



ISSUES OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN NAXAL AFFECTED AREAS OF BIHAR

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Abstract

Education has always been a foundation for economic and social development and it will be essential for the knowledge economies of the 21st century. Education manifests itself in many ways like cognitive thinking, affirmative thought system etc. It brings well-being to the society. Education of women is vital not only on grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation. Level of literacy and educational attainment are important indicators of development of any given society and we cannot exclude rural women in the development of any society as they equally contribute to the progress of the society and largely to the economy. The last decade in Bihar (2004-14) has seen an exceptional development in education. Efforts by the Government of Bihar to increase accessibility to educational facilities in the state are showing signs of positive change. The improvement of Female Literacy Rate in Bihar during 2001-11 (20 percentage points) was the highest, achieved by any state in India during that period. Although the growing literacy rates are showing some positive results, still literacy cannot be considered as the only sign of an educated society. On the other hand education rate in Bihar is characterized by wide gaps between the urban and rural woman (Urban female literacy is 72.6% & Rural female literacy is 49.6%) as well as in between the male and female population. The area of Magadh is highly impacted by the naxals where they don't allow the education of women. The fact that there many of the males leave their families behind to join the naxals exhibits that more educational programmes especially for women is required so that they can overcome their daily lives issues and face the challenges.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the current status of women education level of rural Bihar and this paper will also highlight the various issues and challenges associated with. The ultimate purpose of this paper is to demonstrate some measures to deal with all these barriers.



The educational requirements of those women whose male family members have joined the naxals are discussed in this paper.

Introduction

“If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation).” - Dr. James Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey (1875-1927, Ghana)

Education has always been a foundation for economic and social development and it will be essential for the knowledge economies of the 21st century. Every issue that our society faces is like a link of a chain. Each issue is connected to another either directly or indirectly. Lack of education and Illiteracy is the mother of all issues as it gives birth, to many other issues like poverty, unemployment, child labor, population burst and many more. Education in India is a key for social and economic progress. Education of girls is vital not only on grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation. Level of literacy and educational attainment are important indicators of development of any given society and we cannot exclude women in the development of any society as they contribute about half of the human race.

Literacy and proper Education is a game-changer in the effort to advance women’s standing in the third world. In *Women and Literacy*, Marcela Ballara (1992) defines literacy as “the apprenticeship for the knowledge needed to cope with everyday needs, including the individual’s relationship with the surrounding world”. In essence, literacy is a tool for lifelong learning. Gaining literacy expands a woman’s opportunities to communicate feelings and needs. According to Ballara, not only does literacy help silent women express needs, interests and concerns, but “literacy activities for and with women motivate the organization of women’s groups to support collective demands and to seek active participation in development and a better position in society” (SRINATHAN, 2011)

As swami Vivekananda said, “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”.

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development of any given society and we cannot exclude rural women in the development of any society as they equally contribute to the progress of the society and largely to the economy. The last decade in Bihar (2004-14) has seen an exceptional development in education.

The region of Magadh has since long being the area for naxals where male members leave the female members of the family behind to join naxals. This puts the burden on the female members to make the earning in order to take care of the family. Being uneducated and politically weak make it more difficult for them. It is important that new schemes must be integrated in for making these women politically and financially strong.

Efforts by the Government of Bihar to increase accessibility to educational facilities in the state are showing signs of positive change. The improvement of Female Literacy Rate in Bihar during 2001-11 (20 percentage points) was the highest, achieved by any state in India during that period. Although the growing literacy rates are showing some positive results, still literacy cannot be considered as the only sign of an educated society.

On the other hand education rate in Bihar is characterized by wide gaps between the urban and rural woman (Urban female literacy is 72.6% & Rural female literacy is 49.6%) as well as in between the male and female population. (Jyoti, 2011)

Importance of Literacy

The reason why literacy is considered as a right is because of the set of benefits it provides to individuals, families, communities and nations. According to Stromquist (2005), ‘literacy skills are fundamental to informed decision-making, personal empowerment, active and passive participation in local and global social community’ in modern society. Literacy programmes and written materials can be a measure to teach people to actively participate in a political system without discrimination (Graff, 1987a). The benefits of literacy can be broadly classified as following:

- **Human Benefits:** Literacy can improve the creativity and critical thinking of an individual leading them to improved self-esteem and empowerment. These benefits may also be instrumental for realizing other benefits of literacy.



- **Political Benefits:** Empirical evidence for past researches suggests that there is an association between participation in literacy programs and political participation. Increased political participation contributes to the quality of public policies and to democracy.
- **Cultural Benefits:** The cultural benefits of literacy are slow and hard to identify clearly. Literacy can be instrumental in preserving as well as to promote cultural openness along with diversity. (Farah, 2005).
- **Social Benefits:** Improving literacy levels has many social benefits. It is instrumental in maintaining good health and living longer, learning throughout life, controlling reproductive behaviour, raising healthy children and educating them. This paves the path for increased life expectancy, reduced child mortality and improved children's health.
- **Economic Benefits:** Improved level of literacy opens doors of new and better opportunities for the participant. This results in increased purchasing power leading to better economic growth.

Need for Woman Literacy

Although, the constitution of India grants equal rights to everyone irrespective of gender, the current scenario in the country shows disparity between the male and female in terms of literacy. Government of India is working hard to abridge this gap. As educated women are considered capable of bringing socio-economic changes, this is extremely necessary for the society. According to Marstaller, "Educate a man and he will leave his home to find work. Educate a woman and she will have fewer children, introduce better health practices to her family and village, run her household more efficiently, and most important, advocate for the education of her children".

Impact of Female literacy on Society



According to Donald Block, “Literacy is the foundation on which the solving of all social problems can be built”. Female literacy can bring more radical change in the society and have broad effects. Following are the few areas which female literacy can affect. (Bayeh, 2016)

- Economic development and prosperity: As literacy improves empowerment, increasing female literacy will empower them so they will come forward and contribute towards nation’s building.
- Economic empowerment: Women can be economically empowered only if they have employment themselves, which is possible with increased literacy only.
- Justice: Educated women are more informed of their rights for justice. It would eventually lead to decline in instances of violence and injustice against women such as dowry, forced-prostitution, child-marriage, female foeticide, etc.
- Alleviate poverty: Women education is a pre-requisite to alleviate poverty. Women need to take equal burden of the massive task of eliminating poverty. This would demand massive contribution from educated women. There cannot be many social and economic changes unless girls and women are given their rights for education.
- Reproductive Behavior: Researches show that female literacy has a negative correlation with fertility. Women with ability to read and write have less number of children in comparison to that of those who cannot. (Robey, 1990)
- Infant Mortality: Empirical researches prove that increase in female literacy decrease that infant mortality. This provides healthier life to the children and increases their life expectancy leading the country towards better human development index (HDI).

Current Status of Female Literacy in Bihar

Literacy rate in Bihar has seen upward trend and is 61.80 percent as per 2011 population census. Of that, male literacy stands at 71.20 percent while female literacy is at 51.50 percent. In 2001, literacy rate in Bihar stood at 47.00 percent of which male and female were 59.68 percent and 33.12 percent literate respectively.



Factors Responsible for Poor Female Literacy Rate

Although there is variety of factors that caused the poor female literacy rate in Bihar, there are few that need to be mentioned here. Factors like gender based inequality; social discrimination and economic exploitation, occupation of girl child in domestic chores, low enrollment of girls in schools, low retention rate and high dropout rate, and lack of basic utilities in the schools have been the major ones to be reported. (Gangadharan et al., 2014)

ROLE OF LITERACY AND EDUCATION IN SOCIETY AND IN THE LIFE OF WOMEN

Literacy and level of education are basic indicators of the level of development achieved by a society. Spread of literacy is generally associated with important traits of modern civilization such as modernization, urbanization, industrialization, communication and commerce. Literacy forms an important input in overall development of individual enabling them to comprehend their social, political and cultural environment better and respond to it appropriately. Higher level of education and literacy lead to greater awareness and also contributes in improvement of economic and social conditions. It acts as a catalyst for social upliftment enhancing the returns on investment made in almost every aspect of development effort, be it population control, health, hygiene, environmental degradation control, employment of weaker sections of the society.

Government Schemes for educating Women in Bihar

Since independence there has been number plans developed to promote literacy. One of these plans was NLM (National Literacy Mission) which was launched in 1988. The objective of this plan was to provide functional literacy to illiterates of the age group of 15-35. After 10th five years plan NLM made 127.45 million persons literate of 597 districts across the country. Saakshar Bharat was the next generation plans of NLM targeting higher level of literacy and reduction of gap between male and female literacy rate.

State government of Bihar has developed many schemes in order to improve the literacy rate in the state. The results are better when compared to the past literacy level of the state but not



promising when compared to other states of the country. The essence of few important of these plans is discussed below.

1. “Rastriya Madhiyamik Shiksha Abhiyan” was developed to provide high school within the radius of 5 kms and high-secondary school with a radius of 8 kms.
2. “Madhyahan Bhojan Yojana” provides free food distribution to the students of the school.
3. “Mukhyamantri Cycle Yojana” provides students enrolled in 9th class with Rs. 2500 to purchase a cycle to come to school daily.
4. “Mukhyamantri Balika Poshak Yojana” provides Rs. 700 in cash to every student enrolled in order to purchase a pair of school dress and shoes, and with the amount left they are expected to purchase stationery.

The various schemes developed by the state have certainly improved the literacy rate. There has been a considerable amount of increase in enrollments in schools. Many students those who were not able to go to school because of distance or economic problems can now afford to study. But, there is also the dark side of these schemes. Many families in rural areas enroll their wards just for the sake of money, food and cycles offered by the government. The ward gets himself enrolled but rarely attend classes during the same time these children work somewhere else to earn more. The passing of examination with 1st division is a cake walk as cheating prevails at a huge extent. So, in order to lift the status of literacy these loopholes should be removed.

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) through Education: Government of India has enacted the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women: 2001. The goal of the policy is to bring about an advancement, 160 development and empowerment of women. Regarding education of girls and women the policy portrays that: Equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured. Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rate of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate lifelong learning as well as development of vocational/technical skills by women. Reducing the gender



gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus on girls and women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes/ Other Backward Classes/ Minorities. Gender sensitive curriculum would be developed at all levels of educational system in order to address sex stereotyping as one of the causes of gender discrimination.

National Policy On Education (1986) On Women Education Regarding education of women the National Policy on Education emphasizes 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 social engineering. Women's studies will be promoted as a part of various courses and 161 educational institutions encouraged taking up active programmes to future women's development.

Conclusion:

Education among women plays a significant role for the development of the society. Development of many important factors gets affected because of the women's education especially the development of moral of the society. From the paper, it can be concluded that even though many programmes has been initiated by the government for benefitting the education of the women in Bihar, results have not been received as per the requirement and new schemes must be introduced for attaining a 100% literacy rate for women. The requirement of new schemes emphasizes over the inefficient schemes which are integrated in the educational programmes of the women in Bihar. The area of Magadh need special programmes as the women who live there are left alone by the male members of their families. The programmes should be efficient of educating them of being politically and financially strong.

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