

Women of Marginalized Communities in India and their Access to Education

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Abstract: India is known for its 'unity in diversity' because of its multi-religious, multilingual, and multicultural nature. Caste and class biases in India exclude many communities and obstruct their efficient participation in economic and social development. Among the marginalized communities the most susceptible are women folk which faces severe forms of discriminations that denies them to access to the progress and development. It directly or indirectly affects them in the field of occupation, livelihood and education. A brutal environment is setup where women folk are prevented from participating in social life which in turn leads to their further isolation. Women education refers to every type of education that aims at their all-round development including general education in schools and colleges, professional and technical education, health education etc. Education is a strong medium for creating consciousness about their rights and empowerment. Education ensures socio-cultural and economic development of women in society. Our nation will progress remarkably if we have educated mothers. Women education will change the social fabric of society by bringing about socio-economic development, prosperity, improved life and health, dignity and honor etc. The importance of women education has been highlighted in the fundamental rights and duties and also in directive principles of our constitution. Various commissions and committees also recommended measures for women upliftment. Thus, women education occupies top most priority among the various actions to be taken to improve the status of women. Despite various measures taken by the Government of India for women education, women belonging to marginalized communities are still backward in the field of education, high literacy rate among them is still a dream. Problems like parental attitude, parental illiteracy and ignorance, poverty, poor school environment, early marriages, preference for male child education, lack of infrastructure and communication facilities, etc leads to poor literacy and dropout rates among women. This paper will examine the access of education to women belonging to marginalized section of Indian population in context to hurdles come in their way to receive education, various constitutional provisions for their upliftment and development along with their possible remedies.

Keywords: Marginalized, Women, Education, Empowerment, Occupation, Attitudes

1. Introduction

From the ancient times 'unity in diversity' is one of the treasured goals of the entire humanity. There are so many examples of unity in diversity in different parts of the world. Great societies of the world are plural and diverse in their composition. The appearances of plurality can be seen in many ways like, class, caste, language, culture, nationality, sub-regional and religious differentiations etc. Like all other great societies of the world Indian society is also pluralistic and diverse in nature having different number of religions, cultures, languages, regions, customs, beliefs, communities, classes, and castes. Indian society is a stratified society having different number of strata based on age, gender, rural, urban, caste, class, etc. There are number of marginalized groups present in Indian society like, SC's, ST's, OBC's, minority groups, aged people, children and women folk. The procedure of marginalization denies opportunities and effects to those 'living on the margins' while increasing the opportunities affects those 'living at the center'. Throughout the world large portion of population is being affected by marginality. Marginalized people don't have much control over their lives and possessions as enjoyed by the people living in the mainstream. It eventually affects them and makes them unable to live a normal life and they remain isolated and separated. Marginality has great impact on the growth of human beings as well as the society as a whole. Among the marginalized communities the most

susceptible are women folk who experience severe kind of discriminations.

Place of Women in Indian Society

There was a time when women in India were worshipped as Goddess without whose blessings, work cannot be commenced. Nowadays, crimes against women and girls are rising day by day. The status of women in India is pathetic, they are still struggling for their dignity and in most of the Indian family's sons are preferred and considered as real assets of the family and the birth of a girl child is not welcomed at all even by their mothers. It is the orthodox fact that most of the Indian families consider the rearing of girl child as a burden, as they get married off and will serve the in-laws in future. Right from childhood, Indian girl is being trained or socialized with a view that she has to adopt food habits, living standard, rituals, dresses etc. according to the tastes of new family (in-laws). Sowellingly or unwillingly, she tries to live her life according to the tastes and demands of her in-laws. At the time of marriage, a large amount is being spent on the dowry, more the groom is educated more the demand is for dowry no matter how much educated the bride is. In several cases if the demand of dowry is not fulfilled by the bride's family she is being tortured, incidence of domestic violence occurs every now and then. Cases of dowry deaths are inevitable and have become the main aspect of our country. There is a wide gender disparity, women folk is still considered weak, dependent and burden in some families, and are kept within four walls and are not

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allowed to go outside. Majority of the women face hardships as they suffer not only from 'economic poverty' but also from the 'information poverty' as well. They are living miserable life being dependent on their males for livelihood. Women folk work for long hours than men and add considerably to family income. From day in to day out (dawn to dusk) they remain busy in household tasks but still they are being tortured for not doing the house hold work earnestly. They continue their struggle to make a place of their own in the hearts of their family members but still they are being ignored and are not getting the deserved status.

Over the years there have been numerous discussions and debates about the gender equality in India. The topics of these debates and discussions includes status of women in India, their health, education, economic status, gender equality etc. The outcome of these debates and discussions is that women held a certain contradictory position in our developing country.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA has rightly said that "*It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one Wing*"

However, the status of women has been changed to some extent after independence. It has been seen that women are taking part in every field of life, there is increased rate in their literacy, decrease in dropout rate and their health and status has been improved. Even the marriage being considered the eventual fate and the submissive status of women in the patriarchal society has not yet changed much.

Historical Background and Progress of Women Education in India

"In order to awaken people, it is the woman who has to be awakened, once she moves, the country moves and thus we build the India of tomorrow."

Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru

Education has influenced the behavior of the people in the past, it is influencing in the present and will continue to influence in the future.

The history of women education can be traced back to the **Vedic period** where women were regarded with high esteem and respect. They were giving equal status in every field of life. Education was regarded as the basic instrument for their growth and development. Women education was at its climax. Women were not considered inferior to men in any field of life. Vishwavara, Apalla, Ghosha, Lopomudra, Saraswati and others were the women of high intellect and these were those women who were believed to compose the commentaries on the Vedas. To provide education to daughters was the major and foremost duty of the parents. There were no separate provisions of education for females in this period, co-education was prevalent in Ashrams. Though women mostly used to get education from their fathers, brothers, husbands or 'kulgurus' at their homes, no structured educational system did exist in this period.

Women education was declined during the **Post Vedic or Brahmanic period** due to the tyranny and unequal treatment of the leaders of this era. Women in this period lived miserable life; they were bounded within the four walls and were not allowed to get education. **Buddhist period** emerged as a reaction against the Brahminical tyranny. Women in this period again enjoyed equal status as men; they had high social and religious status. In the field of education, women gained significant achievements. There was a separate provision of education for women in this period, Vihars and monasteries were established for them. The education system was structured. The literacy rate among females in the **Muslim Period** was less due to the strict observance of Purdah System in Muslim as well as in Hindu communities. Women education was not common in this period, however the princesses of the Mughal emperors got liberal education. Gul-Badan Begam, Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mehal, Jahanara Begam, Zaibun Nisa Begam, etc were educated ladies of the Mughal period. Some girls of the Bengali Zamindars and Rajput Chiefs were also educated. It was seen in some cases that women from rich Hindu and Muslim backgrounds received basic education at home. Many Partshalas and Maktabs were imparting education mainly to boys but also to some girls. Female education was mainly vanished during the beginning of **British Rule**. The interest of Britishers was economic and political so they made ritualistic attempts in women education. East India Company was enforced to take charge of education of Indian masses with the renewal of Charter Act of 1813. The company smartly avoided education of Indian women as they only require educated men for their governmental purposes. In support of women education, East India Company had faced many challenges and in consequence of this, there was no single government school for girls during their rule. In addition to this, Indian people also had conservative thoughts toward the education of women. Intolerance against the education of women lined the mindset of masses so strong that any attempt to educate their women could create a chaos in the society, so taking the benefit of this, Company limited itself to education of men only who would themselves later on educate their women folk. Lord William Bentick and Lord Dalhousie made an attempt to change the traditional attitude of male masses towards the education of women. Lord Dalhousie advocated that open support of government should be provided to women education. Missionaries and private voluntary bodies, both Indian and Christian were the pioneers in the endorsement of women education. These groups paid great attention in promotion of women education in the country, due to their efforts schools and colleges in various parts of the country were established and all the expenses for the promotion of their education was borne by them. With the introduction of Wood's (Educational) Dispatch of 1854, women education has entered into a new era. It insisted, supported and encouraged women's education in India. It also assured the financial support and even direct actions. The uprising of 1857 and the announcement of policies of social and religious disinterest by the Queen, it was not implemented. Between 1870 and 1882 the establishment of the special primary schools for girls was the outcome of establishment of municipalities as well as tax of local funds aiding the primary education. One of the great social reformers Miss Marry Carpenter visited India during 1865-

1870, she examined the education system of India and founded that the main hurdle in expansion of women education was the lack of female teachers. To provide training to female teachers, the first training college for women primary teachers was established in 1870 due to her efforts. Indian Education Commission commonly known as Hunter Commission (1882) deeply looked into the problems of women education in India and proposed many restructuring measures. The commission came across with the fact that Indians denied female education themselves and have not allowed their girls to attend the schools because of poverty, lack of separate schools, co-education etc. so the commission recommended liberal grant in aid to girl's schools, scholarships to female students, establishment of girl's hostels, award prizes to girls who agree to become teachers, appointment of lady inspectors etc. Several implementations were employed throughout India but unfortunately due to the period of financial stringency, government could not provide sufficient grants and the development of women education was hampered. During the period of 1901-1902 it was seen that college education of women was limited to elite groups. In Muslims and Hindus communities, women education was limited to primary stage only. Creating career opportunities outside home for women folk was a significant development of this period. The career of teachers was the first to be opened for women folk and next was the medicine in addition to this, large number of women were undergoing training as nurses, midwives etc. Education of women witnessed great progress and development during the last twenty (20) years due to the public awareness and First World War. In 1913, British Government of India was enforced to plan a new educational policy for women of India which will advocate particular curriculum of practical utility like music, needlework, home science etc. **Sadler Commission** popularly known as Calcutta University Commission was appointed in 1917, it authorized Calcutta University to devise a special curriculum according to the needs of women and to setup a 'Special Board of Women Education' (SBWE). There were only 19 colleges for women, 675 secondary schools and 21,956 primary schools for girls in the year 1921-1922 in spite of the serious governmental efforts. Under the Dyarchy

system in 1921, the command of education was shifted from State to Indian Ministry however, the Provincial autonomy commenced in 1937 and the states started to take active part in the endorsement (promotion) of women education. To improve the socio-economic position of women folk and to enhance their education various organizations came into being. The All-India Women's Conference came into existence in 1926 and the first, All-India Women's Educational and Social Conference was held in 1927 to bring about changes in the education system especially in the courses and curriculum of girls. The Lady Irwin Home Science College, New Delhi opened in 1930 was a response to this movement. Careers in different fields and equal educational opportunities for women were recommended by **Hartog Committee (1937)** however in spite of the political struggle and financial crises women education made remarkable development. During this period women were free to choose their career in the fields like medicine, engineering, law, agriculture, technology etc. The total number of women educational institutions during 1946-1947 in the country was 28,196.

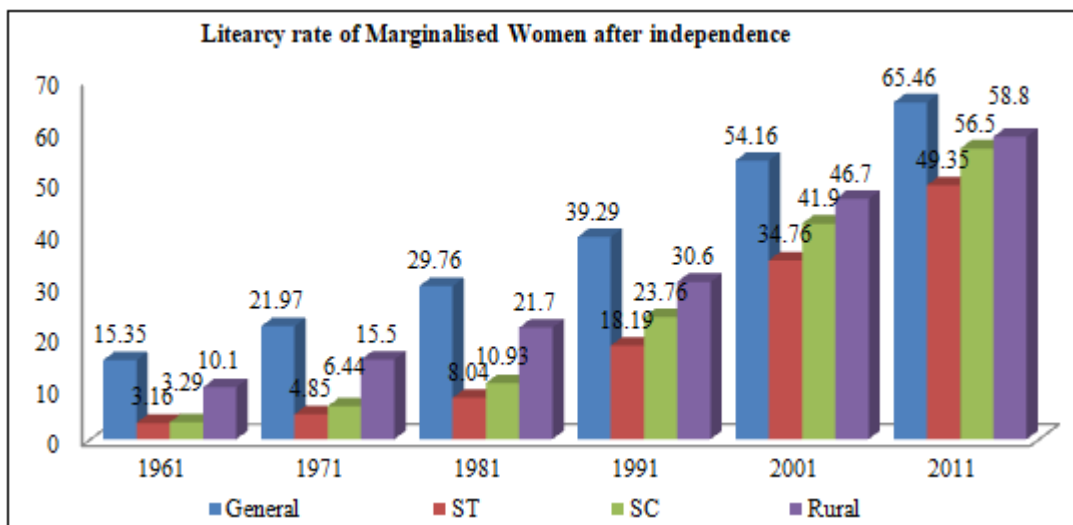
Education of Girls (1946-1947)

Levels of Education	Number of Girls Enrolled
Primary	56,090
Secondary	6,02,280
College	2,903
Total	41,56,742 (6,61,273)

Data source: (Radha Dua, 2008)

After Independence, women education increased significantly, there was an extraordinary increase in the enrollment of girls in schools. The ratio of girls in schools increased mainly due to the execution of the recommendations of various committees, commissions and five-year plans. The increased ratio was also found in the professional and vocational institutions. The negative attitude towards women education in our country is now gradually fading however, in the lower classes the female literacy rate is still low because of their indifferent attitude.

Women literacy has increased significantly after independence as shown pictorially in the following graph.



Source: - Census of India from 1961- 2011

So, it is clear from the above data, that woman literacy rate has increased after independence. In 1961 literacy rate among general category were 15.35 which were quite more than the ST, SC and rural women. In 1971 the literacy rate was little improved in the general and other categories of women in India. If we talk about the census of 1981, the literacy rate among all categories depicts growing as compared to previous census. The census of 1991 shows a magnificent increase in the literacy rate among all the categories of women. Census of 2001 and 2011 portray increased literacy rate among all the categories of women in India. The increased literacy rate among all categories of women is the result of the governmental efforts and growing interest in the field. With the introduction of different constitutional provisions, developmental programmes and policies Government of India has initiated exertion for the education and upliftment of women folk in India.

Constitutional Provisions, Policies and Programmes of Government of India

The disadvantaged and underprivileged groups present in every society have traditionally experienced deprivation, generally in all walks of life, education in particular. Many attempts have been made by the government of India for social, economic and educational development and progress of their underprivileged groups. Right from the time of independence various reforms have been suggested by the committees and commissions set up for this purpose. Indian population is heterogeneous in nature and the Government of India has approved policies and programmes for inclusion of all sections of the society irrespective of any disability. In the field of education, various steps have been taken to provide equality of educational opportunities to all sections of society irrespective of caste, class, gender, religion, region etc.

Recommendations of various Commissions and Committees:

University Education Commission (1948-49): The Education Commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radha Krishnan, through a resolution of the central ministry of Education, on November 4, 1948, the commission recommended that, "Education of women may be similar to that of man in certain aspects, but it should be different also in some other aspects because of different nature of their duties." The commission also laid stress on the necessity of education in domestic science.

National Committee on Women Education(1958): Under the chairmanship of Durgabai Deshmukh, National Committee on Woman Education was appointed by Government of India in 1958. It recommended - "the establishment of special unit in the Government of India to look after the programmes of education, appointment of special officer at the Directorate level as in charge of programmes relating to the education of girls, establishment of more and more co-educational institutions and establishment of separate secondary schools for girls in rural areas."

Committee for Girl's Education and Public Co-operation (1963-65): Under the chairmanship of Shri M.

Bhaskavalsalam Committee for Girl's Education and Public Co-operation was appointed by the National Council for Women's Education in May 1963 to look into the causes for lack of public co-operation especially in the rural areas for girl's education. The committee recommended, "Direct co-operation of the public should be encouraged in establishing private schools, helping in providing suitable accommodation for teachers and students, particularly in the rural areas, supplying mid-day meals, supplying uniforms, free text-books and writing materials to needy children, women candidates from rural areas should be given preference in admission to training courses and well qualified and competent inspecting staff should be appointed for improvement of girl's education."

Kothari Commission (1964-66): Under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari Government of India appointed an Education Commission popularly known as Kothari Commission. The commission approved the views of Durgabai Deshmukh committee and Hansa Mehta committee towards the education of women and clearly stated that, "The education of women should be regarded as a major programme in education for some years to come and a bold and determined effort should be made to face the difficulties involved and to close the existing gap between the education of men and women in as short time as possible, Special schemes should be prepared for this purpose and the funds required for them should be provided on a priority basis and both at the Centre and in the States, there should be a special machinery to look after the education of girls and women. It should bring together officials and non-officials in the planning and implementation of programmes for women's education".

Committee on the Status of Women (1971-74): Under the chairmanship of Dr. Phul Renu Guha, the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Government of India appointed a committee to look into the problems of women - related to their status and rights. The committee suggested that, "Wherever, separate schools/ colleges for girls are established, it has to be ensured that they must maintain required standard with regard to the quality of staff, provision of facilities, relevant courses and co-curricular activities, co-education should be adopted as a general policy at the primary level, and the universalization of education for the age group of 6-14."

National Policy on Education (1986): The National Policy on Education, passed by Lok Sabha on May 13, 1986 recommended that, "Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The national education system will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and engineering. Women's studies will be promoted as a part of various courses and educational institutions encouraged to take up active programmes to further woman's development."

Programme of Action (POA-1992): The National Policy on Education, revised in 1992, emphasized that, Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women and women empowerment.”

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001): Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan or the ‘Education for All’ is the recent initiative launched by the Government of India in 2001-2002 as a national programme to universalize elementary education, through a mission mode, by involving the partnership among center, state, local bodies and community as its basic and foremost goal. The Programme emphasized that education should be provided to every child irrespective of caste, class, gender, region, religion and it covers special children also. It also emphasized the implementation of zero rejection policy so that no child is left out of educational system. Through this programme, efforts have been made to reach out to the unreached categories (marginalized communities).

Constitutional Provisions:

Indian constitution not only grants equality to women folk but also authorizes the State to adopt measures of positive discriminations in favour of women to reduce socio-economic and educational inequalities among them.

Article (14) guarantees Equality before Law.

Article (15-i)- There shall be no discrimination on grounds of sex, caste, class, colour, race, place of birth or any other disability.

Article (15-3) - The State shall make any special provisions for women and children.

Article (16)- The State shall provide equality of opportunity to all the citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.

Article (39-a)- The State should direct its policy towards securing the rights of men and women for adequate means of livelihood.

Article (39-d)- The State directs that there should be equal pay to equal work for both men and women.

Article (42)- The State should make provisions for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Article(46)- The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from all social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Developmental Schemes and Programmes

Government of India launched various schemes and programmes for women education which are as follows:

Mahila Samakhya Programme: Education for woman’s equality or MahilaSamakhya was launched in 1989 by the Government of India for educating and empowering women folk especially for those who belong to socially and economically backward classes.

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL): It was launched by Government of India in July 2003; it is a chief component of SSA. Its target was to reach the “Hardest to Reach” particularly those girls who are not enrolled. Under this scheme “Model Schools” have been established to provide better educational opportunities to girls.

Begum Hazrat Mahal National Scholarship: The scheme previously known as “Maulana Azad National Scholarship” scheme which was launched by Maulana Azad Education Foundation in August 1, 2003 for the meritorious girls belonging to national minorities, who are economically backward.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya: In August, 2004 this scheme was launched by Government of India for educationally backward blocks (EBBs) where the women literacy rate is below the national average and gender gap in literacy is above the national average and to establish residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging to the disadvantaged groups.

Indira Gandhi National Scholarship: Post Graduate Indira Gandhi National Scholarship for single girl child has been launched by UGC for the promotion of education of girls.

National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE): This scheme was launched by Government of India in May 2008, with a view to increase enrollment of girls belonging to disadvantaged groups and to establish a favorable environment to trim down the dropout rate among these girls.

Saakshar Bharat: This programme was launched by the then Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh in 2009, with a goal of achieving 80% of literacy at national level, focusing on adult women literacy and to reduce the literacy gap between male and female.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao: This is a centrally sponsored scheme launched on January 20, 2015 with a view to enhance and promote girl education.

Udaan: This scheme was launched by Government of India to promote and improve girl enrollment in prominent technical educational institutions through financial encouragement and academic support.

Now it is clear from the above discussion that Government of India has taken many encouraging steps for the promotion of girl education in general and for those who belong to deprived class in particular. But still there is a huge gap between male and female literacy rate, and the target of achieving high literacy rate among females at national level is still a dream.

Challenges for Girl’s Education in India

It has been rightly said that, educating a man is like educating an individual, but educating a girl/woman is like educating a whole family. The importance of women education has been recognized by all. India being a developing country has made many bold steps for the promotion of women education, in spite of these steps women education is not improving in required pace, still female literacy rate is unsatisfactory. Even after the decades of independence many groups of population is still deprived of education especially women folk. There are so many causes of their slow literacy rate, more dropout rate and

fewer enrollments in the schools which are mentioned below:

- 1) The orthodox attitude towards female education in our country is one of the great hurdles that hampers female education.
- 2) Educational backwardness of parents does not allow female child to go to school.
- 3) The preference of son's education over the girl's education also contributes to less female literacy rate.
- 4) Lack of separate schools and female teachers is also a great barrier in female education.
- 5) Lack of proper infrastructural facilities in schools is one of the major problems of women education.
- 6) The threat of rape, abduction and molestation of girls lower the passion of parents to send their girls to schools.
- 7) Early marriages and expecting girls to do household chores is another cause that hampers their education.
- 8) Due to poverty of parents, most of the girls cannot afford education after middle level.
- 9) Lack of awareness about the developmental programmes and schemes launched by Indian government for girl education is also a contributing factor for less women literacy rate.
- 10) Lack of interest on the part of officials in enhancing women education.

Remedies for girl's Education in India

Possible remedies for enhancing women education are summarized below-

- 1) The importance of women education should be emphasized so that people can change their mindset about female education.
- 2) More and more separate schools for girls should be established and appointment of female staff should also be made possible.
- 3) Good infrastructural facilities should be made available.
- 4) Equal access to education should be made so that girls cannot be deprived of education.
- 5) Gender disparity should be reduced to enhance girl enrollment rate in educational institutions.
- 6) Violence against girls in educational institutions should be controlled so that they can feel free to attend schools.
- 7) Flexible school timing should be introduced in those areas where normal schooling is not feasible.
- 8) Awareness about the developmental schemes should be made.

2. Conclusion

Development of any nation mainly depends on the development of its all sections of people. India will truly progress if educational opportunities will be extended to the marginalized groups which comprise large part of its population. This paper looked at the educational scenario of the marginalized women in India before and after independence, different constitutional provisions and developmental schemes launched by the government of India for their education and upliftment. Moreover, it also provided an insight to different problems related to women and provided possible solutions.

Authors are hopeful for the empowerment of women and they will become the active agent of bringing socio-economic and political change in India.

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