

DEPRIVATION OF WOMEN IN EDUCATION: A GENDER SENSITIVE EDUCATIONAL ANALYSIS IN WEST BENGAL VIS-À-VIS INDIA

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1.1 Introduction

Women account for roughly half the world's population, perform two-thirds of the hours worked, receive one-tenth of the world's income, and have less than one hundredth of the world's property registered in their names. Female deprivation is very acute in the developing countries with high levels of poverty, though in affluent nations women also suffer low status due to conservative attitudes. Equality of the sexes in terms of men and women's command over resources, their access to education and health, and in terms of freedom to develop their potential has an intrinsic value in its own right. The equal treatment of the sexes for intrinsic reasons is, in the parlance of welfare economics, the equity reason for reducing gender-imbalances. A second important reason in favour of reducing gender-imbalances is what might be termed the instrumental reason i.e. the gains to be had from granting equality. This is the efficiency reason for reducing gender inequality in areas where women are currently deprived.

Sexism exists in women as well as in men; it has no respect for individual aspirations, potential or abilities. In obvious and subtle ways, it influences the outcomes of a myriad of life situations the world over. The concept of gender sensitivity has been developed as a way to reduce barriers to personal and economic development created by sexism. Gender sensitivity helps to generate respect for the individual regardless of sex. Gender sensitivity is not about pitting women against men. On the contrary, education that is gender sensitive benefits members of both sexes. It helps them determine which assumptions in matters of gender are valid and which are stereotyped generalizations. Gender awareness requires not only intellectual effort but also sensitivity and open-mindedness. It opens up the widest possible range of life options for both women and men.

Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic returns, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable. Women in West Bengal are commonly portrayed as among the

most oppressed and majority of them are grounded in both poverty and patriarchy. Patriarchy limits women's ownership and control over property and other economic resources including the products of their own labour. Women's mobility in West Bengal is constrained and their access to education and information hindered. The clearest examples of gender inequality are the various forms of violence systematically meted out against women. In the view of these facts, attempt has been made to analyse the status and deprivation of woman in education in West Bengal vis-a-vis India.

1.2 Data Base and Methodology

The study was based on secondary data. Secondary data are collected from various secondary sources like the CENSUS, NSSO, NFHS and the different publications of Government of India and Government of West Bengal.

1.3 Findings

1.3.1 Literacy rates

Literacy rates both for rural and urban areas in selected states in India are presented in Tables-1 and 2. Position of West Bengal in terms of literacy rate is very praiseworthy. The

Table 1: Rural literacy rates (%) in India and selected states in 1991 and 2001

States	1991		2001	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Andhra Pradesh	47.3	23.9	66.1	44.4
Bihar	48.3	18.0	57.7	30.0
Gujarat	66.8	38.6	70.7	45.8
Karnataka	60.3	34.8	70.6	48.5
Kerala	92.9	85.1	93.5	86.8
Maharashtra	69.7	41.0	82.2	59.1
Mizoram	77.4	67.0	84.4	76.2
Punjab	60.7	43.9	71.7	57.9
Rajasthan	47.6	11.6	73.0	37.7
Tamil Nadu	67.2	41.8	77.5	55.8
Uttar Pradesh	52.1	19.0	68.0	37.7
West Bengal	62.1	38.1	73.8	53.8
India	57.9	30.6	71.2	46.6

Source: COI 1991, Series 1, Paper 2 of 1992; COI 2001, Paper 2 of 2001; GOI, Planning Commission, National Human Development Report 2001, p.24.

Table 2: Urban literacy rates (%) in India and selected states in 1991 and 2001

States	1991		2001	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Andhra Pradesh	75.9	56.4	83.2	69.3
Bihar	77.7	55.9	80.8	63.3
Gujarat	84.6	67.7	85.5	72.2
Karnataka	82.0	65.7	86.9	74.9
Kerala	95.6	89.1	96.1	90.9
Maharashtra	86.4	70.9	91.4	71.3
Mizoram	95.2	91.6	97.0	95.7

Punjab	77.3	66.1	83.0	74.6
Rajasthan	78.5	50.2	87.1	65.4
Tamil Nadu	86.1	69.6	88.4	75.6
Uttar Pradesh	70.0	50.4	78.1	62.1
West Bengal	81.2	68.3	86.5	76.1
India	81.1	63.9	86.4	73.0

Source: COI 1991, Series 1, Paper 2 of 1992 COI, 2001, Paper 2 of 2001

Table 3: Progress of literacy by districts in West Bengal during 1981-2001

States	1981		1991		2001	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
West Bengal	50.5	30.3	67.8	46.6	77.6	60.2
Darjeeling	51.6	32.4	67.1	47.8	81.3	63.9
Jalpaiguri	38.5	20.4	56.0	33.2	73.6	52.9
Koch Behar	40.0	19.3	57.4	33.3	76.8	57.0
Uttar Dinajpur	36.1	17.1	45.2	22.9	59.3	37.2
Dakshin Dinajpur	-	-	56.8	35.3	73.3	55.1
Malda	31.5	14.2	45.6	24.9	59.2	41.7
Murshidabad	32.4	17.3	46.4	29.6	61.4	48.3
Birbhum	43.0	24.2	56.3	37.2	71.6	52.2
Bardhaman	50.9	33.8	71.1	51.5	79.3	61.9
Nadia	43.7	29.4	60.1	44.4	72.7	60.1
North 24 Parganas	55.4	35.4	60.1	58.0	84.4	72.1
South 24 Parganas	-	-	68.5	40.6	83.1	59.7
Hooghly	57.9	38.8	75.8	56.9	77.2	67.7
Bankura	49.4	23.1	66.8	36.6	74.2	49.8
Purulia	45.6	13.3	62.2	23.2	85.3	37.2
Midnapure	55.3	29.7	81.3	56.6	83.7	64.6
Howrah	60.7	40.8	76.1	57.8	79.9	70.9
Kolkata	73.2	63.1	81.9	72.1	84.1	78.0

Source: COI 1991, Series. I, Paper. 2 of 1992; COI 2001, Provisional Population Totals for West Bengal, Table A - 2.

Note: For 1991 & 2001, literates exclude children aged 0-6 years. For 1981, literate exclude children aged 0-4 years; figures for North 24 Parganas stand for undivided 24 Parganas district and figures for Uttar Dinajpur stand for undivided West Dinajpur district.

The literacy rate for rural men from 1991 to 2001 has increased by 12 per cent. Similarly, the literacy rate of rural women has increased by 16 per cent during these periods. The urban literacy rate at the same time was remarkably higher in West Bengal. The urban male literacy rate was 86 per cent both in West Bengal and India in 2001; but it was 76.1 per cent in West Bengal in case of urban female against 73 per cent at the all India level. However, even at the momentum of higher literacy rates, women still occupies a disadvantageous position as compared to men in terms of literacy rate in general both in India as well as West Bengal.

Table 4: District wise rural and urban literacy of women in West Bengal

States	All Women				SC Women 1991			ST Women 1991		
	Rural		Urban		Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
	1991	2001	1991	2001						
West Bengal	38.1	53.8	68.3	76.1	28.9	26.3	42.7	15.0	14.1	31.7
Darjeeling	37.5	56.1	70.0	79.7	33.3	27.7	52.5	30.8	24.9	71.2
Jalpaiguri	27.0	47.0	63.3	74.7	26.6	25.5	35.5	12.5	12.2	36.7
Koch Behar	29.7	54.5	71.6	80.6	26.9	26.1	50.0	-	-	-
Uttar Dinajpur	15.5	31.4	68.1	75.4	17.4	15.3	46.1	5.6	5.1	39.1
Dakshin Dinajpur	29.2	51.2	74.0	79.2	22.0	20.3	41.3	10.9	10.2	41.6
Malda	21.6	38.9	65.8	74.0	20.0	19.0	40.0	6.4	6.1	42.0
Murshidabad	26.8	46.4	52.1	61.5	24.4	22.7	35.3	10.6	10.0	31.0
Birbhum	35.0	50.4	54.4	70.9	16.1	15.3	27.4	5.6	5.5	12.1
Bardhaman	46.0	57.1	62.0	70.1	24.7	23.2	29.5	14.8	15.5	16.1
Nadia	37.6	55.1	66.1	76.0	41.2	36.7	51.2	12.6	10.4	25.6
North 24 Parganas	42.1	61.7	72.2	80.5	17.4	15.3	46.1	13.1	10.7	32.0
South 24 Parganas	36.9	56.9	63.6	74.3	33.4	32.0	52.0	12.1	11.3	35.2
Hooghly	51.1	62.6	69.8	78.0	27.8	24.3	44.8	13.8	13.4	21.3
Bankura	34.1	48.0	63.4	72.4	13.1	12.3	22.9	13.9	13.8	34.1
Purulia	19.6	33.9	58.1	65.5	13.5	12.4	22.8	10.6	10.3	32.8
Midnapure	55.1	63.6	70.1	73	39.7	39.1	46.9	24.6	24.3	35.1
Howrah	49.6	65.1	66.4	76.8	32.9	27.3	46.0	32.0	4.0	48.3
Kolkata	-	-	72.1	78.0	47.3	-	47.3	42.0	-	42.0

Source: State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development (SIPRD), Govt. of West Bengal, Nari O Shishu Unnayan Ebhong Panchayet, Kalyani (Nadia District), August 2003, Table 1- 3.

Table 5: Percentage of households with no literate male and female (15 years and above) in selected states and India in 1993-94

States	Rural		Urban	
	No literate male	No female literate member	No literate male	No female literate member
West Bengal	60.7	56.0	12.2	37.6
Bihar	49.6	82.5	20.8	50.7
Orissa	41.4	70.0	14.8	42.8
India	37.0	67.8	14.3	39.7

Source: Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), Report no.409, Table 4.7.1

District-wise urban and rural literacy rates in West Bengal are presented in Table-3. It has been found that the female literacy rates were lower than that of male in majority of the districts in West Bengal except Kolkata and Howrah in 1991. However, in 2001 about half the districts had reached 60 per cent. The female literacy rate was as low as 40 per cent in Uttar Dinajpur and Purulia, both with a substantial component of tribal population. These facts indicate that there is a wide disparity in the literacy of females of scheduled and non-scheduled groups.

It has been found that 67.8 per cent of rural households and 39.7 per cent of urban households did not have any literate adult women (aged 15 years or more) at the all India level in 1993-94 (Table-5). The same for West Bengal

was 56 and 37.6 per cent respectively, which is relatively better than that of India and the neighbouring states like Bihar and Orissa.

Table 6: Educational attainment (%) of adult men and women in selected states and India in 1995-96

States	Not Literate		Literate without formal schooling		Primary		Secondary		Graduate	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
West Bengal										
Rural	32.5	58.5	3.1	2.3	23.8	15.5	5.7	2.2	2.3	0.7
Urban	13.8	26.1	1.5	3.1	16.1	18.0	12.5	10.6	15.0	7.6
Bihar										
Rural	52.6	82.8	2.5	1.7	8.8	3.5	8.8	2.9	3.0	0.4
Urban	20.8	48.4	2.8	2.9	8.5	7.2	17.2	12.8	13.1	4.5
Orissa										
Rural	38.5	66.4	3.4	1.5	12.4	8.3	7.7	2.7	2.5	0.5
Urban	15.6	35.5	1.5	2.3	10.3	9.9	14.5	10.8	13.3	1.3
India										
Rural	-	66.3	-	1.0	-	10.1	-	3.8	-	-
Urban	14.3	32.7	1.1	1.4	14.2	13.4	17.4	13.1	11.5	6.7

Source: NSS 52nd Round (July 1995-June 1996): Attending an Educational Institution in India: Its Level Nature and Cost, Table 2R, 2U.

It is evidenced that 58.5 per cent of rural and 26.1 per cent of urban women in West Bengal were illiterates up to mid-1990s (Table-6), whereas it was more pervasive in the neighbouring states like Orissa and Bihar. Besides, only 2.2 per cent of the rural women in West Bengal had education up to the secondary level and less than one per cent was graduates. The low participation of adult women in education especially in secondary and graduate level calls to enhance the participation and retention of women in higher education.

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) plays a significant role in imparting non-formal, pre-school education for young children in West Bengal apart from providing specialised care for mothers. The Sishu Siksha Karmasuchi (SSK) is another special scheme for providing basic education to children who cannot be part of the formal primary school system because of various constraints. It has been found that about 1 to 3 per cent of children in West Bengal have literate without formal schooling which is much higher than all India level (Table-6).

1.3.2 School attendance and dropout rate

Enrolment and drop-out ratios are one of the main indicators to judge the literacy and educational standards attained by women and men. Table-7 presents the age-specific school attendance ratios in West Bengal, Kerala and India in 1995. Though these ratios for rural girls in West Bengal are relatively

better than all India average, there is a wide gap between boys and girls. The evidence is far better in Kerala where the school attendance ratio is almost same between boys and girls. This fact calls for narrowing the gap in West Bengal.

Table 7: Age-specific school attendance ratios (%) in West Bengal, Kerala and India in 1995

Particulars		6-10 Years		11-13 Years	
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
West Bengal	Rural	69	61	74	67
	Urban	79	75	83	83
Kerala	Rural	96	97	97	98
	Urban	98	97	97	98
All India	Rural	71	58	75	57
	Urban	84	82	87	83

Source: Department of Development and Planning, Govt. of West Bengal, West Bengal Human Development Report 2004, Table 7.2, p 154.

Table 8: Never enrolled girls and boys (aged 5-24 years) in selected states in India in 1995-96

States	Rural		Urban	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Andhra Pradesh	38.8	24.0	13.7	8.1
Bihar	64.2	39.6	28.6	18.5
Gujarat	37.4	15.6	14.2	7.8
Karnataka	37.4	22.7	14.9	9.2
Kerala	29.0	13.0	12.0	2.2
Maharashtra	19.4	11.0	8.1	4.8
Mizoram	18.6	26.7	2.4	2.4
Punjab	15.2	11.3	11.5	8.5
Rajasthan	63.1	29.2	22.5	11.2
Tamil Nadu	18.4	6.7	6.1	3.7
Uttar Pradesh	54.2	27.3	25.2	18.4
West Bengal	35.0	26.3	17.2	12.2
India	40.6	23.5	14.7	9.6

Source: NSS 52nd Round, Tables 17R and 17U

Table 9: Dropout rates (%) among girls and boys in class I-V and I-IX in selected states in India (1987-88 and 2000-2002)

States	1987-88 Class- I-V		2000-01 Class- I-V		2001-02 Class-I-IX	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Andhra Pradesh	58.5	55.0	40.8	44.2	68.5	63.1
Bihar	46.9	41.9	22.6	24.4	78.4	86.7
Gujarat	46.9	41.9	22.6	24.4	70.3	74.6
Karnataka	57.4	50.2	24.7	18.5	60.2	63.2
Kerala	-3.6	-4.4	-9.7	-6.0	23.8	14.3
Maharashtra	45.7	39.8	15.9	18.8	48.9	56.0
Punjab	37.8	37.3	22.0	18.5	40.4	38.8
Rajasthan	60.8	52.3	55.5	73.5	72.6	80.4
Tamil Nadu	24.5	21.8	53.0	31.7	58.0	58.9
Uttar Pradesh	47.2	47.7	53.0	62.1	57.3	74.9
West Bengal	65.8	63.8	46.2	57.0	77.0	80.5

Source: GOI, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Annual Report, 1991-92, p. 305; 2001-2, p.219.

Table-8 shows that the never-enrolled girls (aged 5-24 years) were 35 per cent in rural and 17.2 per cent in urban areas in West Bengal in 1995. The same at the all-India level was 40.6 per cent and 14.7 per cent, respectively. In Bihar

the proportion of never enrolled girls' both in rural and urban areas was very much higher than that of West Bengal and all India average.

The drop-outs for girls and boys in class I-V in 1987-88 and 2000-01 and for I-IX in 2001-02 are presented in Table-9. West Bengal girls are clearly at a disadvantage as evidenced in other states. The drop-out rates for girls is 57 per cent as against 46.2 per cent for boys in class I-V in 2000-01. The same gender gap appears in case of class I-IX. The dropout rates for girls in 2001-02 were 80.5 per cent as against 77 per cent for boys. It has been found that 'financial constraints' and 'child not interested in studies' are important causes behind non-enrolment and dropping out both for girls and boys.

Table 10: Share of women teachers in selected states in India (1995-96 and 2000-2001)

States	Primary		Middle Stage		Secondary		Higher Secondary/10+2 Schools/Junior Colleges	
	1995-96	2000-01	1995-96	2000-01	1995-96	2000-01	1995-96	2000-01
West Bengal	23.3	24.5	24.2	25.2	39.9	25.6	23.5	26.1
Bihar	19.0	19.2	21.1	22.8	13.0	11.3	24.9	30.1
Orissa	24.4	24.8	14.5	14.7	21.1	21.2	24.0	23.5
Kerala	68.7	71.5	65.7	66.9	65.2	66.7	66.4	65.2
India	31.8	35.6	35.1	38.2	35.2	35.0	32.6	29.8

Source: Govt. of India, MHRD, Selected Educational Statistics 2000-2001. Govt. of India, MHRD, Department of WCD, Women in India: A Statistical Profile-1997, Table 4.20, p. 107.

Involvement of women teachers in educational institutions is an important factor for influencing enrolment and dropout rate of girls. The share of women teachers in education system in selected states in India is presented in Table-10. In West Bengal, women teachers currently constitute about one-fourth (26.1 per cent) of total teachers teaching at various levels. This is comparatively low as compared to all-India level (29.8%) whereas it is as high as 65.2 per cent in Kerala (65.2 per cent).

Table 11: School infrastructure by districts in West Bengal (2001-02)

District	No. of schools	No. with no drinking water	No. without girl's toilet	% of Schools without girls' toilet
Bankura	3464	955	3307	95.5
Birbhum	2366	815	2275	96.2
Koch Behar	1812	112	1125	62.1
Murshidabad	3165	48	2896	91.5
24 Parganas (S)	3526	1147	3131	88.8
Dakshin Dinajpur	1188	335	1097	92.3
Jalpaiguri	1967	718	1843	93.7
Malda	1886	557	1743	94.5
Purulia	3001	635	2838	94.6
Uttar Dinajpur	1443	679	1424	94.6
Bardhaman	3939	756	3456	87.7
Darjeeling	779	638	717	92.0
Howrah	2034	550	1730	88.0
Hooghly	2887	518	2446	84.7
Nadia	2651	437	2381	89.8
24 Parganas (N)	3896	715	3168	81.3
Paschim Medinipur	4685	932	4167	88.9
Purba Medinipur	3157	702	2828	88.6
Total	48224	11360	42952	89.1

Note: Total includes schools in Siliguri.

There is also problem of poor infrastructure that particularly affects the girl children. Lack of drinking water in the premises and absence of separate toilets for girls are very severe in this case. It is evidenced from Table-11 that less than one-fifth of the schools had provided separate toilets for girls in majority of the districts in West Bengal in 2001-02.

1.3.3 Vocational training/education

In the era of globalisation with fast growing markets and technologies, concerted and continuous efforts have to be made for protecting and enhancing income augmenting opportunities for women, especially in view of their several vulnerabilities. It is evidenced from Table-12 that the total number of women's ITIs and Women's Wings in West Bengal had rose from 4 in 1995 to 11 in 2003. The total seats allocated for women had increased from 448 to 720 during this period which is much below as compared to other states except Bihar.

Table 12: Reserved seats of women in ITIs and women's wings in selected states in India (1995 and 2003)

States	1995			2003	
	Women's Govt. ITIs	Women's wings in ITIs	Total Sanctioned Seats	Total no. of Women's ITIs/ Wings	Total Sanctioned Seats
Andhra Pradesh	23	4	3340	36	3600
Bihar	7	0	608	8	592
Gujarat	0	16	1172	33	2238
Karnataka	17	10	1800	28	2626
Kerala	3	9	1456	11	1552
Maharashtra	15	11	2320	238	8592
Mizoram	-	-	-	3	48
Punjab	50	7	5668	78	6154
Rajasthan	10	8	704	16	736
Tamil Nadu	10	13	1832	23	2326
Uttar Pradesh	14	57	4380	80	4316
West Bengal	4	6	448	11	720
India	214	231	34480	800	46658

Source: Department of Women and Child Development, Statistical Profile of Women in India: 1997, pp. 173-174, Table 5.34 and relevant Annual Reports, Government of India, Ministry of Labour, DGET.

Table 13: Expenditure on education as a proportion of total revenue of state governments (1988-89&2001-2002)

States	1988-89	2001-02
Andhra Pradesh	18.4	16.0
Bihar	26.3	23.4
Gujarat	20.5	13.5
Karnataka	21.3	18.0
Kerala	28.1	23.0
Maharashtra	19.6	22.4
Mizoram	-	-
Punjab	20.8	16.3
Rajasthan	21.2	21.9
Tamil Nadu	20.9	20.2
Uttar Pradesh	20.3	18.4
West Bengal	24.5	18.1

Source : Nirmala Banerjee and Poulomi Roy, Gender in Fiscal Policies : The Case of West Bengal, The United Nations Development Fund For Women (UNIFEM), 2004.

In view of considering a number of indicators directly concerned with educational attainments of women and men, a critical look can now be made on few aspects of macro policies which have their own impact on the infrastructure of education. Table-13 provides the central and state government expenditure on education as a proportion of total government revenue. In 10 out of the 12 states (including West Bengal) shown that this proportion was lower in 2001-02 as compared to 1988-89 i.e. before the commencement of economic reforms ushering in globalisation. In 1989 almost one-fourth of the total revenue of the state was spent on education and this share was reduced to 18 per cent by 2001-02.

1.4 Conclusions

Since independence there have been extreme improvements in the level of education especially girl's education. The proportion of girl students to the total enrolled students has increased almost all levels. Particularly in higher education their percentages have gone up from 10 per cent in 1950-51 to 40.4 per cent in 2004-05 (UGC, 2004-05). Likewise the proportion in technical and other professional courses has also increased over these periods. However, this change is primarily observed among the higher and middle classes residing in urban areas. In rural and remote areas and among certain social groups and communities, girls' and women are still facing problem in deriving the benefits of education.

There are also wide inter-state disparities in gender groups at various levels of education and this gap observed to be wider at the district and sub-district levels. Even Girls' are unable to complete their basic education in these areas. Access to higher education is still a constraint to many girls. It has been also observed that wide disparities still exist in the education of rural males and rural females, urban females and rural females, and between females belonging to SC/ST and non-scheduled groups and between certain minority communities. The proclaim goals of correcting inherited imbalance through the intervention of gender sensitive planning and gender budgeting is a very positive step towards narrowing down the gender gaps in development, especially in education.

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