

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN TRANSFORMING GENDER ROLES: STUDY OF RURAL WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN SIRSA, HARYANA

Sarita Rani

Research Scholar Department of History, Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo, Punjab.
rsarita008@gmail.com

Dr. Harpinder Kaur

Assistt. Professor History, Guru Kashi University Talwandi Sabo, Punjab -
harpindersidhu44@gmail.com

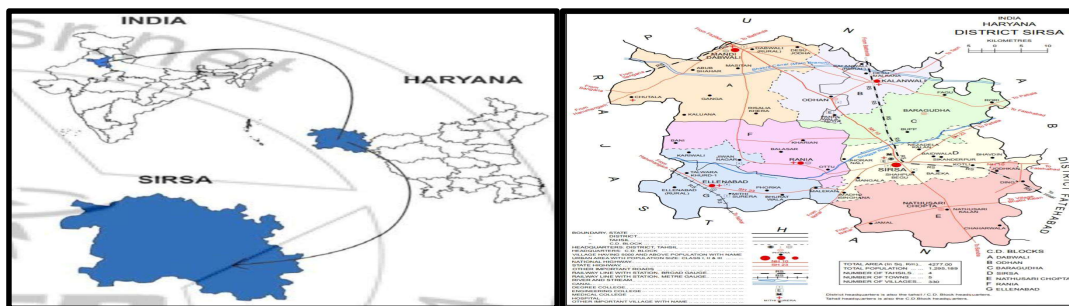
Abstract Equal access to educational opportunity is a basic human right essential to well-being. Educational gaps at attainment levels between males and females and further between females of rural and urban areas have remained the focus of research. This paper is based on the study of a district, Sirsa, to assess the educational empowerment of rural women residing in that district. The study has been carried out on a sample of 200 women identified and designated as rural women in the age group of 18 to 51 and above years. Semi-structured interview schedules, field notes, and participatory observation were the techniques used in the study. The findings of the study reveal that rural women have a very low level of education. Among all social groups, scheduled caste women are at the margin level. Poverty in the family and the non-availability of schools in villages have emerged as a major cause behind the educational deprivation of rural women. Empirical findings have shown that an increase in educational level among rural women increases their family income. It is suggested that education is a pertinent domain to make women empowered and self-reliant. Efforts should be made through different ways to make women educated and self-dependent. Ensuring educational opportunities for all is essential for more than one reason.

Keywords: *Empowerment, identity, rural, deprivation, opportunity, upliftment, attainment*

Introduction: Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions that build both individual and collective assets and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context that governs the use of these assets. World Bank (2002) stated that It is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in negotiating with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Sengupta(1998) argued that empowerment goes beyond socio-economic or political attributes and essentially refers to a process of becoming psychologically empowered. Poverty inflicts deep-rooted wounds on the psyche of individuals. If they cease to be oppressed, their first task would be to psychologically empower themselves. In this context, empowerment would mean increasing one's capacity to define, analyze and act upon one's problem. In the pre-independence time, the literacy rate for women had a poor spurt in comparison to the literacy rate of men. This is witnessed by the fact that the literacy rate of women has risen from 0.7 % to 7.3 %, whereas the literacy rate of men has risen from 9.8% to 24.09% during these four decades. In the post-independence period,

literacy rates have shown a substantial increase in general. However, the literacy rate of males has almost tripled over the period, e.g. 25% in 1951 and 82.1 % in 2011. Surprisingly; the female literacy rate has increased at a faster pace than the male literacy during the decade 1981 -2011. The growth is almost 6 times e.g. 7.9 percent in 1951 and 65.4 percent in 2011. Hence, one can infer that still the female literacy rate (only half of the female population is literate) is wadding behind the male literacy rate (a fourth of the male population is literate). This higher rate of illiteracy of women is undoubtedly attributed to women's dependence on men and to play a subordinate role. It is the education that can help women to understand Indian constitutional and legislative provisions that are made to strengthen them. Thus, promoting education among women is of great importance in empowering them to accomplish their goals on par with men in different spheres of life. India accounts for 30% of the world's total illiterate population out of which 70% are women. As per 2011 Census data, women constitute 48% of the total population in India, with a total literacy rate of 53.7% as compared to 75.3% in males. The literacy rate among rural women is 46.1% as compared to 72.9% among urban women; it is still lower than literacy rates among rural and urban men stands at 70.7% and 86.3%, respectively. However, the gaps between men's and women's literacy rates are rough but informative indicators of the gender difference in many forms of human capital. Despite the forceful interventions of female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programmes over the last 64 years and above all, the United Nations's enormous pressure about the uplift of the plight of women in terms education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons. Many researchers worked on evaluating the educational status of rural women for a long time. Bhandari and Smith (1997), in a study on rural women in the Madhya Pradesh district, found that the education level of women in villages is from 0-9 years, 47 per cent of rural women were employed in agriculture, and 53 per cent of women supplement their family income. Equal opportunities and status are two dimensions of empowerment that define, challenge and overcome barriers of life with which one's ability to shape life and environment increases. In another study Mazumdar (1987), found that discrimination in terms of education against women was found maximum among families of low socio-economic conditions than in middle and high socio-economic status families. Whereas Sadgopal (2003), Mukhopadhyaya (2009) and Panda (2010) concluded that empowerment of rural women is meaningless unless the society and its institutions respond to the discriminatory practices against rural women and women themselves endeavour to transform their life situation. Linguistic reforms are necessary to dislodge the patriarchal mindset and enhance the dignity of rural women, but this will not balance the psychological confusion of rural women's secondary position. In another study, Padhi (2012) evaluated the impact of the agrarian crisis on rural women in the Sirsa region of Haryana and concluded that women bearing the agrarian crisis are surviving with disposessions and deprivations. The structured oppressions of caste, culture and patriarchy in rural settings are layered and affect women in multiple ways. The high dropout rate among the girls in this region has curtailed the educational empowerment of women. Bishaw (2013), based on a study conducted on Assami rural women, concluded that as rural women's level of education increases, their involvement in political and economic activities and the possible advantages secured from their participation increase. Education and socio-economic development have a close relationship.

Rationale: Women's power of expression and capacity to diffuse problems generally come with an education that makes them capable of being heard in society. It is commonly held that education is the main factor that affects women's autonomy as well as identity in any social setup. Despite the established importance of female education, women continue to lag very much behind men in educational development in countries like India. Haryana continues to be predominantly a rural economy. Sirsa district is the largest district of Haryana state by Area. Sirsa is the district headquarters. It is located on National Highway no-9 and 250 kilometres from the National capital Delhi. On 1 September 1975, Sirsa became a district by taking Sirsa and Dabwali tehsils from Hisar District. There are a total of 342 villages in Sirsa. Total area 4.277km²(1651 sqm), Total Population 1295189, density 300/km² as per the Census 2011. Out of which 682,582 are males while 612,607 are females. In 2011, there were a total of 246,571 families residing in Sirsa district. The Average Sex Ratio of Sirsa district is 897. As per Census 2011, out of the total population, 24.6% of people live in Urban areas, while 75.4% live in Rural areas. The average literacy rate in urban areas is 79.2% while that in rural areas is 65.4%. Also, the Sex Ratio of Urban areas in Sirsa district is 896, while that of Rural areas is 898. The population of Children aged 0-6 years in Sirsa district is 157667, which is 12% of the total population. There are 84684 male children and 72983 female children between the ages of 0-6 years. Thus as per the Census 2011, the Child Sex Ratio of Sirsa is 862, which is less than the Average Sex Ratio (897) of the Sirsa district. The total literacy rate of the Sirsa district is 68.82%. The male literacy rate is 66.95% and the female literacy rate is 53.2% in Sirsa district. Population of 1,295,189, and Literacy is 68.82%, which is far below the average literacy rate at the state and national levels. Rural women being born and brought up in the deprived rural setup always lag in availing equal opportunities in life and ultimately remain oppressed, suppressed and weak in society. Most of the researchers emphasized the importance of education in reducing ignorance and creating empowerment. Sen (1999) viewed that education has the potential to contribute to alternative socialization, challenging conventional gender ideologies, levelling the playing field between males and females concerning skills, credentials and qualifications, and allowing women the use of knowledge to empower themselves in diverse ways. For example, a study in Calcutta has shown the positive impact that education has on the ability of women to resist and resolve situations of domestic violence. Rural women residing in the villages in Sirsa, their educational status and the socio-economic conditions in which they live have been scarcely researched so far. Unfortunately, there is neither any database nor any report that reflects the exact extent of their educational attainment level at present. It prompts the investigator and makes the present study vital in essence and spirit.



Objectives: The present study is based upon the following objectives:

1. to study the extent of educational level among rural women.
2. to acquaint with reasons and constraints faced by rural women in terms of their educational attainment.
3. to analyze the economic conditions of rural women at their educational level.
4. to analyze the impact of education on rural women's identity.
5. to study the legislative Provisions And Government initiatives for women's Empowerment.

Method And Procedure: The study is primarily descriptive and based upon a primary observational survey of rural women residing in a District named Sirsa, Haryana.

Tool: An adequately validated questionnaire was constructed and used as an Interview schedule for the data collection. However, field notes and observation techniques were also employed to get in-depth relevant information. Also, investigators have made the base of her analysis based on primary data along with available official secondary data.

Sampling: A representative sample of 200 rural women was selected by a proportionate random sampling technique. The women were identified and designated as rural in the age group of 18 to 51 and above years. The total sample is further stratified into 50 scheduled caste, 50 backward class and 100 general category women. A rural woman in the study is defined as a woman who has been residing in a village for the last 20 years or more. The area is taken as that which is located away from town/city and the main road at least at a distance of 5 kilometres. Data were collected individually and personally in the native language of the respondents. The whole inferences are presented in the form of tables and discussions.

Results And Discussion: Educational Level in Rural Women Across Different Social Groups. To present the domains of educational level among rural women the figures are classified as the percentage of women standing at each level of education across different social groups and are presented in the following tables.

Table 2: Percentage of Rural Women concerning Educational Level among Different Social Groups

Level of education	General		BC		SC		Total	
	No of women	%	No of women	%	No of women	%	No of women	%
Illiterate	40	40	29	58	31	62	100	50

Literate only	17	17	7	14	6	12	30	15
Primary	18	18	7	14	5	10	30	15
Elementary	13	13	3	6	4	8	20	10
Matric	6	6	2	4	2	4	10	5
Senior Secondary	3	3	1	2	2	4	6	3
Skill training	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	0.5
Graduate	2	2	1	2	-	-	3	1.5
Postgraduate	-		-	-	-	-	-	-
Professional	-		-	-	-	-	-	-
Technical	-		-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100	100%	50	100%	50	100%	200	100%

Source: primary survey

This Table reveals that 40% of women belonging to the upper class are illiterate, whereas the same 58 % of women of the backward class and 62% of women of scheduled caste are illiterate. It means women's illiteracy is much more intense in the lower social classes and marginalized groups. Literate women also do not have a comparable higher level of education. Only 17% of women in the general category, 14% in the backward category and 12% in the scheduled caste women are literate. They are below the primary level and keep a drastically low level of education. Almost a similar percentage of women in the upper caste and backward class have the primary level of formal education, but this figure is in the case of scheduled caste women. Similarly, the elementary level of education is found in 13% of the general category women, but the figure is 6% and 8% of the BC and SC categories respectively. Matric level of education is attained by a small percentage, 6% of the upper-class rural women and 4% of BC and 4%SC women. Figures further show that merely 3% of the general category women of the surveyed village could attain a secondary level

of education, and the same figure is again very low 2 and 3% in the case of BC and SC women. It is evident from the table values that the picture of educational empowerment in the surveyed village is much disturbing and bleak. As the overall literacy rate of the district is much below the state and national literacy figures, the situation of rural women's education lies at the bottom. The scenario of the village women's educational level presents discouraging results, as a majority of the rural women have educational levels below elementary. Present results are supported by Bhandari and Smith (1997), who, in a study of a similar texture, evidently concluded that access to higher education is very low among rural women. The educational attainment level of women lies at the bottom and least in the case of women belonging to marginalized sections in ruralities. Hence, it is not only the literacy figures, a certain level of education counts for enhancing the status of women. Reasons for dropping out or not enrolling in the formal educational system. The rural women were interviewed to get insight into different reasons and causes that have made them vulnerable to remaining illiterate or remaining at the bottom of the educational ladder. The causes cited by the respondents are presented in the following table.

Table 3: Causes of School Dropout/Not Enrolled cited by Respondents across social groups

Reasons for Dropout	General (%)	BC (%age)	SC (%age)
Poverty	52	66	76
Illiteracy of Parents	26	36	50
Social cause	35	23	25
Lack of nearby schools	62	50	59
Poor Academic atmosphere	6	23	40
Domestic Work And care siblings	6	26	53
Family attitude	32	26	37

Source: primary survey

The table demonstrates the percentage of causes for their early dropout and not enrollment in the formal school education system, which ultimately became the reasons for their low educational

level. The table further demonstrates that a very high percentage of women in all three social groups complained of poverty in the family as a major cause behind their educational backwardness and deprivation. 26% of the general caste women, 36% of the backward-class women and 50% of scheduled castes women said that they could not avail themselves of educational opportunities due to illiteracy in the parental family. Similarly, parental illiteracy was also viewed as a hurdle by 50% of BC, 36% of SC and 27% of the general category women. Many respondents shared that they gave up their studies at a very early stage due to social reasons and taboos behind girl's education. They mentioned that the value of education was not recognized by society in those times and they were not permitted to study further. Another prominent cause that emerged from the reasons was the non-availability of schools in the parental village, and parents did not allow them to go to a school in the neighbouring village. Similarly, a high percentage of women, 40% of SC, complained that they could not study further due to their failure and poor academic performance in studies, and this reason seems more intense in the case of women. 26% of the BC and 53% of SC women said that household work and the care of siblings were the main reasons responsible for discontinuing studies and terminating education at the very initial stage of schooling. However, family attitude has also remained one of the reasons for low attainment of education among women belonging to all three social groups. Hence, it is evident from the study that not only a single factor played a role in keeping low educational levels among rural women, but multiple reasons interplayed as constraints and held responsible for keeping them away from the educational arena in their times. With similar findings, Dreze and Kingdon (1999) concluded that educational deprivation in rural India is determined by household resources, parental motivation, education of the parents and overall village development index. These results are also substantiated by the findings of a study conducted by Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2010), who found that poverty acts as a constraint to educational achievement, which results in the non-participation of rural children in the educational process. This lack of education, in turn, witnesses as many of these children grow up as illiterate or turn out to be illiterate adults living in poverty. Thus, poverty, illiteracy and social factors have a bearing on learning achievement. The educational level of rural women and the average age of marriage is observed from the qualitative data that rural women had early marriage as compared to their urban counterparts.

Table 4: Educational level of rural women and Average age of marriage

Level of Education	General	BC	SC
Illiterate	20	21	18
Literate	20	22	18
Primary	21	23	19
Elementary	22	21	20

Secondary	23	22	21
Senior Secondary	24	23	21
Skill training	24	23	-
Graduation	24	24	-
Post Graduation	-	-	-
Technical	-	-	-
Professional	-	-	-

Source: primary survey

To look into the relationship between the age of marriage and the educational level of women, the average age of marriage concerning their educational status was worked out. The table presents the figures related to the educational level of rural women and their average age of marriage. Data present in the Table shows that for illiterate women, irrespective of the caste group, the average marriage age is the lowest, i.e. 18 years. It is seen that with the increases in the level of education, the average age of marriage also increases. For the graduate women in general and the BC category, the average age of marriage is maximum, i.e. 24 years. However, the average age of marriage among women is lowest in the case of SC women. It is well acknowledged that early marriage in women curtails their path of empowerment in different ways. As per these results, it is clear that only educational development can overcome these kinds of barriers. This result is supported by a study by Singh and Samra (1996), who concluded that the age of marriage among women is determined by the socio-economic status of the family, educational attainment and labour force participation. Early prevalence of marriage is directly associated with the level of socioeconomic status of the family. Educational Level in Rural Women and Average Annual Income of Family (in thousand Rs.) To get a glance at the economic status of women residing in villages, their family income was calculated. Table 5 indicates the economic situation of rural women concerning their level of education.

Table 5: Educational level of Rural Women and Average Annual Income of Family (in `)

Level of Education	General	BC	SC
Illiterate	80000	26000	23000

Literate	90000	30000	28000
Primary	125000	35000	33000
Elementary	150000	45000	40000
Secondary	175000	70000	50000
Senior Secondary	190000	88000	62000
Skill training	200000	120000	-
Graduation	225000	140000	-
Post Graduation	-	-	-
Technical	-	-	-
Professional	-	-	-

Source: primary survey

The above figures demonstrate the level of education and annual income of the family. It means that the annual income of the women who have a very low level of education is the lowest, but the corresponding figure increases with the increase in level of education. The economic condition of women belonging to illiterate and only literate women is weaker as compared to women who keep a certain level of education. In the case of SC and BC women, the annual income of their family is the lowest, and trends are similar in all the social groups. A little glance at the figures clarifies the overall economic situation of rural women, which is, in fact, the cause and effect of their low educational level. Undoubtedly, low socio-economic conditions are a hurdle to accessing education, and illiteracy further leads to poor economic conditions. The findings of this study are congruent with (Schultz 1993), Patrions and Psacharopoulos (2007), who in their studies concluded that girls with extra years of schooling can earn 10-20% higher income than those with 1 year more schooling. Women receive higher returns on their schooling investment as compared to men. The educational investment in women has a direct relationship with the economic and social development of the country. Substantiating these results, Mohanty (2009) also argued that socioeconomic status is an important correlate of educational attainment and academic performance among rural girls.

Suggestions:

1. Ethical education should be provided to the male-dominated society so that they understand the contribution of women in all spheres of life.
2. Some married women are not able to work outside because of family responsibilities so skill development programmes should be started for their employment.
3. The government should focus more on increasing the literacy level of every gender in rural society, especially Veiling women.
4. Teachers can play an important role in inclusion. They should motivate the aged rural women for education and prepare a friendly environment for them.
5. More scholarship programmes for girls and elderly women to motivate them to study.

Conclusion: The empirical analysis of the above results reveals that the situation of rural women in educational empowerment and development is far from satisfactory. The inferences drawn here clearly indicate that the educational system and developmental plans have been showing the exclusionary processes in rural areas and that of women in weaker sections of the state. The dynamics of educational development among rural women present not hazy but rather a bleak picture of affairs. It is well-documented that educational development paves the way towards empowerment and makes a person self-reliant, identified, aware and enriched. The present study indicates that educational empowerment is a distant dream for rural women. Illiterate women or low educational level have a bearing on the health of the family, their health, the education of children and ultimately, the status of the family and society. The constraints faced by women to attain educational levels are multiple and complex. Poverty plays a vital role in educational deprivation. It is pertinent that the non-availability of schools in the neighbourhood, especially for girls, has remained a strong reason for their denial of education. Many factors play a role in accumulation with each other. Such a pattern highlights a sad picture of entitlement failure for rural females, a phenomenon that provokes a deep question about the significance or depth of rural development schemes of the state. Undoubtedly, education is the worst form of exclusion because it excludes from other walks of life and activities also. The findings of the study show that the educational status of rural women, by and large, is deeply rooted in the socioeconomic structure of the rural economy.

Thus, women's educational backwardness is of concern not only because it is inequitable but also because it is socially and economically inefficient. It is well acknowledged that education for mothers is associated not only with healthier children, but with children's acquisition of knowledge, language, and literacy skills as well. Research by the World Bank indicates that a mother's education level, more than the father's education, is positively related to higher aspirations for children and participation in education by their daughters. The interconnectedness of women's literacy with family and society highlights the importance of women's participation in family literacy programs. Equal access to educational opportunities is a basic human right essential to well-being. Educational gaps at attainment levels between males and females and further between females of rural and urban areas have remained the focus of research. Reduction in such gaps is essential for more than one reason. Hence sincere efforts are required to raise the educational level of rural women.

References

- Bhandari and Smith, F.J. (1997). Rural Women in India: Assessment of Educational Constraints and the Need for New Educational Approaches, *J. Res. Rural Edu.*,13(3):183-196.
- Bishaw, A. (2013). Impact of Education on Rural Women's Participation in Political and Economic Activities, *Int. J. Edu. Admin. Policy Stu.*, 6(2).
- Census of India(2011). Report on the Census of India. New Delhi: Registrar General Census of India.
- Mazumdar, V. 1987. Education and Rural Women: Towards an Alternative Perspective. Paper presented at the International Conference on 'Worldwide Education for Women; Progress, Prospects and Agenda for the Future' at Mount Holyoke College.
- Ministry of Women Child and Development GOI (2011). Dalit Women and Resources: Accessing Government Schemes.
- Mukhopadhyaya, D. (2009). Education and Empowerment of Women (Perspectives, Issues and Concerns)-An Issue for India. *Women Education and Development*, pp. 83-204.
- Mohanti, (2009). Social Correlates of Academic Achievement: A study of Rural underprivileged Girls, *Perspectives in Edu.*, 21(4).
- Sen, Amartya, K. (1999). "Equality of What?" In S. McMurrin, ed., *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Vol. I. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Singh and Samra (1996). Early Marriage among women in developing countries *International Family Planning, Perspective*, 22(2).
- World Bank. (2002). *Engendering Development*. Oxford University Press New York.