

North Asian International Research Journal Consortium

North Asian International Research Journal

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NAIRJC JOURNAL PUBLICATION

North Asian
International
Research Journal Consortium



Welcome to NAIRJC

ISSN NO: 2454 - 2326

North Asian International Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi, Urdu all research papers submitted to the journal will be double-blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial board. Readers will include investigator in Universities, Research Institutes Government and Industry with research interest in the general subjects

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GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT:

The pace of social change in West Bengal has accelerated in recent years because of the globalization trends. The focus of this article is on the assessment and understanding of the gender equity in education in West Bengal. Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures should be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantaged. The central government, state government, NGO's and local bodies are jointly working for the promotion of women's education. The article discussed to what extent the central government, state government; NGO's and local bodies have achieved the gender equity in education and what are the challenges in promoting gender equity in the state? The objectives of this study included first, to understand and explore the women's level of participation in education and to explore the barriers to women's education. The data used are taken from the census of India, report from the education sector of West Bengal and National Human Development Report of India. The educational schemes and developmental programs seem have not helped to improve the condition of girls. There is an essential need to make serious efforts by government, not-for-profit organizations and other local bodies to augment the pace of development in education of the women of West Bengal.

'You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women' - Jawaharlal Nehru

Keywords: Gender equity, Education.

INTRODUCTION

West Bengal is now the fourth most populous state in India, with a population density of a little more than 1028 persons per square km. The state continues to attract a large number of migrants from neighboring states as

well as neighboring countries. Its topography is dominated by the alluvial plains of the Ganga and its tributaries, except for the hilly terrain of North Bengal, extending into the Himalayan foothills. West Bengal, state of India, located in the eastern part of the country. It is bounded to the north by the state of Sikkim and the country of Bhutan, to the northeast by the state of Assam, to the east by the country of Bangladesh, to the south by the Bay of Bengal, to the southwest by the state of Odisha, to the west by the states of Jharkhand and Bihar, and to the northwest by the country of Nepal. West Bengal may be broadly divided into two natural geographic divisions—the Gangetic Plain in the south and the sub-Himalayan and Himalayan area in the north. The Gangetic Plain contains fertile alluvial soil deposited by the Ganges (Ganga) River and its tributaries and distributaries. It also features numerous marshes and shallow lakes formed out of dead river courses. Indeed, the Ganges, which now runs through the narrow middle section of the state before entering Bangladesh, has been moving steadily eastward for centuries; only a small amount of its water now goes to the sea via the western distributaries, of which the principal one is the Hugli (Hooghly). The state capital, Kolkata, is situated on the Hugli in the southern portion of West Bengal. Another important river, the Damodar, joins the Hugli southwest of Kolkata. The elevation of the plain increases slowly toward the west; the rise is most marked near the Chota Nagpur plateau of neighboring Jharkhand. The population of west Bengal more than nine crore as per census figure and cover the area of approximately 88,752 sq. Kms. During the last few decades West Bengal has recorded high rates of agricultural growth. It also has a strong industrial base which needs to be further strengthened and diversified.

In the National Educational Scenario, State is subsumed as educationally backward in reference to the established indices namely literacy rate, dropout rate, teacher pupil ratio and the absorption pattern of the educated persons. The troubling features are low literacy rate, higher drop-out rate, mismatch between education and employment. The State strictly adheres to the National Education Policy and with the exponential growth of the institutional framework and reach of services as a consequence of sustained investment folio through plan strategy; improvement in every parameter is visible. The improvement is more pronounced in the field of female literacy. 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 labor. 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. They are practically excluded from decision making. Preventable diseases and unequal access to health care still affect women and girls, especially those in rural sector. HIV infection among women continues to increase. Incidents of physical violence against

women in West Bengal are increasingly mentioned in the media but rarely within the context of longer processes of gender discrimination. Education is one of the most precious means in achieving gender equity and empowerment of women. The 15th official census in India was calculated in the year 2011. In a country like India, literacy is the main foundation for social and economic growth. When the British rule ended in India in the year 1947 the literacy rate was just 12%. Over the years, India has changed socially, economically, and globally. After the 2011 census, literacy rate India 2011 was found to be 74.04%. Compared to the adult literacy rate here the youth literacy rate is about 9% higher. Though this seems like a very great accomplishment, it is still a matter of concern that still so many people in India cannot even read and write. The numbers of children who do not get education especially in the rural areas are still high. Though the government has made a law that every child under the age of 14 should get free education, the problem of illiteracy is still at large.

Table 1: Ranking of States by literacy rate: 2011.

Sl.No	State	Literacy	Male	Female
01	Kerala	94.00	96.11	92.07
02	Lakshdweep	91.85	95.56	87.95
03	Mizoram	91.33	93.35	89.27
04	Goa	88.70	92.65	84.66
05	Tripura	87.22	91.53	82.73
06	Daman and diu	87.10	91.54	79.55
07	Andaman and Nicobar Island	86.63	90.27	82.43
08	Delhi	86.21	90.94	80.76
09	Chandigarh	86.05	89.99	81.19
10	Puducherry	85.85	91.26	80.67
11	Himachal Pradesh	82.80	89.53	75.93
12	Maharashtra	82.34	88.38	75.87
13	Sikkim	81.42	86.55	75.61
14	Tamil Nadu	80.09	86.77	73.44
15	Nagaland	79.55	82.75	76.11
16	Uttarakhand	78.82	87.40	70.01
17	Gujrat	78.03	85.75	69.68
18	Manipur	76.94	83.58	70.26
19	West Bengal	76.26	81.69	70.54
20	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	76.24	85.17	64.32
21	Punjab	75.84	80.44	70.73
22	Haryana	75.55	84.06	65.94
23	Karnataka	75.36	82.47	68.08

24	Meghalaya	74.43	75.95	72.89
25	Orissa	72.87	81.59	64.01
26	Assam	72.19	77.85	66.27
27	Chhattisgarh	70.28	80.27	60.24
28	Madhya Pradesh	69.32	78.73	59.24
29	Uttar Pradesh	67.68	77.28	57.18
30	Jammu and Kashmir	67.16	76.75	56.43
31	Andhra Pradesh	67.02	74.88	59.15
32	Jharkhand	66.41	76.84	55.42
33	Rajasthan	66.11	79.19	52.12
34	Arunachal Pradesh	65.38	72.55	57.70
35	Bihar	61.80	71.20	51.50

Source- Census of India.

The above table 1 shows that the state of West Bengal ranked 19th in literacy rate, as having only 76.26 percent literacy. It becomes clear that the state is one of the educational backward states of India. Education is a vital instrument for human resource development. Human resource development for the advancement of the country requires the capacity building of both the genders. In the Sixth Five Year Plan, women are accepted as a partner as well as a stakeholder in the development of the country. The Ninth Five Year Plan took up 'empowering women as a means of socioeconomic change and development' as a major commitment. The Ninth Five Year Plan designed to improve the status of the women in the country by shifting the concern from 'development' and 'welfare' to 'empowerment'. Education is the single most important tool that can result in bringing the welfare, empowerment and development of women. An educated and empowered woman can have much to add to the socioeconomic development of the country. If the education of the girls and women remain unnoticed in a country, about half of the human resource would remain unprepared and unutilized. Therefore, education of girls and women holds crest priority amongst various measures to improve the status of the female citizens of the country, so that they can also participate and avail the benefits of the development.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Education of the girls and thus the future of women are seen as key to securing intergenerational transfers of knowledge, and hence providing long-term gender equity, enhanced per capita income and social change (DFID, 2005). Global discourses on education highlight the instrumental value of education as central to this debate for securing investments in female education (Subrahmanian, 2002).

However, along with the instrumentalist rationale, the intrinsic value of education for girls and women is also discussed (Sen, 2000). The latter regard the *return* of education, for individuals as equally important as the social rate of return. Sen, through his capability approach, suggests that both boys and girls should have access to 'adequate' education to enable them to develop their capacities for informed and rational choices and to have increased agency. This, Sen (2000) argues, will help individuals to lead the lives they value. Thus girls' participation in education is considered a first step towards achieving equality.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY-

- To understand and explore the women's level of participation in education in West Bengal.
- To explore barriers and constraints to women's education in West Bengal.

Methodology: In this study descriptive methods are followed and secondary data has been collected from various books, Research Article, Magazines, Research Journal, E-journal, Report of UGC, Report of five year plans and Report of the Census in India and also from the School education department of West Bengal.

Limitations of the Study: By and large, the researcher did not encounter any major hurdles in the field, and in meeting and interacting with the citizen of West Bengal and the study based on secondary data.

GIRLS LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION:

In the 18th century was highly sympathetic towards the exploited position of Indian women's because during the time the condition of women in British ruled India was deplorable. Women's education was also neglected in British India and very few women did acquire education specially who belong to the upper caste. In the last of 18th century British Government took the responsibility of educating women. The most significant achievement of the period was a girl's school started for the first time in Bombay in 1824. The Calcutta, Bombay and Madras Universities did not permit admission of girls up to 1875. After 1882 girls were allowed to go for higher education. During British Period there were two major movements which affected the position of women. There were the Social Reform Movement of the nineteenth century and the National Movement of the twentieth century. In short, during the phase prior to independence, an awareness of the need to remove social disabilities of women was created; the doors of education were opened for them.

Girls form an underprivileged or deprived section due to the cultural prejudice involved in them. A girl becomes multiple disadvantaged when the gender gets compounded with the other disadvantages like poverty, scheduled tribes and scheduled caste, minorities, or disability. Among girls, those belonging to Scheduled tribes or Scheduled castes or belong to Muslim community becomes highly disadvantaged. Girls with disabilities also turn into a highly vulnerable group. There is a general indifference to education of girls mainly due to gender bias. There is the high occurrence of child labor among girls belonging to the weaker section of the society. As we know that there is also some social resistance arising out of misconceptions and fears that education might estrange girls from tradition and social values. Society also assigns stereotyped roles for girls like doing household chores, domestic work and looking after siblings. Some school related barriers prevent girls to attend school.

INITIATIVES TAKEN TO IMPROVE GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION BY GOVT. OF INDIA:

Education of girls and gender equity has been a high priority with the Government of India and West Bengal: The Indian government has expressed a strong commitment towards education to all and specially girl child. However, India still has one of the lowest female literacy rates in Asia. The low rates of female literacy not only have a negative impact on women's lives but also the country's economy as well. Numerous studies show that illiterate women have high rates of maternal mortality, poor nutritional status, low earning potential and little or no autonomy within their household. Lack of an educated population can be an impediment to the country's economic development. Since the governments have realized this, they have developed many schemes to educate the females of the country. There have been programs and policies to check negative teacher attitudes, biases in curriculum, lack of female teachers and inadequate hygiene and sanitation conditions in schools that inhibit girl child enrolment and retention

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana (*Save girl child, educate girl child*):

The year January 2015 will witness the change in lives of countless girl child and women. The pet project launched by Prime Minister "**Beti bachao beti Padhao**" (BBBP) Yojana (save daughter, educate daughter) to save and empower the girl child is making waves all over the nation. This major inter ministerial initiative of the Government of India bringing together Ministries, institutions and civil societies, though not a drastic change yet, the results are positive on the scheme. The scheme will have focused intervention and multi section action in almost 100 districts with low Child Sex Ratio (CSR)

Right to Education Act 2009:

The Right of children to free and compulsory education Act came into force from April 1, 2010. The RTE Act has 37 sections, seven chapters and one schedule which clearly lay down the aims and goals of the Act. Some of the salient features of the RTE Act, 2009 include that every child in the age group of 6-14 years will be provided 8 years of elementary education in an age appropriate classroom in the vicinity of his/her neighborhood, providing free and compulsory education. It provides for a non-admitted child to be admitted to an appropriate class. The Act also mentions about norms and standards, the Pupil-Teacher Ratio, the buildings and infrastructure etc. No child shall be denied admission for want of documents; no child shall be turned away if the admission cycle in the school is over and no child shall be asked to take an admission test. Children with disabilities will also be educated in the mainstream schools. 100 percent enrolment is ensured by providing a Primary School within 1 km radius and Upper Primary School in 3 km radius of all the habitations. It has also to ensure that child belonging to weaker sections and disadvantaged groups are not discriminated against and prevented from pursuing and completing elementary education on any grounds. The teachers should not be engaged in any other activities apart from teaching. It must also ensure and monitor admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by every child and that the quality of elementary education conforms to the standards and norms specified in the schedule. The National commitment to provide free and compulsory basic education to all children in the (6- 14) years is now a Fundamental Right of every child in India after the passing of the Constitution (86th Amendment) Act in December, 2002. Reaching out to the girl child is intimate to the efforts to universalize elementary education.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, or 'Education for the All' program recognizes that ensuring girls' education requires changes not only in the education system but also in societal attitudes and norms. A two-sided gender strategy has therefore been adopted, to make the system of education responsive to the needs of the girls through targeted interventions which serve as a pull factor to enhance access and retention of girls in schools and on the other hand, to generate a community demand for girls' education through training and mobilization.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan includes:

- To provide free textbooks to all girls up to class VIII.
- Separate toilets for girls.
- Back to school camps for out-of-school girls.

- Bridge courses for older girls.
- Recruitment of 50% women teachers.
- Early childhood care and Education centers in/near schools/convergence with.
- ICDS program etc.
- Teachers' sanitation programs to promote equitable learning opportunities.
- Gender-sensitive teaching-learning materials including textbooks.
- Intensive community mobilization efforts.
- 'Innovation fund' per district for need based interventions for ensuring girls' attendance and retention.

In addition, to target pockets where girl's education is lagging behind to boys, the Government of India has launched focused interventions for girls as under:

National Programme for Education of Girls for Elementary Level (NPEGEL):

Launched in September 2003, is an integral but distinct component of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. It offers additional provisions for enhancing the education of disadvantaged/underprivileged girls at the elementary level through more intense community mobilization, the development of model schools in clusters, gender sensitization of teachers, early development of gender sensitive learning materials, child care and education facilities and provision of need-based incentives like escorts, stationery, work books and uniforms etc. for girls. All Educationally Backward Blocks have been included under NPEGEL.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV):

The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme was introduced by the Government of India in August 2004, then integrated in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan program, to provide educational facilities for girls belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, minority communities and families below the poverty line in Educationally Backward Blocks. The scheme provides for a minimum reservation of 75% of the seats for girls belonging to ST, SC, OBC or minority communities and priority for the remaining 25%, is accorded to girls from families below the poverty line.



Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY):

Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) seeks to empower adolescent girls, so as to enable them to take charge of their lives. It is viewed as a holistic initiative for the development of adolescent girls. The program through its interventions aims at bringing about a difference in the lives of the adolescent girls. It seeks to provide them with an opportunity to realize their full potential. This scheme is a redesign of the already existing Adolescent Girls (AG) Scheme being implemented as a component under the centrally sponsored Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme. The broad objectives of the Scheme are to improve the nutritional, health and development status of adolescent girls, promote awareness of health, hygiene, nutrition and family care, link them to opportunities for learning life skills, going back to school, help them gain a better understanding of their social environment and take initiatives to become productive members of the society.

Post-Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child for PG Programs:

The Govt. of India declared elementary education as a basic human right of every child. The Union Government of India has taken various steps to uplift the status of women by implementing various schemes including free education for girls. In order to achieve and promote girls education, UGC has introduced a Post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child with an aim to compensate direct costs of girl education to all levels especially for such girls who happen to be the only girl child in their family.

DURING XI PLAN, SOME APPROACHES ARE BEING TAKEN:

- i) To offer training programs to focus on increasing gender sensitivity issues in respect of women managers.
- ii) To provide some facility for women's movement.

Pre-metric scholarship by the State Government:

The scholarship at pre-metric level will encourage parents from minority communities to send their school going children to school, lighten their financial burden on school education and sustain their efforts to support their children to complete school education.

In addition, to target pockets where girl's education is lagging behind to boys, the Government of West Bengal has launched focused interventions for girls as under:

Kanyashree Prakalpa (Scheme):

- Under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA), 18 is the legal age of marriage for girls, and 21 for boys in India. Despite several years of this Act being in existence, the early marriage of children continues to be practiced in West Bengal. Every year, 14th August is celebrated as the Kanyashree Dibas. The Chief Minister opened the Kanyashree Prakalpa it has been given international recognition by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and UNICEF.
- Kanyashree Prakalpa seeks to improve the status and wellbeing of girls, specifically those from socio-economically disadvantaged families through Conditional Cash Transfers by: Incentivizing them to continue in education for a longer period of time, and complete secondary or higher secondary education, or equivalent in technical or vocational streams, thereby giving them a better footing in both the economic and social spheres.
- Disincentive marriage till at least the age of 18, the legal age of marriage, thereby reducing the risks of early pregnancies, associated risks of maternal and child mortality, and other debilitating health conditions, including those of malnutrition.
- It was also decided that the Scheme should confer more than just monetary support; it should be a means of financial inclusion and a tool of empowerment for adolescent girls. The schemes benefits are therefore paid directly to bank accounts in the girl's names, leaving the decision of utilization of the money in their hands.
- To reinforce the positive impact of increased education and delayed marriages, the scheme also works to enhance the social power and self-esteem of girls through a targeted behavior change communication strategy. The communication strategy not only builds awareness of the scheme, but includes adolescent-friendly approaches like events, competitions and Kanyashree clubs, and the endorsement of strong women figures as role models to promote social and psychological empowerment.
- Kanyashree's core objectives are simple and focused: it aims to ensure that girls stay in school and delay their marriages till at least age 18. Kanyashree's approach is also simple: it uses a social safety net mechanism that has shown a high degree of success in transforming the lives of children and adolescents in several countries in the world: Conditional Cash Transfers. The scheme has two cash transfer components. The first is an Annual incentive of Rs. 750/- to be paid annually to the girls in the age group 13 to 18 years (studying in Class VIII equivalent or above for every year that they remained in education, provided they are unmarried at the time.



- The second is a One-Time Grant of Rs. 25,000/-, to be paid after a girl turns 18, provided that she was engaged in an academic or occupational pursuit and was unmarried.
- The term 'education' encompasses secondary and higher secondary education, as well as the various vocational, technical and sports courses available for this age group. Given that children from socio-economically disadvantaged families are more vulnerable to child marriage, the scheme is open only to girls from families whose annual income is Rs. 1,20,000/- or less. For girls with special needs, orphans and girls in J. J. Homes the income criterion is waived. Girls with special needs, but in a class below class VIII, can also apply for the annual scholarship.

Now, if we consider female literacy rate in India, then it is lower than the male literacy rate as many parents do not allow their female children to go to schools. They get married off at a young age instead. Though child marriage has been lowered to very low levels, it still happens. Many families, especially in rural areas believe that having a male child is better than having a baby girl. So the male child gets all the benefits. Today, the female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 census are 65.46% where the male literacy rate is over 80%.

Table 2: Ranking of State by female literacy Rate:

Sl.No	State	Female
01	Kerala	92.07
02	Lakshadweep	87.95
03	Mizoram	89.27
04	Goa	84.66
05	Tripura	82.73
06	Daman and diu	79.55
07	Andaman and Nicobar Island	82.43
08	Delhi	80.76
09	Chandigarh	81.19
10	Punduchery	80.67
11	Himachal Pradesh	75.93
12	Maharashtra	75.87
13	Sikkim	75.61
14	Tamil Nadu	73.44
15	Nagaland	76.11
16	Uttara khand	70.01
17	Gujrat	69.68
18	Manipur	70.26

19	West Bengal	70.54
20	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	64.32
21	Punjab	70.73
22	Haryana	65.94
23	Karnataka	68.08
24	Meghalaya	72.89
25	Orissa	64.01
26	Assam	66.27
27	Chhattisgarh	60.24
28	Madhya Pradesh	59.24
29	Uttar Pradesh	57.18
30	Jammu and Kashmir	56.43
31	Andhra Pradesh	59.15
32	Jharkhand	55.42
33	Rajasthan	52.12
34	Arunachal Pradesh	57.70
35	Bihar	51.50

Source- Census of India.

For a long time gender equality in education was dominating the discourse and the interventions. It is still generally believed that gender inequalities in education will be set on if equal access for boys and girls is provided and if gender inequalities in enrollment figures and retention rates are eliminated. Access to schooling is a hazardous issue that still requires attention; however, a wider approach is necessary, which, for e, g, includes the learning content of education such as curriculum, textbooks and teaching learning practices. It is steadily being recognized that the promotion of gender equity in education goes beyond access.

Table No-03: Ranking of State by Sex literacy Rate

Sl.No	State	Male	Female	MFG
01	Kerala	96.11	92.07	4.04
02	Lakshadweep	95.56	87.95	7.61
03	Mizoram	93.35	89.27	4.08
04	Goa	92.65	84.66	7.99
05	Tripura	91.53	82.73	8.8
06	Daman and diu	91.54	79.55	11.99
07	Andaman and Nicobar Island	90.27	82.43	7.48
08	Delhi	90.94	80.76	10.18
09	Chandigarh	89.99	81.19	8.8

10	Punduchery	91.26	80.67	10.59
11	Himachal Pradesh	89.53	75.93	13.6
12	Maharashtra	88.38	75.87	12.51
13	Sikkim	86.55	75.61	10.94
14	Tamil Nadu	86.77	73.44	13.33
15	Nagaland	82.75	76.11	6.64
16	Uttara khand	87.40	70.01	17.39
17	Gujrat	85.75	69.68	16.07
18	Manipur	83.58	70.26	13.32
19	West Bengal	81.69	70.54	11.15
20	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	85.17	64.32	20.85
21	Punjab	80.44	70.73	9.71
22	Haryana	84.06	65.94	18.12
23	Karnataka	82.47	68.08	14.39
24	Meghalaya	75.95	72.89	3.06
25	Orissa	81.59	64.01	17.58
26	Assam	77.85	66.27	11.58
27	Chhattisgarh	80.27	60.24	20.03
28	Madhya Pradesh	78.73	59.24	19.49
29	Uttar Pradesh	77.28	57.18	20.1
30	Jammu and Kashmir	76.75	56.43	20.32
31	Andhra Pradesh	74.88	59.15	15.73
32	Jharkhand	76.84	55.42	21.42
33	Rajasthan	79.19	52.12	27.07
34	Arunachal Pradesh	72.55	57.70	14.85
35	Bihar	71.20	51.50	19.7

Source- Census of India

MFG-Male Female Gap

The table 3 below shows that there is male-female gap in literacy rate in every state. Despite the number of limiting factors, the country has been able to make remarkable progress in the field of education as is clear from the above figures. Although, the outcomes of investment in education are no doubt quite visible, yet the country is committed to achieve universalization of education

Table No-04: Literacy Rates by Sex in West Bengal (Rural)

Year	Male	Female	MFG
1951	28.91	7.55	21.36
1961	38.91	11.73	27.18
1971	42.27	18.05	24.22
1981	49.71	25.34	25.34
1991	62.05	38.12	23.93
2001	73.13	53.16	19.97
2011	79.51	66.08	13.43

Source - Census of India.

MFG-Male Female Gap

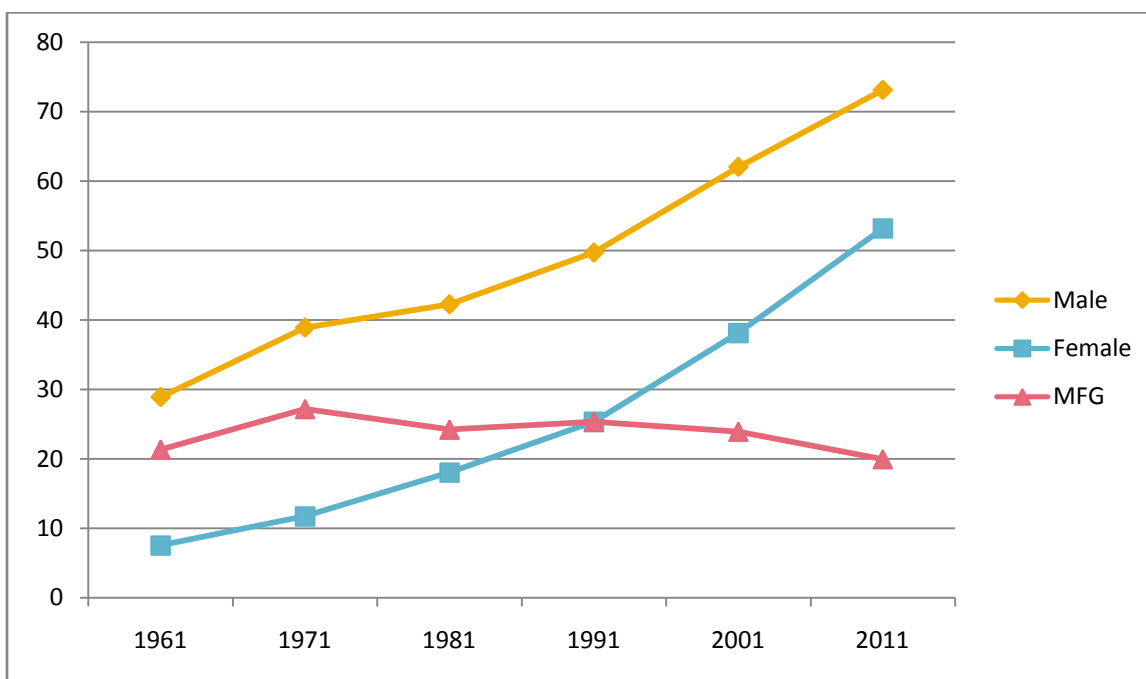
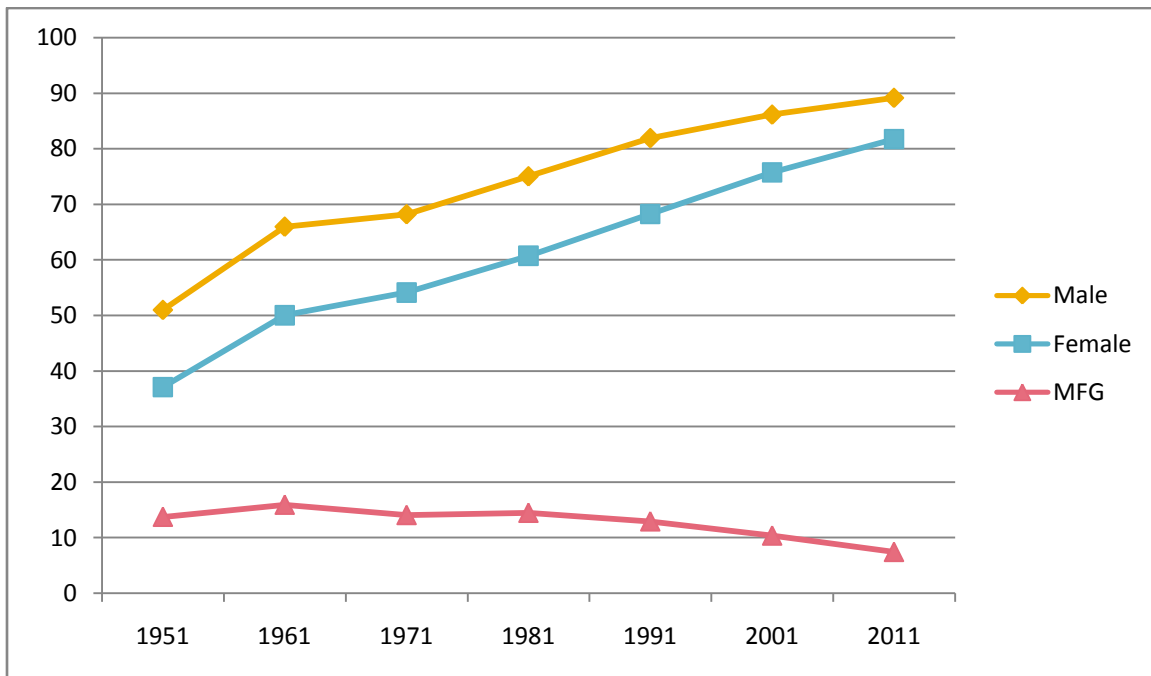


Table No 05 : Literacy Rates by Sex in West Bengal (Urban)

Year	Male	Female	MFG
1951	50.96	37.10	13.86
1961	65.95	50.02	15.93
1971	68.19	54.11	14.08
1981	75.02	60.72	14.48
1991	81.91	68.25	12.94
2001	86.13	75.74	10.39
2011	89.15	81.70	7.45

Source- Census of India .

MFG-Male Female Gap



According to census of India 2011, the literacy level climbed up from 28.91(M), and 07.55 (F) percent rural and 50.96 (M) and 37.10(F) in 1951 to 79.51(M) and 66.08(F) per cent in rural area and 89.15 (M) and 81.70(F) in 2011 .Further analysis of the data shows that the male literacy rate is higher than the female literacy rate in all the years. In the delineation of the above figures, it can be argued that though there is a considerable progress in the female literacy rate but the gender disparity in literacy rate still exists in the every state including West Bengal.

BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION

Factors responsible for the barriers to girls' education in West Bengal can be categorized according to how one perceives and defines barriers. Barriers take different forms – e.g. Barriers to access, barriers to quality services and barriers to relevant curricula and/or pedagogy. There are many religious, socio-cultural, economic and educational barriers in West Bengal, which hinder their participation in education. Some of these barriers are discussed below:

- **Poverty:** The rate of illiteracy is closely linked to poverty. Due to the poverty or low family income, if parents are not in a position to send both boys and girls to school, they usually send boys to schools and retain girls at home to do house-hold work.
- **Parental Illiteracy:** The high level of parental illiteracy among also constraints the education of girl children. Lack of parental support and poor learning environment at home makes learning for them very difficult. The present education system does not fit their needs, which lead to stagnation and wastage among them.
- **Number of children:** In poor families generally, there are many children. According to the priority list of parents, girls' education is not compulsory and boys get a high chance of receiving education.
- **Child Marriage:** Many girls in many districts of West Bengal still get married at an early age, which affect their education to a great extent.
- **Female teachers in schools:** Girls are more interested in going to schools if female teachers are there in the schools. They are more comfortable and more vocal with female, thus actively focusing and participating in the learning processes. In rural areas also, parents are interested in sending their girl children to school if female teachers are present.
- **Transport facility:** One of the barriers for girl education may be the location of schools which are far away from their homes, particularly in rural areas. Adequate transport system is needed for girl to attend the schools.
- **Molestation/abuse in school:** Most of the parents feel in secured towards their girl children as instances of abduction, rape, sexual harassment and molestation of girl dampens the enthusiasm of parents and girl students in pursuing their education beyond a certain age.
- **Toilet facility:** This may be one of the reasons of lower participation rates of girls in education especially at upper primary level. The separate toilet facilities for girls must be created in the school premises.

- **Shortage of girls' schools:** Many parents do not want to send their daughters to coeducational schools especially at upper primary level. There is an urgent need to open separate schools for girls especially at upper primary level as a powerful strategy for bringing to a conclusive girls' school environment.

CONCLUSION:

Education is a key indicator of socioeconomic development. It also increases the knowledge and vision of a person. Equally, it is considered as an essential element in bringing change in social, political, economic fields in a society. Emancipation and upliftment of people can be achieved only through education. Indeed, the country's progress and development largely depend upon the educational attainment of its people. Despite considerable progress, sharp disparities continue to exist between male and female literacy levels. There is an urgent need to bridge the gender gap in education in the state because no society and civilization can move forward without the education of its half population as well said by Swami Vivekananda, "There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved". From the above analysis, it can be concluded that the position of education among the women of West Bengal is not considerable. However, in reality, given the opportunities were not exploited fully. Gender disparity exists both in rural and urban areas, but it is higher in the rural areas. This can be endorsed to a number of factors like Social dogmas, engagement of girl child in domestic activities and other agricultural activities etc.

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