

### **Govt. Initiatives on Women Education**

Constitution of India The Article 21-A in the Constitution of India provides free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards.

The Article 15 of the Constitution of India prohibits any discrimination on grounds of sex (Constitution of India Article 15(1) (3)). The Article 26 of Declaration of the Universal Declaration of Human Right declares: —Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and Professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.|| This Right is also repeated in the UN Declaration of the Right of the Child which seeks to ensure. —Right to Free and Compulsory Education at least in the elementary stages and education to promote general culture, abilities, judgment and sense of responsibility to become a useful member of society and opportunity to recreation and play to attain the same purpose as of education.|| III. After Independence: After India attained independence in 1947, the University Education Commission was created to recommend suggestions to improve the

quality of education. However, their report spoke against female education, referring to it as: "Women's present education is entirely irrelevant to the life they have to lead. It is not only a waste but often a definite disability." In 1958, a national committee on women's education was appointed by the then government, and most of its recommendations were accepted. The crux of its recommendations was to bring female education on the same footing as offered for boys. Soon afterward, committees were created that talked about equality between men and women in the field of education. For example, one committee on differentiation of curricula for boys and girls (1959) recommended equality and a common curriculum at various stages of their learning.

Further efforts were made to expand the education system, and the Education Commission was set up in 1964, which largely talked about female education, which recommended a national policy to be developed by the government. This occurred in 1968, providing increased emphasis on female education.

Present Position of Women education in India In Independent India, education acquired special significance and has been supported by the government from time to time through its policies and programmes. Therefore, in recent years the Education system has expanded rapidly. But still a large number of women are in dark and the gender gap in literacy rate remains startling by its presence. The following facts and figures throw light on the criticality of the problem which is a harsh reality and demonstrate that we have a herculean task ahead. Every person above the age of 7 years who can read and write in any language is said to be literate.

Female literacy in 2001 stood at 53.67%, it has gone up to 65.46% in 2011. The male literacy in comparison rose from 75.26% to 82.14%. The data shows that the improvement in female literacy is more than males in both rural and urban,

during the decade 2001-2011 which represent women's are growing well in the last 10 years. The gender gap in literacy has come down from 24.57 in 2001 to 19.22 in 2011 in rural areas and from 13.41 in 2001 to 9.65 in 2011 in urban areas. And the gap between the literacy rate in urban and rural areas is also declined from 21.18 percentage in 2001 to 16.34 percentage in 2011.

**Factors Responsible for Low Literacy Rates among Women:** In spite of various plans and policies formulated and implemented by Indian govt. to eradicate illiteracy from our country, especially among women, the gap between male and female literacy still persist.

- Gender bias in the curriculum (female characters being depicted as weak & helpless)
- 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.
- Deprived of access to information and alienated from decision-making processes.
- Shortage of female teachers in schools.
- Schools established in faraway places etc.
- Inadequate school facilities (such as sanitary facilities etc).
- Rapid growth of population which leads to the neglect of girl child and put more emphasis on the boy education. women is considered as liability who will one time get married and will not contribute to the economic and social development.

Current policies Before and after Independence, India has been taking active steps towards women's status and education. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, has been a path breaking step towards the growth of education, especially for females. According to this act, elementary education is a fundamental right for children between the ages of 6 and 14. The government has undertaken to provide this education free of cost and make it compulsory for those in that age group. This undertaking is more widely known as Sarva

Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Since then, the SSA has come up with many schemes for inclusive as well as exclusive growth of Indian education as a whole, including schemes to help foster the growth of female education.

*The major schemes of the government are discussed in the following section :*

**Mahila Samakhya Programme:** This programme was launched in 1988 as a result of the New Education Policy (1986). It was created for the empowerment of women from rural areas especially socially and economically marginalized groups. When the SSA was formed, it initially set up a committee to look into this programme, how it was working and recommends new changes that could be made.

**Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBV):** This scheme was launched in July, 2004, to provide education to girls at primary level. It is primarily for the underprivileged and rural areas where literacy level for females is very low. The schools that were set up have 100% reservation: 75% for backward class and 25% for BPL (below Poverty line) females.

**National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL):** This programme was launched in July, 2003. It was an incentive to reach out to the girls who the SSA was not able to reach through other schemes. The SSA called out to the "hardest to reach girls". This scheme has covered 24 states in India. Under the NPEGEL, "model schools" have been set up to provide better opportunities to girls. The very first step towards women education and empowerment is to achieve the desired literacy rate.

At the same time a notable reconsideration needs to be made regarding imparting an enhancement of certain vocational skills as visualized by Swami Vivekananda are to promote and foster the women's education in India:

Involving women's group like self help groups to promote women's literacy. •  
Providing free and compulsory education for all girls up to 20 yrs. • Establishment  
of more no. of primary school. • Bringing out change in the attitude of parents  
and in the society. • Removal of gender bias in the school curriculum.

DR. MOUSUMI BORAL