

Gender Inequality in Literacy Status in Bihar: A Spatial Study of Patna Division

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Abstract - Gender inequality in education is an instrument to measure the social gap among different sects and social change. It empowers individuals and communities, generates an awareness of one's own potentialities and inner strengths equipping people to combat oppression, exclusion and discrimination. Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for women as education is an entry point to other opportunities, and educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Education is also landmark of women empowerment because it facilitates them to responds to the challenges, to confront their customary appearance and revolutionize their living. The situation of literacy rate in general and female literacy rate in particular is very deplorable in Bihar in general and Patna Division in particular. However, there has been significant growth of literacy rate among women, and that there has been a steady decline in the gender gap of literacy rate, but large inequalities still continue between men and women at every level of education. This reality makes it an imperative to analyze the ground reality of female literacy in Districts of Patna Division. The study is based on the secondary data borrowed from Census of India of Bihar State (various issues). The paper tries to map a comprehensive picture that captures the connection between female literacy and existing gender inequality in Patna Division, Bihar.

Key Words: Bihar, Education, Female Literacy Rate, Gender Gap, Patna Division, Social Inequality

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is an instrument of social change. It empowers individuals and communities, generates an awareness of one's own potentialities and inner strengths equipping people to combat oppression, exclusion and discrimination. Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for women as education is an entry point to other opportunities, and educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Education is also landmark of women empowerment because it facilitates them to responds to the challenges, to confront their customary appearance and revolutionize their living. Education plays a major role in developing proper understanding and responsible behaviour among the people, so that they manage resources effectively, rationalize their consumption style and make use of technologies in a desirable manner. The social status makes the illiterate women more vulnerable to all forms of discrimination and exploitation. Illiteracy affects women more than men. It prolongs women's dependence and subordination by cutting them off from participation in change, and further, as modernization spreads, illiteracy comes to be despised more

than in the past, thus eroding women's economic status and respect.

Educational attainment is one of the most fundamental prerequisites for empowering women in all spheres of society. A Chinese proverb deserved to be mentioned here for signifying the importance of female literacy: "If you plan for a few years, earn money; for ten years, then plant trees; but if you plan for a hundred years, educate the women". Mary Wollstonecraft clearly said that, "Till women are more rationally educated the progress in human virtue and improvement in knowledge must receive continual checks. It is justice, not charity that is wanting in the world..."

The statement made by a renowned Ghanaian educator and sociologist Dr. James Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey (1875-1927) clearly hint at importance of female literacy in society: "The surest way to keep people down is to educate the men and neglect the women. If you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation (family)". Literacy rate was very low in the state of Bihar, as it was not given much importance, especially for women. The historical past is one of the important reasons for the low level of literacy. The situation of literacy rate in general and female literacy rate in particular is very deplorable in Bihar.

2. Trends of Literacy Rate in Bihar

The literacy in Bihar has made remarkable strides since independence, but situation is still pitiable. The figures of the Table-1 indicate that though situation of literacy rate in general and female literacy rate in particular is improving, still half of the population of women is illiterate, which needs special attention. The level of female literacy recorded an impressive jump from 4 per cent in 1951 to 52 percent in 2011 in the state. During the six decades (1951-2011) female literacy of the State increased by thirteen times, which in itself is an achievement. Despite the relatively high increase in female literacy in the current census, a significant gender gap persists in the State, revealing the lagging performance of females in literacy.

Table -1: Trends of Literacy Rate in Bihar from 1951-2011

Year	Male	Female	Gender Gap
1951	22.7	4.2	18.5
1961	35.9	8.1	27.8
1971	35.9	9.9	26
1981	47.1	16.6	30.5
1991	51.4	22	29.4
2001	59.7	33.1	26.6
2011	71.2	51.5	19.7

Source: Census of India, 2011, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, New Delhi

3. Gender-Gap in Literacy in Districts of Patna Division

The figures of Table-2 present the status of literacy rate during 2011 in all the districts of Patna Division of Bihar. The women of Rohtas recorded highest female literacy rate during 2011 with 65 per cent, closely followed by the women of Patna (63.7 per cent). The performance of the districts of in case of female literacy rate was better in compare to other districts of Bihar during 2011. The gap between male literacy rate and female literacy rate is also a major problem in Patna Division. Table-2 indicates that the maximum gender gap in literacy rate during 2011 was recorded in Bhojpur, Supaul (24 per cent). The gender gap in literacy rate was recorded minimum in Patna (16 per cent).

Table -2: Male-Female Literacy rate and Gender-gap in Districts of Patna Division in Bihar, 2011

District	Males	Females	Gender Gap
Bhojpur	84.1	60.2	23.9
Buxar	82.8	59.8	22.9
Kaimur	81.5	59.6	21.9
Nalanda	77.1	54.8	22.4
Patna	80.3	63.7	16.6
Rohtas	85.3	65.0	20.3

Source: Census of India, (1991, 2001, 2011) Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, New Delhi

4. Female Literacy rate in Patna Division

The data presented in the Table-3 compare the female literacy rate by district of Patna Division in Bihar during 1991-2011. It is heartening to mention that there is improvement in the situation during the period, but still the situation of female literacy rate is very bad. The development in the female literacy rate during the period of 2001-2011 is better than the progress in the female literacy rate during the period of 1991-2001, which indicates the improving situation in the female literacy rate because of awareness.

Table -3: Female Literacy rate of Districts of Patna Division, Bihar, 1991, 2001 and 2011

District	2011	2001	1991
Bhojpur	60.2	42.8	28.0
Buxar	59.8	40.4	25.7
Kaimur	59.6	38.9	20.7
Nalanda	54.8	39.0	30.0
Patna	63.7	52.2	41.4
Rohtas	65	46.6	30.3

Source: Census of India, (1991, 2001, 2011) Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, New Delhi

5. Gender-gap in Literacy Rate of Patna Division from 1991 to 2011

Gender gap in literacy rate is related to existing gender inequality prevalent in the society as it indicates that literacy for male is considered more important than female in Bihar. The figures of the Table-4 highlight the existing gender-gap in literacy rates in different districts of Bihar during 1991-2011. The situation gradually improved during 1991-2001 in every

district, which is evident from the Table-4. The situation of gender gap in literacy rate improved during 2001- 2011 in every districts of Patna Division. Despite the relatively high increase in female literacy in the current census, a significant gender gap persists in the State, revealing the lagging performance of females in literacy in all the districts. This gap is, perhaps, due to the continuing backlog of past legacy of a large number of adult illiterate women and the preference of parents to educate male children. It may be noted with satisfaction that the gap between male and female literacy rate recorded in 2011 is lower than the gap registered previously.

Table -4: Gender- gap in Literacy Rate by Districts of Patna Division, Bihar (1991, 2001, 2011)

District	2011	2001	1991
Bhojpur	23.9	32.0	38.4
Buxar	22.9	32.5	37.2
Kaimur	21.9	31.7	35.0
Nalanda	22.4	27.9	32.0
Patna	16.6	21.6	27.7
Rohtas	20.3	29.9	34.2

Source: Census of India, (1991, 2001, 2011) Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, New Delhi

The analysis of female literacy in Patna Division makes it clear that tough there has been significant improvements of literacy rate among women and that there has been a steady decline in the gender gap of literacy rate, but large inequalities still continue between men and women at every level of education. The gender gap in education is associated to the overall position that women occupy in society, women are the disadvantaged sections of the society (Jha, 2015). The problem is exacerbated further when class, caste and religious discrimination (Wazir, 2000) compound gender disadvantage.

Improved literacy rate of women not only minimizes poverty for their families and children but secures equitable societal change also. Kofi Annan has rightly said, "Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope". Educating women contributes to shunning away societal and culture pressures women often have to endure. Education helps in creating a society with human values or justice with progress (Jha, 2015). King and Hill (1993) also support this idea and opine, "A better educated mother has fewer and better educated children. She is more productive at home and in the workplace. And she raises a healthier family since she can better apply improved hygiene and nutritional practices".

Hinting at the importance of education of women for the society, Catherine Esther Beecher (1800-1878), an American educator, wrote in her book, A Treatise on Domestic Economy (1843): "Let the women of a country be made virtuous and intelligent, and the men will certainly be the same. The proper education of a man decides the welfare of an individual; but educates a woman, and the interests of a whole family are secured".

The 1994 Cairo Consensus recognized education, especially for women, as a force for social and economic development, it is clearly mentioned that "Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process" (ICPD Program of Action, paragraph 4.2). The important roles played by Millennium

Development Goals (MDG) and the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) also deserve to be mentioned here for improving the situation of education in Bihar. In September 2015, the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Building on the principle of "leaving no one behind", the new Agenda emphasizes a holistic approach to achieving sustainable development for all.

SDG-4 and SDG-5 are closely related to female literacy. Goal-4 is "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" and Goal-5 is "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". The Indian government has been working since independence to create opportunities for women, minimize gender inequality and grants them better social opportunity and mobility. A number of programmes, i.e. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (The Education for All Movement), Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, etc played important role in improving the situation of female literacy. Some important initiatives at state level also contribute to improve the situation of female literacy rate in Bihar.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The lamentable situation of female literacy stems from low-quality education, shortage of teachers, poverty, attitude of society towards female literacy, lack of separate toilet facility, health issues, etc. The recent experience of the society clearly reveal that educating a girl child has a ripple effect, impacting health, population control, next generation school enrollment and the potential to earn, active participation in decision making, active political participation, gender equality and so on. Education enables women to think in right direction, make informed decisions; and live productive, healthy and lively lives. While the impact of different initiatives at state, national and international levels is clearly visible in ameliorating the situation of female literacy in Bihar, society has, as Robert Frost would say, 'miles to go before we sleep'.

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BIOGRAPHIES

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