



## Gender Disparity: A Study of Education in India

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### ABSTRACT

*Literacy and education can play a pivotal role in reducing the socio-economic disparities. In a country like India where almost half of the population are females and if they do not access an equal opportunity to get literate and educated the nation is at a big socio-economic loss. It is in this context that the current research inquires if the disparity existed in literacy rates and at various levels of education. Using tools like literacy rates, enrolments, GER and GPI it could be observed that the disparity between females and males exist but is reducing. From 2005-06 to 2012-13 the disparity had largely reduced across all levels of education. Various policy initiatives have contributed in the improvement in parity in literacy and across education levels. However, continued and greater efforts would be imperative to ensure gender parity in education and thereby across all walks of life in India.*

**KEYWORDS :** gender disparity, literacy rates, education, GPI, GER, India

### INTRODUCTION

Historically certain sections in India have been disadvantaged for social, geographical and economic reasons. Similarly gender bias in favor of males may result in lesser opportunities for females to keep pace in participating in the socio-economic development of the nation. The sections of the society that have lagged behind on the path of development should have an equitable access to the tool of education to assure that they develop at an equal pace. Education is considered to be the alchemy for change. This is well realized by the apex regulatory body for education in India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). MHRD in its Citizen's/Client's Charter of Department of School Education and Literacy mentions its vision statement as "To ensure education of equitable quality for all to fully harness the nation's human potential" ([http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/upload\\_document/CitizenCharter-SE-updated.pdf](http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/CitizenCharter-SE-updated.pdf)). In its Citizen's/Client's Charter of Department of Higher Education mentions its vision statement as "To realize India's human resource potential to its fullest in the higher education sector with equity and excellence" ([http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/upload\\_document/CCC112014.pdf](http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/CCC112014.pdf)). Thus the commitment of the policy makers to ensure an equitable access to education for all could not have been overemphasized. An upward social ascent can be assisted through education. Education can play a crucial role in reducing disparity by allowing economic development of the females and thereby enhance her status in the society.

The current research paper is an attempt to study the gender disparity in literacy rates and various levels of education. It is an attempt to study the differences in enrolments of boys and girls and thereby understand the severity of the disparity in education in India.

### METHODOLOGY

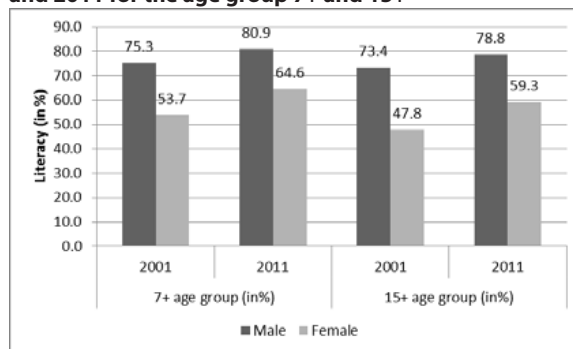
The current study is an analysis of enrolments at various levels of education based on the secondary data from a report released by the MHRD (2014). The study is undertaken for the period of 2005-06 to 2012-13 since a comparable data across all levels of education is available for this period over the last decade 2004-15. The data for 2012-13 were provisional. The analysis is undertaken for five stages of education, namely primary education (standard 1 to 5, age group 6-10 years), upper primary education (standard 6 to 8, age group 11-13 years), secondary education (standard 9 to 10, age group 14-15 years), senior secondary education (standard 11 to 12, age group 16-17 years) and higher education (all education after senior secondary education, age group 18-23 years) (MHRD, 2014). Literacy rates for boys and girls, Gross Enrolment Ratio for boys and girls and Gender Disparity Index are the tools used to analyze the disparity in education. They are defined as (i) Literacy Rate is the number of literates in the age group of 7 years and above expressed as percentage of the total corresponding population; (ii) Gross Enrolment Ratio is defined as the total student enrolment in a given level of education, regardless of age expressed as a percentage of the corresponding eligible official age group population in a given school year and (iii) Gender Parity Index (GPI) is the ratio of Girls GER to Boys GER in a given level of education.

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Literacy rates in India have grown at a very slow pace over the decade 2001-11. It should however be considered that the rise in percentages of literates is with a huge

population base. The gap between the male and the female literacy had reduced over the period of 2001-11 for both the categories of above 7+ age group and above 15+ age group. As shown in figure 1 from 2001 to 2011 while the literacy rates in percentage for 7+ age group grew for both males (75.3 to 80.9) and females (53.7 to 64.6), the gap between the male and female literacy rates had also reduced from about 22% to about 16%. Similarly the literacy rates in percentage for 15+ age group grew for both males (73.4 to 78.8) and females (47.8 to 59.3), the gap between the male and female literacy rates had also reduced from about 26% to about 20%.

**Figure 1: Literacy rates for males and females for 2001 and 2011 for the age group 7+ and 15+**

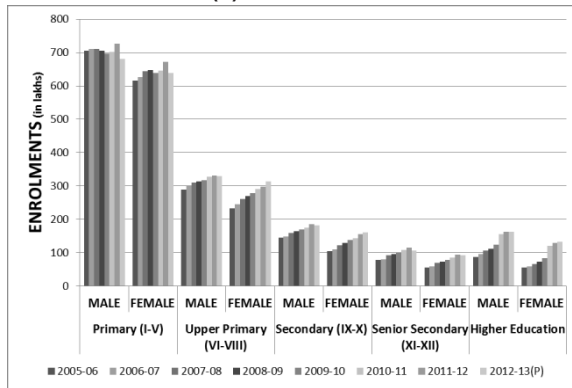


Source: MHRD (2014)

Thus for both the age groups the literacy rates had increased and the gender gaps between males and females had also reduced. If this trend continued or the reduction in the gap between the literacy rates of males and females narrowed with a greater speed it might contribute phenomenally towards the reduction in disparity and thereby positively affect the socio-economic fabric of the nation.

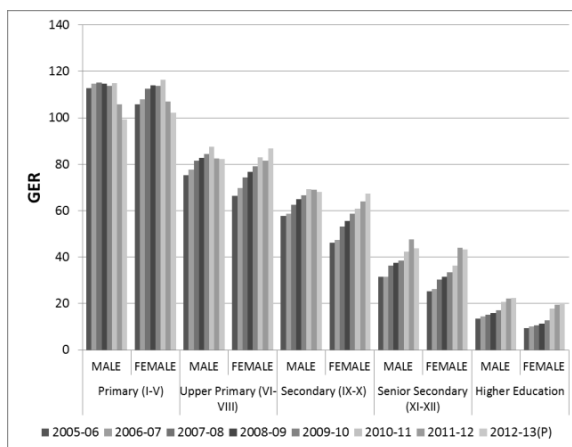
It could be largely observed that the total enrolments reduced from primary education to higher education for each year as shown in figure 2. The enrolments largely increased over the years from 2005-06 to 2012-13 for both males and females. But across all levels of education the gap between males and females persisted. While various policy initiatives are offered to females probably more policy efforts are needed to enhance the enrolments of education at all levels.

**Figure 2: Enrolments in various levels of education from 2005-06 to 2012-13 (P) for males and females**



Source: MHRD (2014)

**Figure 3: GER at various levels of education from 2005-06 to 2012-13 (P) for males and females**

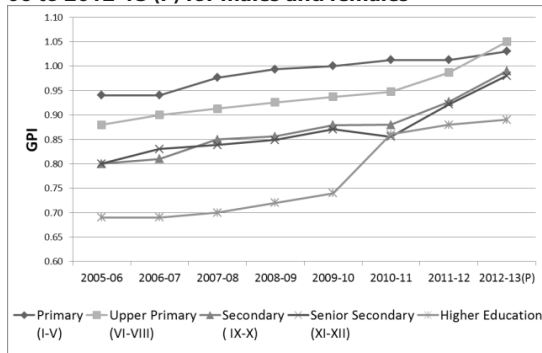


Source: MHRD (2014)

Figure 3 shows, that the GER for males and females almost showed a similar picture for the gender gap as was the case for enrolments. For primary education though since 2008-09 the GER for females exceeded that for males. For all the other levels of education from 2005-06 to 2012-13 (P) the gap between males and females GER continued to exist. But for 2012-13 either

the gap between the enrolments of males and females across various levels of education narrowed down or the GER for females exceeded that for males. While it should be noted that the data for 2012-13 was provisional and final data may help understand the scenario better. Nevertheless largely the gaps between males and females have reduced for all levels of education for 2005-06 to 2012-13 (P).

**Figure 4: GPI at various levels of education from 2005-06 to 2012-13 (P) for males and females**



Source: MHRD (2014)

A GPI of 1 indicates parity between sexes, i.e. if the GER of males and females at a certain level of education would be same, the GPI would settle at 1, indicating a perfect balance between genders. Above 1 GPI would indicate that a higher proportion of eligible age group females are enrolled as compared to their male counterparts. As can be observed in figure 4 the GPI had increased from 2005-06 to 2012-13 for all levels of education and got closer to 1. Particularly the rise in the GPI for upper primary, secondary and higher education was at a greater pace. In 2009-10 particularly in higher education the enrolments of females saw a sudden upsurge and the GPI showed a rise of about 0.1 in a year itself. Overall the trend in the GPI showed that the scenario had improved in context of enrolments of girls from 2005-06 to 2012-13 across all levels of education. While this is praise worthy, the GPI above one was only noticed for primary and upper primary levels of education. For the other levels the GER for males was higher than the GER for females since the GPI was less than one.

## CONCLUSION

The incorporation of greater participation by the fairer sex, the females, in the process of inducing changes in social, cultural, institutional and economic conditions of the nation is necessitated. In a country like India where almost half of its population is females, one cannot afford to ignore the possibilities of increasing the pace of economic development by providing education facilities to females. Instead if this opportunity is lost almost half of the population would lack opportunity to participate and contribute in the economic growth of the nation.

An equitable development of the nation can be ensured if the economy invested higher investments towards the provision of education of females. Time cannot be riper than now for an increased consciousness and sensitivity amongst the policy makers. They should pursue the goal of increased access to education for females with greater commitments. Moreover there are also ethical and normative arguments in support of increasing the opportunity of access to education for females.

In India some of the initiatives to enhance gender parity are already being implemented like highly subsidized higher education, community based aids to girl child to support for fees and providing other resources for pursuing studies, girls colleges and universities, lodging & boarding facilities, sexual harassment cells, etc. Besides there are also many schemes as mentioned below that are regularly funded by the government. They include:

1. Day care centers in Universities and Colleges
2. Indira Gandhi Scholarships for single girl child for pursuing Higher and Technical education
3. Construction of Women's hostels for colleges
4. Development of Women's studies in Universities and colleges
5. Capacity building in women managers in Higher Education
6. Post doctoral fellowships for women
7. Women hostels in polytechnics
8. IGNOU's motivation for women/girls learning (MHRD, 2011-12)

There is also a 'Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place Cell' to avoid any kind of sexual harassment at work place against women. This ensures a safe work culture that can further motivate the female enrolment in education (UGC, 2010-11).

Such policy initiatives amongst others have contributed for a higher participation of females in education. Continued efforts would surely ensure gender parity in literacy and education that would further enhance the development of the nation.

## REFERENCES

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