

Challenges and opportunities for girl education in Rajasthan**SUNITA GEHLOT* and SHIRISH BALYA***Shah Goverdhan Lal Kabra Teachers College Jodhpur, India-342001***Corresponding author: drsunitagehlot@gmail.com***Abstract**

In the ancient times girl education was given proper attention and the women has honourable position in the society. Rajasthan was also known for many intellect women. But a great change has occurred in the position of women after independence as far as education is concern due to many reasons. There are so many challenges in the field of girl education after independence. Gender differences, poverty and practices of early marriage are the most important ethos associated with the girl education in Rajasthan. Various challenges for the enrolment and drop out of the girl students are sum up with the objective to assess the challenges and its opportunities of girl education in Rajasthan in the present study.

Introduction

Education is the most essential aspect for a healthy, productive and equal society. It is necessary in order to produce thoughtful and knowledgeable citizen who can work towards the prosperity of the society. Education is one of the most important factors for overall development of an individual and society. In the recent times, there has been widespread debate emphasizing that education is the most effective mean in imparting and re-orienting gender stereotypes, traditional gender roles and its role in changing mindset in society (Mohamed and Singh 2014).

Rajasthan is characterized by high degree of structural inequalities in reference to caste, ethnicity, gender, religion, class and various other forms of social prohibitions. The education status of this state was not better in the earlier days of its establishment. The situation of girl education was worst with hardly enrolment of girl students in the schools. The state is situated at the north western (26.5727° N, 73.8390° E) part of India and is the largest state (10.4% of total area) by area (342,239 square kilometres) in the country. The varying topographic features dominated by parched and dry regions includes rocky terrain, rolling sand dunes, wetlands, barren tracts of land filled with thorny scrubs, river-drained plains, plateaus, ravines and wooded regions. The soil and vegetation of Rajasthan alters with its wide-ranging topography and availability of water. The varied kinds of soils available in Rajasthan are mostly sandy, saline, alkaline and calcareous. The vegetation of the state includes deep rooted grass species, shrubs and dwarf trees owing to the limited rainfall (Bhat, 1997). Agriculture and animal husbandry are the major sources of livelihood in the state and distribution of income is also highly uneven. Hence, the task of providing education for all sections of society is challenging.

Rajasthan having 33 districts, 244 tehsils, 44,672 villages and 185 towns constitutes 5.67 per cent of total population of the country with about 200 people residing within one square kilometre (Census of India, 2011). In 1951 Rajasthan recorded 8.5 per cent literacy rate that was lowest among the states, which have improved significantly to 66.11 per cent while women comprise more than 60 per cent of the total illiterate population (Gakhar and Kaur, 2012). But it is still one of the least literate states in the country.

According to the 2011 Census, Rajasthan has the 33rd worst literacy rate across India. The total number of literates in Rajasthan stood at 38,275,282 out of which the males were 23,688,412 and females were 14,586,870. Rural literacy rate of Rajasthan as per Census 2011 was 61.44 per cent. The total number of rural literates was 26,471,786. Out of which the females were 9,567,197 and males were 16,904,589. The male literacy rate for Rajasthan is not far behind the national average, which is very good. But, it is much lower (47.76%) for women in Rajasthan as compared to the national average of 65.46 per cent. The literacy rate of rural males was 76.16 per cent and that of rural females was 45.8 per cent. Total number of urban literates in Rajasthan was 11,803,496 out of which males were 6,783,823 and females were 5,019,673. The urban literacy rate of Rajasthan as per 2011 census stood at 79.68 per cent. The literacy rate of urban males was 87.91 per cent and that of urban females was 70.73 per cent. The gap between the literacy rate of male and female in the state is given in table 1. The data shows a drastic gap and reveals that the females are least literate as compared to male. The most interesting thing is that the literacy rate is improving significantly over the decades and shows a linear progress (Fig. 1). The literacy rate which was only 7 per cent during the census of 1961 has reached more than 50% during 2011 (Dubey and Abraham, 2013). The increasing trend clearly indicates that the female literacy rate can be improved in Rajasthan by rectifying the challenges.

Table 1. Literacy rates of male and female gap in Rajasthan

Gender	Literacy rate (%)					
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Male	28.1	33.9	44.8	55.0	75.7	80.5
Female	7.0	10.1	14.1	20.4	43.9	52.7
Gap	21.1	23.8	30.7	34.6	31.8	27.8

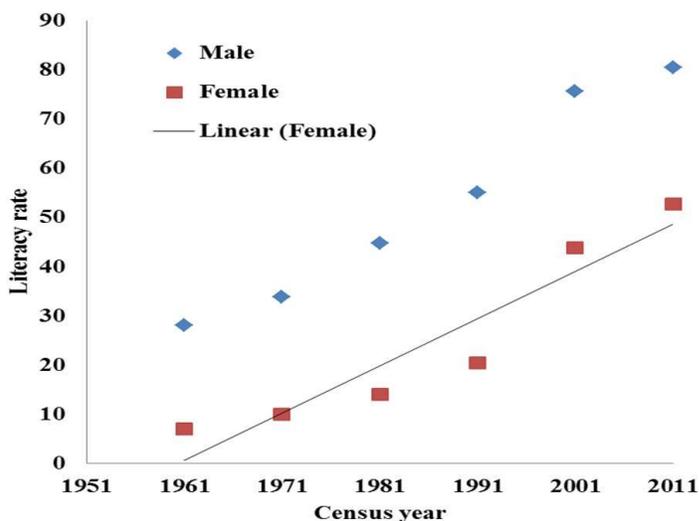


Fig. 1. Trend in the female literacy rate in Rajasthan over the decades

However, government is attempting to create change in the area of child education with the great emphasis on girl education. Over the past decades, Governments of Rajasthan have shown clear

devotion towards addressing developmental concerns in the state, especially that of children and women. Strides are being made to increase the enrolment of girls in school, provide girls everything they need for school for free, educate people about education and implement various after school programs. The State Government is attempting to achieve the objective of total literacy through various programmes/schemes such as Lok Jumbish, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, District Primary Education Programme and Continuing Literacy Programme. School children are being benefited with mid-day meals in the state. Apki Beti Scheme has been introduced for the girl child belonging to below poverty line families and whose one or both parents have died. Special bridge courses have been started for physically challenged children and qualified teachers have been appointed for them. To promote girls secondary education, the state government is providing free transport facilities through Roadways, bus pass and free distribution of bicycles in tribal areas.

Challenges for girl education

The main challenge for making education strategies in Rajasthan is the education of the girl child, especially among ST and SCs. Rajasthan is well known for very low level of female education in the country. Although the literacy rate is improving but studies reveal that 26% of girls in the age group of 15-18 year complete class 8th and very low proportion of girls could complete secondary class. The situation is the clear indication of capability failure (CABE, 2005). Nevertheless, the situation with respect to boys completing class 8th was also found to be low in the states. Only 33% of boys in the 15-18 age groups had completed class eighth. The low achievements of boys and girls indicate that there are severe shortcomings in the access and quality of schooling in Rajasthan. The socio-economic background of parents and differing aspirations for their boys and girls are the major challenges for the girl education in Rajasthan. Gender discrimination is of particular interest to in the context of differences in opportunities for girls' schooling (Gakhar and Kour, 2012). There are numerous reasons that keep the children away from schools and the major causes emerges more from girls' side as compared to boys. The problems of illiteracy among girl children vary from place to place and region to region.

Enrolment and drop out of girls

The enrolment of girls in Rajasthan is not a positive situation particularly in the rural areas and is found to be the most severely disadvantaged. Some of the districts of Rajasthan are the most backward districts in India as far as the girl education of concern. The gender gap in these districts is very prominent and the females are lagging behind their male counterparts in all spheres of life. The enrolment of girls in school is far behind the boys' enrolment rates. For every 1000 boys 857 girls were enrolled in 2009-2010. However, in the following school year only 538 girls were enrolled for every 1000 boys (Gupta, 2013). High proportions (43%) of girls in the age group of 15-18 year were never enrolled in school. The proportions that was never enrolled in the school were lower (11%) for the 11-14 year age group indicating that the girls are getting least attention for their education. Low motivation for girl education is one of the most social beliefs in Rajasthan. Late enrolment is also a common challenge of girl education. Although the enrolment of adolescent girl is getting problem but the drop out ratio of enrolled girl is the biggest challenge in the girl education in Rajasthan. In the upper primary classes there were higher rates of dropping out girl students (Table 2). Studies revealed that the 58 per cent girls in the age group of 15-18 years were enrolled in class 1, out of which 48% completed class 5, and 29% completed class 8. The proportions of girls that finally completed class 10 were only 9% (Sangeeta and Kumar, 2013). The enrolment level for children of the age group of 6-14 years was very good in

Rajasthan. 94.5 per cent of children in this age group were enrolled in either a government or private school (ASER 2012).

The dropout rates of girls are higher in upper standards. The parents and families consider girls as burden and do not want to waste money on their education because they just leave them after their marriages. Parents are more likely to want older girls to work and make money instead of sending them to school. Besides this, once girls reach the age of twelve, most families believe them eligible for marriage, so they take their daughters out of school and marry them. Thus, child labor and child marriage are the main two causes of drop out of girls from the schools. The tight budget of the families is also a major hindrance in the way of girl education.

Table 2. Gross enrolment ratio and drop out rates of Rajasthan

Class	I-V			VI-VIII			I-VIII		
	6-11 year			11-14 yrs			6-14 yrs		
Gender	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Gross enrolment ratio	119.1	115.1	117.2	95.1	72.8	84.4	110.0	98.7	104.6
Drop-out rates	49.1	52.1	50.5	41.2	59.7	50.3	70.52	73.4	71.6

Source: abstract of educational statistics 2009-10 and economic survey 2010-11

Distance and infrastructure

Teen ager girls have to face fragmented schooling experiences; they have to shift from one school to another after completing a particular stage. These schools were usually in different locations, under different managements and generally varied in quality. The average distance to the nearest secondary school in Rajasthan is seven kms, while the nearest senior secondary school is 28 kms away. The distance, cost of travel, time and safety issues are various issue that do not allow girls to continue their schooling beyond the upper primary level. The poor quality of primary schooling is sometimes responsible for completing the schooling cycle of the girls. There is a considerable difference in schooling structures in Rajasthan. The primary school includes the first five grades, classes 6-8 forms upper primary schools, classes 9-10 makes secondary and classes 11-12 comprised of senior secondary schools. The number of functional toilets at schools is again a challenge, in 2010 only 65.4 per cent of schools had useable toilets which could increase by 72 per cent in 2012. Unfortunately, separate, useable toilets for girls are lacking in various schools. Similarly drinking water facilities at schools are not good. Accessibility has been steadily decreasing since 2010 and as of 2012 only 67.1 per cent of schools have drinking water available to its students (Gupta,2013). The primary and upper primary schools has poor infrastructure in terms of cemented building, boundary walls, teaching aids, playgrounds, electricity, laboratories and libraries.

In the state there are schools neither having any building nor a black board to write. The figure reveals that the schools having no building in primary have only 8.6 per cent and in upper primary have only 1.3 per cent of enrolment, whereas the schools without black board both the primary and upper primary level have 10.8 percent of enrolment. Besides this, there are some other interesting data, usually where there are female teachers; parents are more inclined to enrol their girl children in the

primary level of schooling. But in Rajasthan and no female teachers are available in 36 per cent and 42.5 per cent primary and upper primary schools, respectively.

Social and home Environment

The home backgrounds of the adolescent girls in the Rajasthan differed much from place to place. The support given to young people enrolled in school plays an important role in their study. Beside this is the home environment including parents' economic backgrounds, their profession, the extent of labour force participation by mothers and children, parents' educational levels and their aspirations for their girl children is also very important factor for the education of girl child. The home environment for girl student is not always favourable. They have to perform housework alone and with their mother in the house. Their considerable time is spent on these activities resulting the suffering of study and sometimes drop out. Girls in Rajasthan were spending more than three times as compared to the girls in the states in supporting their families through such work. Close to two-thirds of enrolled girls in Rajasthan are doing housework compared to less than half of the girls in other developed states and about one-fourth of girls in Rajasthan are doing economic work (DWCD, 2005). The dispersed settlement pattern and the harsh terrain in the desert areas of Rajasthan contribute major difficulties in terms of travel. In this way the girls in Rajasthan are getting less time for self-study.

Rajasthan is well known for rainfed agriculture, frequent droughts and rearing of livestock. Seventy three per cent of households are reported agriculture as their main source of income. High proportions of women (63%) and adolescent girls (55%) were involved in cultivation and rearing livestock (Government of Rajasthan, 2002). The work pressures on enrolled girls are high throughout the year, but during peak season in agriculture, it is very high and girl students are reported not to attending school. High female labour force participation in agriculture increases the demand of adolescent girls, to work with their mothers outside the home. Such situation compels lower demand for female education in terms of higher indirect costs associated with sending girls to school and lower perceived benefits in the future. The social and family pressure such as grazing animals, helping family members in housework, household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, child care and other work which can be done side by side with attending school contribute to poor school performance through reducing time and energy which could otherwise have been used for self-study of the girl student.

The young girls in Rajasthan get married and their schooling brought to the end. In a sense this marks an end to their freedom to leave the house and to have time to meet friends and great restriction on the study. Although their *gauna* (co-habitation) takes place at a later age but the social structure does not allow do the things as they were doing before their marriage.

The social and family situation is worse for Muslim girls, they have to discontinue their schooling at the secondary level (14-18 age) who had completed elementary education due to non availability of secondary level schooling facilities, especially in rural areas, household poverty, school ethos etc. (Nuna, 2013) Parents are not interested for their education especially when girls attain puberty.

It is a general presumption that high education of girls may create problems in searching equally qualified bride and there is high demand of dowry for highly qualified bride. This is again a great challenge and most of families support drop out girls from school after primary education.

Opportunities and efforts for girl education

The government is constantly trying to overcome the problems associated with the girl education in Rajasthan. There have been several efforts to improve quality made by the government. It has been providing free education to girl students since July, 2011. The idea behind this scheme is to

encourage the poor families to educate their girl child without feeling any financial burden. The government also promised to provide free education to girls till graduation. However, due to a shortage of resources and lack of political will, this system suffers from massive gaps including high student to teacher ratios, shortage of infrastructure and poor levels of teacher training. In order to improve enrollment, retention and reduction of dropout rate of students in primary classes and also to improve the nutritional status of primary school students, Government, of India, launched a countrywide scheme i.e. National programme of nutritional support to primary education (Mid-Day Meal) scheme in 1995 in which the students of primary classes are provided cooked meal. Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is another initiative of Indian government aimed at the universalisation of elementary education operational since 2010. It is providing elementary education for all and bringing the entire social and gender gaps with active participants of local community in the affairs of the school and effective decentralization down to the school level. The major thrust of scheme is to achieve zero drops out.

The Right to Education Act (RTE) has made major steps towards achieving access to primary education for all of its children. This act guarantees quality education for all children in India aged six to fourteen. With the passing of this act Government of India has given a strong weapon to the children to acquire elementary education. It is a vital aspect in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) out of the eight MDG set by the United Nations and in creating an equal, justice and healthy society in India. In this connection, all government, government aided and special category schools shall have to constitute School management committee (SMCs) as per section 21 of the RTE act. SMC is an instrument that has tremendous potential to transform the existing system of education, characterized by cynicism and a defeatist outlook of the system functionaries and stakeholders, including teachers and parents. The constructive dialogue and its positive action with stakeholders, the SMC can work towards reinstating a well functioning school system (Mukhopadhyay and Sahoo 2012).

The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyana (RMSA) is another effort of the government for universal secondary education in the country (Singh, 2007). It give better opportunities for girls school where gender sensitive issue. It provides quality education in diverse habitat from the preparatory stage by granting budget for establishment new secondary school wherever there is density of population is high and to reduce the distance from 5 km to 3 km. RMSA appoints teacher to reduce pupil teacher ratio to 30:1 with focus on the education of science, maths and English. It is also focuses to appoint more female teachers. RMSA improves school libraries, laboratories and computer education to promote and enrich the experimental culture among the students (www.rmsaindia.org). The scheme encourages the establishment of the model school scheme in every block of the remote areas for the improvement of secondary school and grants separate hostel for girls along with model school (Sangeeta and Kumar, 2013). RMSA has also provision for budget of electricity connection to use the computers provided to them and also internet facility. Furniture, rain water harvesting facility for drinking water and toilets facilities, especially separate toilet for girls is being providing under this scheme. It appoints at least one teacher or counsellor for guidance and counselling of the students for better performance in scholastic activities and facilitation of adjustment and career development problem in school level. Counsellor guides to those parents, who are interested to drop out her girls from school without any reason. RMSA offers regular meeting among the personnel involved in education to ascertain the progress of scheme in the school and shares all the related information to parents. Scholarship is being provided for girl, educationally backward, economically weaker sections and physically disabled students under the scheme (Bhutia, 2013) In this way, RMSA is utmost scheme to provide all facilities for the upgradation of the girl education (MHRD, 2014)

Parents, the change leaders

Along with the children, parents are also the main stakeholders of the education system and it is they who bear the impact of the faulting school system. They need to be given opportunities and support to bring about a change in the education system because they hold the powerful key to initiate the process of reversing the decline in schools, through their constructive and collective engagements with the school. Parents should encourage their daughter to stay in school and progress through examinations, despite of expectations that she would stay at home. She would not have to put schoolwork after housework or automatically be expected to clean the classroom. They have to change their mind set in the direction of girl education. The parents should remember that an educated girl can not only improve the status of their family but also play very important role in the education of coming generation.

Conclusion

The society cannot claim to be developed without educating its children. Education cannot also be selective on the basis of gender, cast and creed and should not cater only to the interests of few communities who are economically and socially rich. Due to a plethora of schemes in Rajasthan, there is improvement in the girl education during the last 10 years with the significant increase in enrolment of girls at the upper primary level in rural areas also. But a large number of girls are still facing difficulties in entering school and continuing their studies due to many social and other reasons. Incapability of families to undertake education expenses of girls, gender disparity, poverty and practices of early marriage are the most important ethos associated with the girl education in Rajasthan. Governments are consistently trying to improve the situation by launching various programmes but the socioeconomic status and orthodox thinking of the parents are the major bottleneck in the context of girl education.

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