turn improve prospects for the next generation. The Millennium Development Goal also puts emphasis on gender equality and empowerment of women. It is now widely accepted that gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental cornerstones for achieving development results.

Keywords: gender equality, empowerment, women participation

1. Introduction

Gender equality will be achieved only when women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. This means sharing equally, power and influence, and having equal opportunities in economic and social spheres. Equal claim on education and career prospects will enable women to realize their personal ambitions. Gender equality demands the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. When women are empowered, the whole family benefit, thus benefiting the society as a whole and these benefits often have a ripple effect on future generations.

2. Objectives of the Present Study

This research paper has the following objectives:

1. To understand the level of equality among girls and boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education.
2. To check the level of literacy among women and men between 15-24 years old.
3. Gender Equality and Share of women in wage employment in the non- agricultural sector.
4. Women Empowerment in Political Field.

3. Methodology & Database

For the present paper and for the purpose of study data have been collected from secondary sources. Necessary secondary data on conceptual frame work and review of literature are collected from Journals, Magazines, Newsletters, Newspapers, Periodicals, Reference Books, including the reports and documents of Ministry of Human Resource Development, various regulatory bodies like National Sample Survey Organization, Five Year plan documents, Office of Registrar General of India, Report of Census of India etc. and various other publications. Statistical methods were used for the determination of various aspects of inequalities and empowerment of women.

4. Results and Discussion

A. Gender Equality in primary, secondary education, tertiary education

Education is the single most important factor to ensure gender equality and empowerment. Enrolment of girls in primary education, survival and transition to higher levels of education lead to achieving gender parity in education. During 2000-01 to 2013-14, substantial progress has been achieved towards gender parity in education as revealed by some important indicators.

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Table 1: Trend in some important indicators related to girls enrolment in education

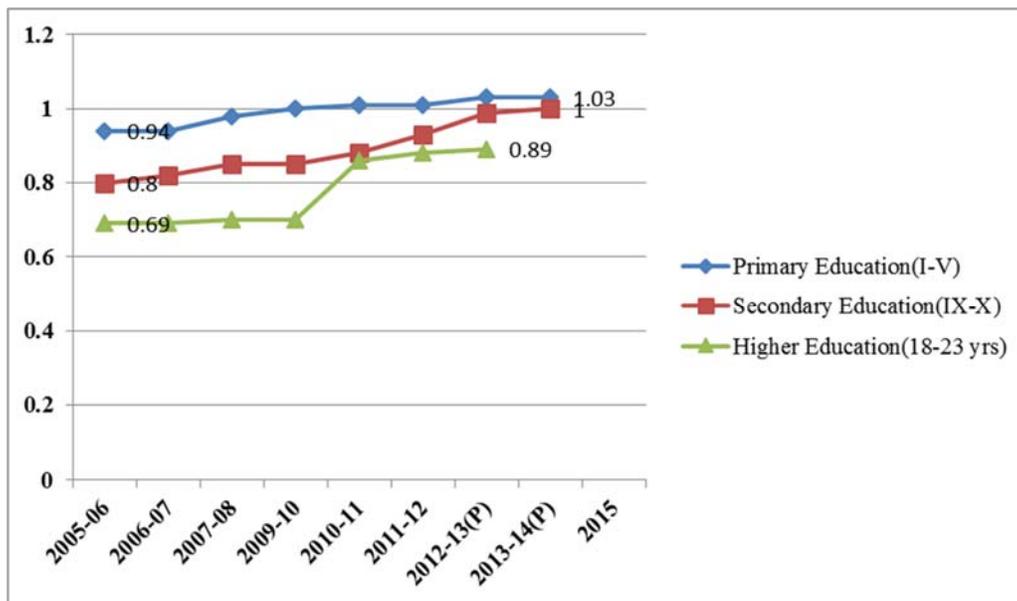
Indicator	Level of education	2000-01	2013-14
Enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment	Primary education (Classes I-V)	43.8%	48.2%
	Upper primary education (Classes VI-VIII)	40.9%	48.6%
	Secondary (IX -X) and higher secondary (XI -XII) education	38.8%	47.1%
Number of girls per 100 boys enrolled	Primary education (Classes I-V)	78	93
	Upper Primary Education	69	95
	Secondary education	63	90
	Higher education	58	81

Source: Education for all towards quality and Equity, M/o HRD, Educational Statistics at a glance 2014, M/o HRD

It is evident that, during 2000-01 to 2013-14, the enrolment of girls is improving and the gender gap in enrolment is diminishing in all levels of education.

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is the ratio of the number of female students enrolled at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education to the corresponding number of male students in each level. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is the number of pupils enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the

population in the theoretical age group for the same level of education. GPI of GER is the ratio of GER of the girls to that of boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Thus, the GPI (GER), which is free from the effects of the population structure of the appropriate age groups, for each level of education, is taken as the appropriate indicator to monitor the gender equality in education. Gender Parity Index for GER in primary, secondary and higher education has been improving steadily.



Source: Educational Statistics at a glance 2014, M/o HRD

Fig 1: Gender Parity Index (GER)- All India

At present, in primary education the enrolment is favourable to females as GPI has crossed the level of 1. In Secondary education also gender parity has been achieved and in tertiary level of education, a rapid progress has been observed during the recent past towards gender parity.

B. Gender Equality and Level of literacy among women and men between 15-24 years old

The ratio of literate women to men, 15–24 year old (literacy gender parity index) is the ratio of the female literacy rate to the male literacy rate for the age group 15–24. The literacy rate for population in the age group 15-24 years depicts an upward trend both in rural and urban areas and for females as well as males. The youth literacy rate has increased from 61.9% to 86.1% during the period 1991-2011. This period indicates a higher increase in literacy rate among female youths (from 49.3% to 81.8%) compared to male youths (from 73.5% to 90%). Over the years, the gap between male and female youth literacy rate has been reduced considerably.

As per Census 2011, the ratio of female youth literacy rate to male youth literacy rate is 0.91 at all India level. During the decade 1991 -2001, the percentage increase in ratio of female youth literacy rate to male youth literacy rate is 19.4% whereas during 2001 -2011, the growth was 13.75%. The slow pace of progress in the indicator 'ratio of female youth literacy rate to male youth literacy rate' in the last decade can be attributed to the tendency of low growth rates observed for most of the indicators which are nearing the saturation point. With the progress achieved during 1991 – 2011, India is likely to achieve the gender parity in youth literacy rate by 2015. Among the States / UTs, in Meghalaya, female youth literacy rate is higher than the male youth literacy rate, and gender parity has been achieved in Kerala and Lakshadweep. The gender disparity in youth literacy rate was highest in Rajasthan (0.78), followed by Bihar (0.8). The States/ UTs, with Ratio of female literacy rate to male literacy rate (15-24 yrs) -2011 less than the corresponding estimated ratio at national level i.e.91

C. Gender Equality and Share of Women in Wage Employment in the Non- Agricultural Sector

The another aspect of gender equality is 'Share of Women in Wage Employment in the Non-Agricultural Sector' which is defined as the share of female workers in the non-agricultural sector expressed as a percentage of total employment in the sector. This measures the degree to which labour markets are open to women in industry and service sectors, which affects not only equal employment opportunity for women but also economic efficiency through flexibility in the labour market and reflect economic factors in social empowerment of women. The NSS 68th round (2011-12) results had estimated the percentage share of females in wage employment in the non- agricultural sector as 19.3% with corresponding figures for rural and urban areas as 19.9% and 18.7% respectively. There is an improvement in the status as NSS 66th round (2009-10) had reported that the share of women in wage employment is 18.6% at national level and the corresponding estimates for rural and urban India pegged at 19.6% and 17.6% respectively. In India, the labour market of non-agricultural sector are greatly male dominated and a 50:50 situation for men and women is too ideal to be true, given the market dynamics and existing socio-cultural framework.

D. Women Empowerment

Greater participation of women in social and political sphere is essential to make the social and political institutions more representative. It serves as a tool for empowerment of women and contributes to gender sensitive decision making. Available Statistics reveals that India has witnessed 16 General elections to the Lok Sabha of Nation's Parliament so far. As in January 2015, India, the world's largest democracy, has only 65 women representatives out of 542 members in Lok Sabha, while there are 31 female representatives in the 242 member Rajya Sabha and at present, 12.24% seats of Indian Parliament is held by women. According to data released by Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), India ranks 115 in the World for proportion of National Parliament seats held by Women.

Government Initiatives to eradicate gender disparity in Education....

- SSA(Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan)
- National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level(NPEGEL)
- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme
- Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)
- Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)
- Saakshar Bharat
- Kishori Shakti Yojna and Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) – 'SABLA'
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP): The new scheme Beti Bachao Beti Padhao was launched on 22/1/2015 with the overall goal of the scheme is to celebrate the girl child and enable her education. The BBBP scheme has been visualized as a key scheme that aims to address the dipping child sex ratio and empower the girl child in the country.

5. Conclusion

Despite rapid strides made by India on the front of economic growth, gender inequalities still persist and manifest themselves in the form of low sex ratio, low female labor force participation rates, earnings gaps between men and women, low levels of representation of women in politics, and so on and so forth. This presents a serious challenge for the policy makers and decision makers to devise ways to reduce these gaps in the shortest possible term so that women can participate more equally in the growth process. Gender equality and women empowerment plays a central role in reducing poverty, promoting development and addressing many other challenges. Education being the most basic step towards this objective, it is essential to continue the initiatives directed to improve the situation of participation in all levels of education by both genders.

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