



WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN RURAL AREA OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR: A CASE STUDY OF POONCH DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS:

Education, Women's Education, Rural Area, Poonch District

The role of education as a key to human resource development and economic growth is well recognised in contemporary society. Education not only broadens the mental horizon of people but also promotes socio-economic well-being of family, community and nation. It is an important means to achieve social mobility and move upward in the social ladder. In Indian society, well known for its cultural diversity, we can see sharp multiple inequalities and disparities in education and economic development in terms of caste, creed, tribe, religion and gender despite prolonged struggle and affirmative action by the state to reduce social inequalities in independent India. But in spite of constitutional provisions, policies and programmes in favour of women, increase of literacy rate and promotion of women's education, many social evils practices and customs still exist in our society which prevents women from availing opportunities available for them. Women, in general, constitute the most deprived and disadvantaged section of Indian society who have always faced multiple barriers in getting educational opportunities. In independent India, however, women have made significant strides by entering in every field of education. Even then, a large number of women especially who reside in rural area still remain restricted to vicious circles of family expectations, gender discrimination and stigma. Available literature reveals an increase in women literacy rate in the last few decades but still there is a wide gap between men and women literacy rate. The rural women literacy rate in J&K as per 2011 census report is 53.36 percent and for urban females is 70.19 percent when compared to earlier in the Census of 2001 was 36.7% at rural and 61.9% at the urban level, respectively. Within Jammu and Kashmir rural-urban differentials in terms of literacy rate are quite wide. Literacy rate is quite high in districts with higher urban population which are concentrated mostly in plain areas as compared to those districts which are primarily mountainous and have low level of urbanisation. The present study attempt to analysed the educational status of women in rural areas of Poonch district. The study is mainly based on secondary sources of data. The data reveals that socio economic conditions are the major determinants of women liberation than the religion.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world education is regarded as a primary means to bring about any desired change in society. It occupies a central place in contemporary society as a significant determinant of progress and prosperity of individual, communities and nation. Education is equally important for both men and women but women's education is particularly important for overall development of society. As rightly said by Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru "In order to awaken people, it is the woman who has to be awakened, once she moves, the country moves and thus we build the India of tomorrow". Women's education plays an important role in reducing

prevailing inequalities while lack of women's education becomes an obstacle in bringing about required socio-economic transformation. Having realised this, the issue of women's education has received attention not only in developmental planning and programmes in post-independent India but also became a major concern of social scientists and social activists. The concern and discussion on rural women's education is of recent origin. The present study also concerns itself with rural women's education to fill the gap in the studies concerning women's education in general and rural women's education in particular. To begin with, it would be appropriate

to understand the meaning and function of education. According to a philosopher of education George F. Kneller, "In its broad sense, education refers to any act or experience that has formative effect on the mind, character, or physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which society, through schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions, deliberately transmits its cultural heritage- its accumulated knowledge, values and skills - from one generation to another" (Noryati, 2009).

The role of education as a key to human resource development and economic growth is well recognised in contemporary society. Education not only broadens the mental horizon of people but also promotes socio-economic well-being of family, community and nation. It is an important means to achieve social mobility and move upward in the social ladder. In Indian society, well known for its cultural diversity, we can see sharp multiple inequalities and disparities in education and economic development in terms of caste, creed, tribe, religion, region and gender despite prolonged struggle and affirmative actions by the state to reduce social inequalities in independent India. Not all social groups have equal access to available resources and opportunities particularly in educational field. Women, in general, constitute the most deprived and disadvantaged section of Indian society who have always faced multiple barriers in getting educational opportunities. In independent India, however, women have made significant strides by entering in every field of education. Even then, a large number of women especially rural women still remain restricted to vicious circles of family expectations, gender discrimination and stigma. There are significant differences in women's specific status across regions, caste and class, communities and religions (Ministry of Women and Child development, 2007).

For the development of rural areas attention is to be paid to education on priority as it is the most important means of change. Education takes us away from superstitious beliefs, backwardness, darkness, poverty, misery and overpopulation to enlightenment, prosperity and happiness. Education is the basis for creativity and foresightedness that triggers change; it helps in economic growth, quality of life and quality of human resource.

It is the women who nurture the child and take care of his/her overall development, particularly in formative years. Hence she has to be educated to provide a sound base for upbringing of the child.

Education is a crucial factor in achieving individual development, economic development and technical progress and in creating a social order founded on the values of freedom, social justice and equality of opportunities, to avoid social evils and taboos through educating them.

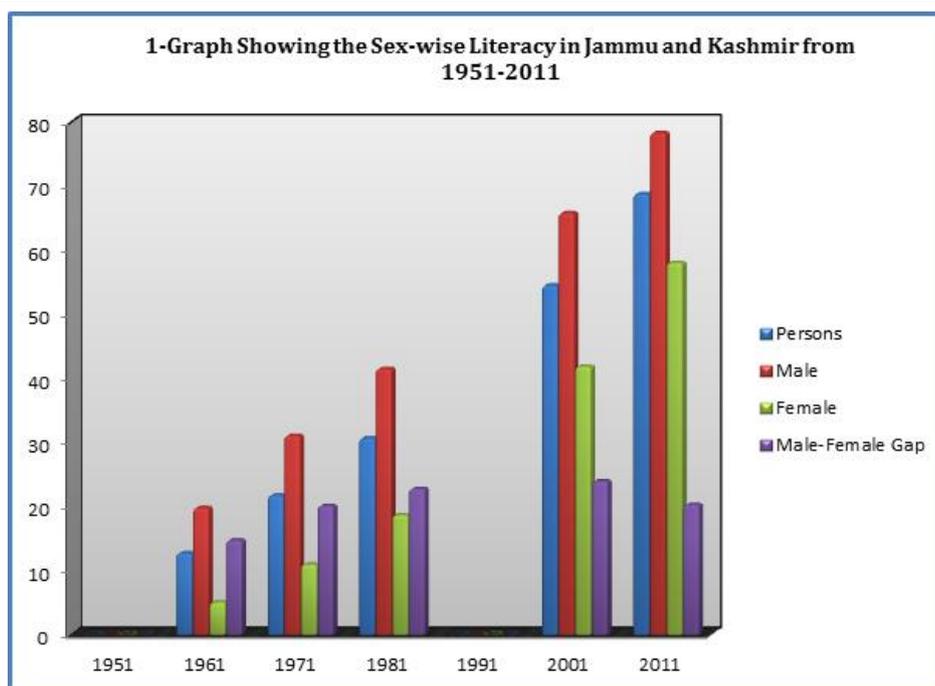
Education of rural women also assumes great importance to enable them to get the fullest benefit of modernisation because majority of the population live in rural area of the country.

At the time of Independence, there were very few educational institutions in the state which were to a great extent concentrated in the major towns. The state of affairs, as far as education is concerned, was such that the literacy rate of the state was around five percent only. With the purposeful endeavours of the State Government, over the period, the educational situation in the state has improved considerably. Over the years, the women's literacy rate in J&K has increased though not in the same proportion as that of men. According to the census of 2011 in Jammu and Kashmir, literacy rate is 68.74 percent. The Table below shows the literacy rate of both males and females in Jammu and Kashmir from 1951-2011:

**Table-1:
Sex-wise Literacy in Jammu and Kashmir from 1951-2011 (in Percentage)**

Year	Persons	Male	Female	Male-Female Gap
1951	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
1961	12.71	19.75	5.05	14.70
1971	21.71	31.01	10.94	20.07
1981	30.64	41.46	18.64	22.73
1991	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
2001	54.46	65.75	41.82	23.93
2011	68.74	78.26	58.01	20.25

Sources: Census of India (provisional) 2011 and Census of India J & K 2001, Paper-2 of 2001, Rural-Urban Distribution of Population and Economic Survey, (2008-09).



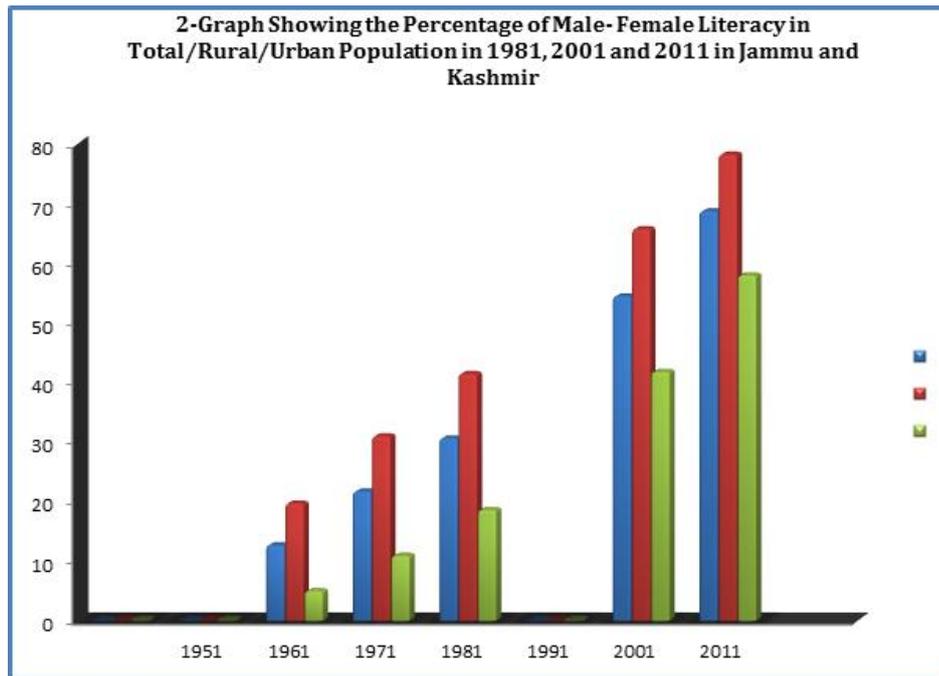
The literacy rate for the state as a whole in 2011 works out to be 68.74 percent for the total population. The corresponding figures for males stand at 78.26 percent and that of females is 58.01 percent. Jammu and Kashmir has continued its inexorable march in improving its literacy rate by recording a jump of 14.28 percentage points from 54.46 percent in 2001 to 68.74 percent in 2011. Further analysis of the data shows that the male literacy rate is higher than female literacy rate in all the years. The male literacy rate

reached to 78.26 percent in 2011 which was only 19.75 percent in 1961 whereas the female literacy rate increased from 5.05 percent in 1961 to 58.01 percent in 2011. The male-female gap in literacy rate has increased from 14.7 percent in 1961 to 20.25 percent in 2011. On the basis of an analysis of the above table, it can be argued that though there is a substantial improvement in women literacy rate but gender disparity in literacy rate still persists in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Table-2: Percentage of Male- Female Literacy in Total/Rural/Urban Population in 1981, 2001 and 2011 in Jammu and Kashmir

S.No	Year	Area	Male	Female	Total
1	1981	Total	41.46	18.37	30.64
		Rural	36.35	12.19	25.01
		Urban	59.87	41.05	51.12
2	2001	Total	65.75	41.82	54.46
		Rural	60.34	35.09	48.22
		Urban	80.30	62.22	72.12
3	2011	Total	78.26	58.01	68.74
		Rural	57.51	53.36	64.97
		Urban	84.90	70.19	78.19

Source: Census of India 2001 and 2011 (Provisional)



An analysis of table-2 shows that literacy rate for both males and females are higher in urban areas in comparison to rural areas for a period from 1981-2011. Male literacy rate is higher than female literacy both in urban and rural areas during the same period indicating less educational opportunities for women and their low educational status.

The Districts with low level of literacy are basically hilly and have low level of urbanization. People in these districts are mostly engaged in primary sector for their livelihood. Numbers of schools in these districts are also not sufficient enough to meet the educational needs people living in far flung and inaccessible localities. The contrary is true for the districts with relatively high level of literacy. These Districts have higher urban population and occupy moderately plain areas. Most of the work force in these areas is engaged in secondary and tertiary sectors. Moreover presence of more schools in these areas gives them an added advantage.

It is apparent from the table given above that literacy rate in rural areas is lower than the urban areas. As per 2011 census, out of 68.74 percent literate in Jammu and Kashmir rural areas contributes 64.97 percent. While the contribution of urban areas stands at 78.19 percent. Further, examination of the table shows that during the period from 1981 to 2011, the literacy rate among males in rural has increased from 36.35 percent to 57.51 percent and in urban areas the literacy rate of males has also increased from 59.87 percent to 84.90 percent. Similarly, the literacy rate among the females in rural area has increased from 12.19 percent to 53.36 percent. Although female and male literacy has improved over a period time, the gender divide remains quite wide both rural as well as urban areas. In the rural areas the gender disparity is more accentuated in comparison to urban areas.

REVIEW OF LITERATURES

Available literature on rural women's education in the country reiterates that educationally women in rural areas of the country are very backward as compared to their male counterpart. Ward (2007) in his study "Rural Education. In

India Infrastructure Report" examines the educational setup in rural India and the problems associated with it. In 2005, 48 per cent of India's rural elementary schools had no more than two teachers and only 25 per cent had five or more. Fifty percent of the rural schools having two or more teachers had no female teachers. These small rural schools with one or two mostly male teachers and three or less permanent classrooms have on average between 1 and 100 and 35 per cent of the schools have less than 50 students. Several different age groups are combined in one class and multi-grade teaching is the norm in such circumstances. The average student to classroom ratio in rural areas is 45. The average teacher to classroom ratio is 1.12 which indicates that a large proportion of teachers are teaching their students in classrooms shared with another class, or in alternative environments, such as the veranda of a school building, under a tree or beneath some other form of temporary shelter (Ward, 2007 and Jayaraman, 2011). Bhatt and et al. in their study highlight the educational problems of rural women. They said girls in rural areas continue to be deprived from education owing to factors like lack of competent and committed teachers, lack of textbooks or teaching-learning materials, and so on. Present Scenario of rural education in Jammu and Kashmir is quite poor. Persistent female illiteracy is a major impediment to women's empowerment; empowering women and adolescent girls through literacy and education can enable them to develop analytical skills on gender, development and other issues. Suri (2010) in her paper shows that the literacy rate of women in Jammu and Kashmir State has remained very low as compared to men. This gender gap in literacy in the state is a historical phenomenon. She also highlighted some of the problems which women face while acquiring education like the mountainous topography of the state is major hindrance in achieving the desired goal of complete literacy and lack of school within reachable areas, lack of infrastructure, weather vagaries and lack of employment opportunities. Ruchi (2013) shows in her study that there is a wider gender disparity in the education of both men and women in Jammu and Kashmir. This disparity is due to the poverty, lack of female teacher,

lack of infrastructure facilities, early marriage and parental illiteracy especially of mothers had always been an obstacle in the spread of women education. Literacy rate is quite high in those districts with higher urban population which are concentrated mostly in plain areas as compared to those districts which are primarily mountainous.

Thus we can say on the basis of above studies that rural women are among the most educationally backward and marginalised section of Indian society who lag behind not only their male counterparts but also women from urban areas. So, the education of Women is the important route for the development of any society in all areas including health, economic development, asset ownership, skills, political participation etc.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the education status of women in rural areas of the district.
2. To study the factors responsible for the low women's enrolment and high drop-out rate.
3. To recommend the measures that needs to be taken at different levels for improving educational status of women.

STUDY AREA

For the purpose of present study Poonch one of the remotest and educationally backward district, located in the southern part of Jammu and Kashmir has been selected. Poonch district is popularly known as mini Kashmir and is one among the most backward and remote districts of Jammu And Kashmir State. It is bounded by the Actual Line of control (ALC) from three sides. The ALC is about 103kms. from Tarkundi in Balakot to Sawjian in Mandi Block. Poonch is situated between 33°25' to 34°01' North latitude and between 73°58' to 74°35' east longitude. It is surrounded by Kashmir valley in the North; district Rajouri in the South and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) in the West. Poonch has witnessed many historical events and has been ruled by outsiders and locals at different junctures till it became a part of independent India. It consists of 04 Tehsil, namely Mendhar, Haveli, Mandi, Surankot, 06 Blocks, (Poonch, Mandi, Surankot, Bufliaz, Mandhar, Balakot,) 191 Panchayats and 179 villages comprising of 172 inhabited and 07 uninhabited

as per 2001 census. The total population of the district as per 2001 census was 3.73 lacs, out of which 1.94 lacs are male and 1.79 lacs are female. The density of population was 223 per Sq Kms. The percentage of population belonging to Muslim Community is 91.93%, Hindu 5.20%, Sikh 2.76%, Buddhist 0.03% and Christian 0.08%. Out of total population 40% population consists of Gujjar and Bakarwal, 52% Pahari while remaining 6% are kashmiris, Dogres and Punjabi. The rural population is 3.49 lacs and 0.24 lacs is urban population. The growth rate was 28.16% during the period 1991-01. Working force consists of 65.855 cultivators, 3.77% agricultural labourers and 2.17% works in household industry and 28.21% are of "others" category. The population of Poonch district is heterogeneous, with people possessing different ethnic backgrounds, possessing diverse religion, language and culture.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN POONCH

Educational status of women in the district of Poonch is very depressing and quite miserable, like their other districts of the Jammu and Kashmir state. Women in Poonch district were generally subjected to discrimination, exploitation, oppression and inequality. Their role remained confined to household activities and they were also excluded from education. Very little information is available about the educational status of women in the district of Poonch. There is a lack of inclusive studies based on empirical field data and covering the different aspects of women's life in general and women education in particular.

As per the report of district Handbook during the years 2011-2012, there were 4 degree college, 104 High and Higher secondary, 529 Middle and 1042 Primary school exist in the Poonch district both government as well as private having the enrolment of 122856 students in which 56986 are female and 7187 teachers are engaged in these institutions. According to 2001 census, the literacy rate among women in Poonch was 36.00 percent as against 65.00 percent among men with a total of 51.20 percent for both sexes. The literacy rate of Poonch as per Census 2011 is 66.7 per cent while in 2001 it was 51.20 per cent. The male literacy in Poonch is 78.84 per cent as per 2011 Census in comparison to 65.04 percent in 2001. The female literacy in Census 2011 in Poonch district is 53.19 while in Census 2001 it was 35.96 percent.

LITERACY RATE OF POONCH

Table-3: Literacy Rate by Sex and Rural/Urban Area of Poonch District -1981, 2001

S.No	Tehsil/ Distt.	Area	1981			2001		
			Persons (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Persons (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1	Haveli	Total	26.11	35.96	14.76	53.60	67.00	38.30
		Rural	20.50	31.15	8.18	47.10	61.50	31.20
		Urban	58.46	64.17	53.08	88.00	93.50	80.60
2	Mendhar	Total	21.36	32.86	8.66	54.40	69.50	38.50
		Rural	21.36	32.86	8.66	54.40	69.50	38.50
		Urban	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
3	Surankote	Total	21.36	32.86	8.66	43.40	56.50	29.20
		Rural	21.36	32.86	8.66	43.40	56.50	29.20
		Urban	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
4	Poonch District	Total	23.39	34.20	11.24	51.20	65.00	36.00
		Rural	21.03	32.19	8.47	48.40	62.70	33.01
		Urban	58.46	64.17	53.08	88.00	93.50	80.60

Source: District Handbook 2011-12, Note: 2011 Census report Tehsil wise distribution of education was not available

The analysis clearly shows that the literacy rate is higher in urban areas than the rural areas both in case of men and women. The urban men have taken lead over rural males by 30.08 percent. Similarly, when compared with rural women the literacy rate among the urban women literacy is higher, by 47.56 percent as per 2001 census. The overall literacy rate of Poonch district is 51.02 percent as per the District Handbook. The men and women literacy of total rural/urban population across the three main Tehsil of Poonch district is depicted in the table-3

It can be observed from the table -3 that the highest literacy rate of 54.40 percent is found in Tehsil Mendhar while Tehsil Surankote has the lowest literacy 43.40%. With 69.50 percent male literacy and 38.50 percent female literacy Tehsil Mendhar stands at the top. The table -3 clearly depicts variations in male and female literacy. In both urban and rural areas female literacy is found to be low when compared to the male literacy rate of the respective areas.

PROBLEMS OF EDUCATION IN STUDY AREA

About half of the population of Poonch is living below poverty line. In rural areas majority of the people is not in a position to give proper education to their children. They are compelled for child labour, such as collecting fire wood, fetching water from far furlong areas, caring their young siblings, cooking and helping parents in agriculture fields. Main occupation of the people is cultivation they get their day to day requirement from it, so the parents are unable to provide education to their children due to heavy expensive on education. The education department is providing free education facilities but due to militancy related activities in the last 20- 22 years, the education set up in most of the primary schools in rural areas has been effected because the teaching staff posted there was reluctant to perform their duty regularly due to the threat of militancy. The state government has introduced Reber-e-Taleem (RET) Scheme and posted local staff in rural areas to meet this challenge. However, this scheme has degraded the education standard because these staffs were raw and untrained. Increase of education in the district has been made immense strides during the past few years of planned development and significant educational facilities are being made available in remote, backward and hilly areas. (Jameel, 2015, Maini, District Handbook,2011-21)

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It can be concluded from the above analysis that literacy rate in rural areas is lower than the urban areas. Women in the district were generally subjected to discrimination, exploitation, oppression and inequality. Their role remained confined to household activities and they were also excluded from education. Although women and men literacy has improved over a period time, the gender divide remains quite widen both rural as well as urban areas. In the rural areas the gender disparity is more accentuated in comparison to urban areas. The foregoing discussion makes it evident that the causes of non-enrolment in school as well as dropping out early from the system of education are largely rooted in the local traditional and customary practices pertaining to gender roles, socio-cultural norms, economy, lack of proper infrastructure and feeling of insecurity. Various policies and programmes made by the Indian government for the enhancement of women's education, in spite of these rural women have been

ignored. Within the framework of democratic polity, National policies and plans for women's advancement in different spheres, there has been gradual improvement in several areas of women's lives but much need to be done especially in the lives of rural women. Remedy to this challenge is grass root initiatives that focus attention on the problems of women education. To make effort to generate educational awareness and attitudinal changes among the masses regarding women education, the role of women's families, community leaders and media deserves special attention here.

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