



Educational system in India and Socio-ecopsychological conditions that discourage female education: The critics and the panacea

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ABSTRACT

“To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves”.-Jawaharlal Nehru.

The present text conforms to the famous African Proverb “If you educate a man you educate an individual but if you educate a woman, you educate an entire nation”. This is an important notion that our country needs to understand as lack of education limits its socio-economic development. In India, the journey of female education has been on a roller coaster ride. While history witnesses’ commendable contribution of women as noted in Brahnavidya followed by the decline in rights of women education due to societal psychologies, there has been an uphill battle since the British rule. The paper attempts to explore factors that discourage female education in India and the way forward. Poverty and lack of parent’s education, especially women, scarcity of lady teachers, lack of proper physical facilities and social consciousness among women were found to be the potential factors inhibiting female education in the country. Proposed solutions for encouraging women education in India are alleviating poverty, mind engineering and reconstruction of age-old thinking of woman being merely a homemaker, provision of proper physical facilities, strategic initiatives related to innovation and incentivization.

Keywords: Minority, Sanitation, Economic empowerment, Directive policies, mind engineering, India

Introduction

Female education in India still remains a topic of discussion in India despite the major role it plays in the socio-economic development of a country. Although, the 86th Amendment to the constitution provides for free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 6-14 as a fundamental right, yet the state of education of women in India is far from ‘free’ and encompassing as the right appears to guarantee. Although the government aims at providing primary education especially to girl children from disadvantaged rural areas through schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, in an attempt to improve the education of women, the barrier to educating women is not always monetary and within the purview of the state. The post-independence era has witnessed concerted effort by different organization and agencies to improve literacy levels of the population in India. Many schemes have been introduced to increase the access, expand coverage and improve the quality of education. Amongst them the universalization of elementary education, incentive schemes for retention and non-formal education for adults are noteworthy. Special attention has been given to the education of women in all of the schemes. However, despite the varied attempts of the government and various NGOs operating in the field of education, the statistics for women's education leaves a scope for further re-thinking as well as development.

History of Female Education in India

Vedic period in ancient India witnessed the state of equal opportunities including access to education for women. The pattern of education during this period was generally instruction from holy preceptor in the Vedas and other religious literature. There is evidence that women and girls enjoyed unlimited access to this instruction, for women rishis are recorded as having composed some Vedic hymns and performed sacrifices. In this period girls were also permitted to remain unmarried upto the age of 16 that allowed them sufficient time to acquire an adequate basic education. In Rigvedas, two of the most intelligent philosophers of the time, Gargi and Maitreyi stood out of the contents with their commendable work in philosophy as noted in Brahnavidya. In the later Vedic period the position of women underwent a drastic change. Women lost their political rights of attending assemblies, child marriages came into existence and a decline in their right to education was witnessed. Women during this period were expected to follow the stereotypical social thought process of being homemakers, confined in four walls of the households. Text content from Mahabharat and Ramayana mentioned very few learned women, represented that during time of Smirits, education for women was predominantly limited to domestic, craft and vocational studies good enough to suffice the notion of being a good homemaker.

The medieval period witnessed a rise of kingdoms, culture and formation of a hierarchical society with king referred to be the mightiest. Trade and cross cultural interactions flourished but the inferiority complex of female sex prevailed throughout. Foreign invaders came to be far less civilized than the native India, but the culture where females play only supportive roles slowly penetrated the roots of India and the idea of female education vanished into thin air. Although fine arts like music, dance, painting, embroidery, stitching and other crafts did exist and were taught to females. Other than this there were guidelines of being a housewife including planting, knowledge of medicinal herbs, cattle, expenditure and income etc. Though they lost their regard as goddess, there were some exemplary females who patronized science studies, sports, arts and entertainment, mostly the ones who belonged to royal families. Buddhism and Jain female followers experienced more freedom in regard to education; Indian nuns travelled across the globe to explore and preach Buddhism. There are no evidences regarding formal schooling of females, but there were some public schools built for girls and boys separately. Southern India, especially Karnataka has had more educated women than central or northern India during medieval period. The education for females during this period was predominantly domestic.

Then emerged the British rule where women education started flourishing again and came into picture of concern during the late 1800's when convent schools were established and English had to be taught to the Indians for effective communication between the rulers and the crowd. During this time, revolutionists like Jyotiba Phule, B R Ambedkar and Raja Ram Mohan Roy stressed upon the importance of education.

Transition to Modern India

Modern age was the time of reformation in India. The status of women in modern India was subjected to inconsistency. In modern period women outshined in certain areas, yet suffered the violence of patriarchal society. During this period of time female education became the

major concern for both the government and civil society as educated women play a vital role in growth and development of the country. Women struggled even for 33% participation in political sphere. Nehru was the first man to argue for Universal Adult right ages, so anyone of the age 21 has to have the right to vote despite of the education to ensure participation of an oppressed crowd who was devoid of education comprising majority of women in decision making, hence indirectly favoring the females in particular. During post independence, the first census was done in 1951, and the figures that came out were much below par the general rate expected. Female literacy rate showed much worse figures. It was just 9%. It was a very low figure percentage, maybe because of freedom struggle, foreigners ruling and many other cultural social factors which we had inherited. From 9%, we worked up our way to bring female literacy rate up as much as 70 or at least equally according to the proportions in the population as such. Even during the Independence Movement, there were awareness campaigns stating that the women literacy rate was hitting a low. In 1935, during the Indian National calm moment, Sucheta Kripalani prepared a draft on Women's education corresponding to the situation. It could not be taken up as other issues came up in the political front. So it got subsumed by them. The figures were very low and from there when it was realised that for changing the mentality of the population, education is the most effective route, female education was put on a concern. Figures moved up to 19% in 1997. Soon through various policies India brought the literacy rate up to 50%. This was a high number in India compared to the total population. We still were far from the target as 50% of the women were uneducated. In 2001, the literacy rate went up to 53.7% of women but the general literacy figures also went up to 66.4%. Overtime Male education got prominence over female education.

The Problem associated to female education in India

According to census 2011, the literacy rate has gone up to 82.1% but the female literacy only went up to 65.6%. Though the Indian literacy rate went up to 73.8% the gap between the men and women's education remained quite a big figure. Even though we have improved, 35% of Indian women are still illiterate. After 2011, the situation was still not satisfactory. The other countries that progressed during the same time or gained Independence like India, i.e. China and Vietnam, have reached a rate of 100%. Many countries in the world have moved much faster than India has, except a couple of countries in Africa. The South Asian continents such Pakistan, India and Nepal have a very low figure of literacy when compared globally. If we further go into subsections like SC and STs, the figures are even lower. 45-50% of the people are not educated. The older generations are bringing the figures down, the younger generation is going to school. There are states in India which are very advanced. There are states which haven't yet realized the importance of Women's education. Kerala is a state that shows advancement in the education literacy. The average for literacy rate of Kerala is 95%. The literacy rate of women is 95.6%.

On contract, the literacy rate of Rajasthan is only 34% for women. Bihar 35% Orissa 38% Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and UP in low figures. There is a big variation between different states so geography makes a difference. There is also variation because of Rural and Urban differences. Most women are not literate in the rural side of India. The figure of the minority community is lower. The figures of STs have seem to go up as there are a lot of states in the North East, 78 states, which are highly populated with tribal population as

Nagaland as Missouri. So the figures show 71.1% among the STs but it is not evenly distributed all over India. The tribal belt in hilly areas is in a worse state regarding awareness of education. The development of 11% is not evenly distributed in states and all regions.

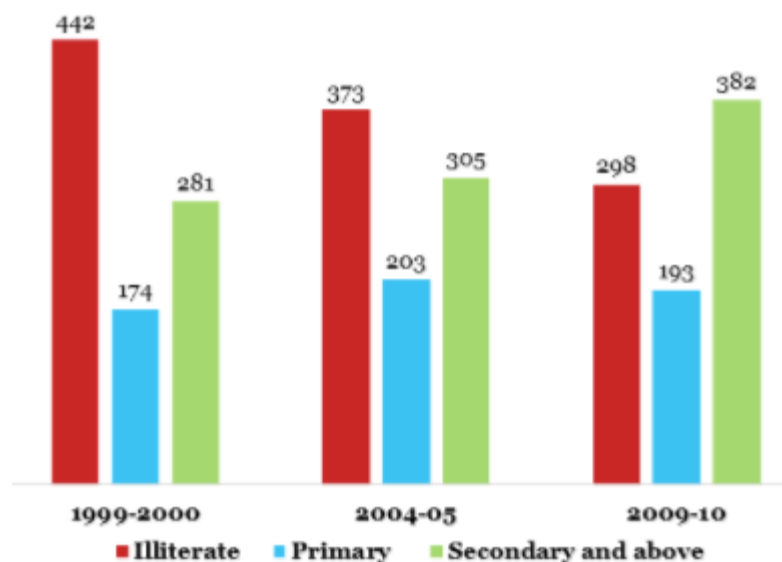


Fig 1.1 Graph depicting the illiteracy and literacy rates of females in India

Factors inhibiting female education:

1. Poverty and lack of parents education, particularly father's education.
2. Burden of survival tasks: bringing fuel, water, cooking, shepherding and grazing, family occupation (agricultural), etc.
3. Rape culture and marriage at an early age;
4. Development of immorality and the justification of patriarchy by men;
5. Lack of suitable curriculum for the education of girls;
6. Lack of social consciousness among women;
7. Scarcity of lady teachers and their unwillingness to serve in rural areas;
8. Women of the house pulling down women, either in the name of long lost traditions or by threatening them about the society's rants;
9. Wanting male child, hence considering the girl child good for nothing;
10. Means of transportation to whatever is available in the name of schools and colleges is not available or in some cases looked after for security;
11. Problem of waste disposal and sanitation issues;
12. Unfamiliarity of young girls with co-education;
13. Lack of enthusiasm and interest of the officials in charge of education

Many children are still not able to write their names, or speak words and sentences or even count. Hence qualitative education is more important to the population than quantitative education. The dropout rate is still very high. The dropout percentage until class 10 is 50% in both girls and boys.

Classes/Year	Classes (I-V)			Classes (I-VIII)			Classes (I-X)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1960-61	61.7	70.9	64.9	75.0	85.0	78.3	NA	NA	NA
1970-71	64.5	70.9	67.0	74.6	83.4	77.9	NA	NA	NA
1980-81	56.2	62.5	58.7	68.0	79.4	72.7	79.8	86.6	82.5
1990-91	40.1	46.0	42.6	59.1	65.1	60.9	67.5	76.6	71.3
2000-01	39.7	42.9	40.7	50.3	57.7	53.7	66.4	71.5	68.6
2005-06	28.7	21.8	25.7	48.7	49.0	48.8	60.1	63.6	61.6
2006-07	24.6	26.8	25.6	46.4	45.2	45.9	58.6	61.5	59.9
2007-08	25.7	24.4	25.1	43.7	41.3	42.7	56.6	57.3	56.7
2008-09	29.6	25.8	27.8	41.1	36.9	39.3	54.0	54.4	54.2
2009-10	31.8	28.5	30.3	41.1	44.2	42.5	53.3	51.8	52.7
2010-11	29.0	25.4	27.4	40.6	41.2	40.8	50.2	47.7	49.2
2011-12	23.4	21.0	22.3	41.5	40.0	40.8	48.6	52.2	50.3
2012-13(p)	23.0	19.4	21.3	41.8	35.7	39.0	50.4	50.3	50.4
2013-14(p)	21.2	18.3	19.8	39.2	32.9	36.3	48.1	46.7	47.4

Fig 1.2 Dropout rates in India according to years and classes

Even at elementary level the girls are not able to go to school, due to various factors.

Studies were done on children in which people tried to find out why didn't they go to school. The literacy level is very low especially in the Urban slums.

In many places the poverty doesn't count. The tuitions are free, school is free, boarding, notebooks and books are free. Even free uniforms are being provided particularly for girls in rural and urban areas. So poverty is not as such the reason why they aren't sending them to school, as they are given everything if they go to school.

But somehow due to poverty there are other things which come up like:

1. **The education of the parents:** The lack of importance of education amongst parents is due to the fact that they themselves are not able to value the education of the children. Many do not understand the importance of education on individual level- if they won't get any employment, they won't get any wages. Many women who aren't educated aren't even ambitious enough that their daughter should go to school. The other reason is household chores. Children of the poor families do have a lot of work like cooking or bringing fuel as mothers have to work as domestic workers. The girls are asked to look after the cattle's or other petty jobs while the male go to work. This is a hindrance as girls don't get time to go to school. This continues from childhood to even higher age groups. Usually the secondary schools or middle schools are very far away.
2. **Lack of proper sanitation facilities:** Now the government has no doubt provided toilets to the remotest of villages, keeping in mind the privacy and needs of females, the damage in all these years has been done. Girls never went to school because either there were no toilets, or where they were, there wasn't enough hygiene.
3. **Rape culture:** Less would be more than enough, because this prevalent issue has no limits. The narrow horizons of thinking capacity of men around us will never let girls abandon the fear of moving out of their houses and returning back safe. Girl students go through child abuse. Some of them become victims of corporate punishments which is found very frequent in rural areas. There are a lot of varieties in which the abuse takes place. Newspapers state that most of the harassments aren't reported as the girls don't report it. Sexual harassment has become a very big issue even in the

very developed areas. There are some cases of child marriage. The average age for child marriage in India is 17 years.

4. **Lack of transportation:** There are schools which are really far away but still do not have proper roads or means of transport. Also there is the insecurity of being kidnapped or killed. There is lack of security.

Steps taken to improve the condition

Although much work has been done to improve the status of female education in India, we are still a long way off from attaining standards comparable to other developing nations. India is ranked 109 amongst 128 countries in its education index for women.

Although there is much work to be done to enhance education in India, particular attention is warranted to women's access to education. An attempt has to be made to remove the social, psychological and structural barriers, for participation of majority of women in education. The state must play a prominent role in preventing gender stereotyping and segregation in education, and providing stipends, scholarships, loans, transport facilities, guidance and counseling services to women and their families, especially belonging to the lower and marginalized sections of society, and with required regulation and intervention, when necessary, to correct the imbalances in education access. Below are some recommendations and suggestions for improving access to education for women of the country. The recommendations can be categorized as those related to (a) Grassroots level improvements related to mindset changes,

(b) Strategic initiatives related to innovation and incentivisation and

(c) Enabling policy level framework that deals with regulation and reservation

1 Grassroot level Improvement

One of the foremost requirements for ensuring increased participation of women in education is effecting a mindset change in society. This class of recommendation, the buildingblock or core of enabling any kind of change, is discussed first.

Sensitisation and awareness building for women's education: Although the government and various voluntary organisations engage in various attempts to sensitise the local population to the need for women's education, much needs to be done in this area. Unless parents of the girl child see value and merit in sending the girl child to school, they will resist doing so and instead prefer to use her help in household chores or agricultural activities. Institutes of higher education such as the IIMs and other management schools can lead the way by designing programmes using marketing and selling skills to facilitate dialogue and build greater awareness about the benefits of educating the girl child. Rural immersion programmes for management students, especially in regions where the participation rate in schools is particularly low, will pave the way for better understanding and awareness of the differing needs and constraints of the intended beneficiaries. Parental reluctance can be targeted and stymied through such interaction, with a discussion of the various options and avenues that education can open up building awareness, and joint exploration facilitating alternate solutions keeping in mind the needs of the target population. Institutes of higher learning such as the IIMs, IITs, NITs, TISS, JNU etc. can lead the way by partnering with the state governments in the region to spearhead such an initiative.

2. Strategic Initiatives

Beyond building awareness and sensitising people towards the need for educating women, innovative approaches to make education available and accessible to women, and incentives to make the prospect attractive for both women and their families, is required. Some recommendations in this direction are offered below.

- **Target segment and approaches:** We need to move towards a segment-based and sector-wise approach to tackle the problem of poor access to education for women. In rural areas, where enrolment of women in education is rather low, mechanisms need to evolve such that the schools are more accessible for the girl child as well as the psychological and sociological barriers to sending the girl child to school are overcome. An approach that ensures the schools go to the girls instead of the girl child having to struggle to reach the school is one possible direction. For example, the concept of mobile schools in far-flung rural areas where the teacher and the classroom can be made mobile is likely to reach far more girl children and also effect parental sensitisation for education of the girl child in the process. Similarly, other mediums can be explored such as video and tele schooling, imparting education through e-choupals and panchayats, and tie-ups with mobile health clinics to get the school to reach the girl child rather than have them labour to reach the schools. A segmented approach will have to consider how best to address the particular requirements and needs of the region, depending on the potential for tie-ups and alternative media that can be used to deliver education.
- **Build linkages between government schemes such as NREGS and education:** A recurring concern is that of poor infrastructure in schools, such as provision for toilets for women, that specifically addresses the needs of the girl child. While every school needs to have adequate facilities such as drinking water and toilets for both men and women, the fact that these are currently not in place indicates perhaps the lack of will or the fund and resource crunch at the local level. A way out might be to tie up with the NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) that focuses on developmental projects while ensuring minimum 100 days of employment with education-related projects. State governments can introduce projects under the NREGS that focus on providing adequate infrastructure in schools, with particular attention to the specific and differing needs of the girl child. This will jointly address the NREGS objectives as well as assure the female population of adequate school facilities.
- **Incentivisation for education of the girl child:** Since girls are more likely than boys to stay on in schools once they enroll, the primary problem is that of attracting the girl child to the school in the first place. To facilitate this process, beyond communicating the usefulness of education to women, education of the girl child must become an attractive proposition for the parents of the girl child, who might otherwise prioritise sending the male child only to school. Some form of monetary incentive that state governments or panchayats can introduce at their level would go a long way in ensuring equal participation of both boys and girls in formal education. While mid-day meal schemes are one such incentivisation, it might help if incentive plans that particularly target the female child are introduced. For example, if a family has its girl children enrolled in schools, they can be made eligible for further discounts through the Public Distribution System (PDS) or entitled to food stamps, or even direct subsidies can be offered. Other forms of incentives that directly address the concerns of the parents, such as discounts in agricultural supplies for parents of the girl child or loaning out

the school premises for marriage of girls who have completed 16 years of schooling, can all be made available. While these incentives may not cost the government much in aggregate, they are likely to fuel stronger participation especially in the short term where instrumental and monetary concerns override the need to educate women.

3. Enabling Policy Framework

Efforts to improve access to education for women may also be addressed through effective regulation and government intervention beyond piecemeal efforts by the citizen body for any long-lasting impact.

- Reservation for women in education: The role of legislation and government intervention is one of the most powerful and effective tools to remedy systemic errors and imbalances prevalent in any society, which continue to be sustained over a period of time. A form of affirmative action, akin to other affirmative actions that provide for reservation to SC/ST and OBC in institutes of higher education, reservation for women in education can potentially reduce the disparity in education access and enrolment, and therefore opportunities made available to women. Although government intervention may not always be desirable, there is no denying that the reservation policy for 'backward castes' has benefited a section of the population and has been instrumental in correcting existing social imbalances. Extending the same logic, since women have continued to be inadequately represented across the education value chain, necessitating a certain percentage of women participation across various levels through required legislation and reservation will not only ensure fair representation but also encourage schools and institutes to actively devise means and programmes to attract women to their portals. Additional subsidies and incentives can further augment such structural mechanisms to ensure gender parity in education. The road ahead for education of women is long and winding. Much needs to be accomplished, first to attract the girl child to enroll in schools and then to retain, train and educate them. Although structural issues may be easier to address with the commitment and will of the government and local bodies, the psychological and sociological barriers require long-term sustained efforts from all. Improving attitudes towards the girl child, challenging prevalent norms of society and countering gender stereotyping and segregation will require more than government engagement; it will take the concerted effort of civil society, NGOs, institutes of higher learning, other stakeholders in education and, above all, the initiative and will of women themselves.

Basic Education Policies:

1. Directive Principles of State Policy – Free and compulsory education till the age of 14.
2. Universal Education by 2010
3. Education for all (UNESCO)
4. Right to education- 83rd Constitutional amendment
5. Passing the Constitution amendments- Education as fundamental right (2008)

The Panacea to the discouraging factors to female education in India

There have been various potential factors that have played a key role in discouraging female education in India. From poverty being one of the main contributors in social inhibitors, to other factors like absence of a concrete structure tackling the logistical inhibitors, there are plenty of other factors that have played a key role. Following is the solution to this ailment and a view of how these solutions will help in eradicating these factors.

1. Alleviation of poverty-

According to Rangarajan Committee, even in 2019, an estimated 46 million people in India live below the poverty line. There is no doubt of poverty being the biggest factor in discouraging female education, for instance burden of survival tasks like agricultural, household chores and the view of seeing children as a helping hand to earn a living. Reduction in poverty rates will significantly improve female education rates due to affordable female education by families. A lot of people do want to send their children to schools but feel helpless because of financial challenges.

2. Reconstruction of thinking through Social Engineering

Although states like Rajasthan are doing well in economic growth but lag far behind in female education. The social mindset with the narrative that women are only destined to be only a homemaker and it is the sacred duty of a woman to be only devoted towards her husband and household needs to be re-innovated through engineering the mindset of the people towards favourable acceptance of the truth that Women is more than a housemaid. Mega advocacy campaign as well as awareness workshops, use of folk like paintings, theatre, folk songs, puppet shows etc. are needed to be introduced both by the governmental and non-governmental organization. A new ideology that encourages female education and discourages the ideology of women will eventually emerge over time and women in the box of the societal mindset can be free.

3. Logistical changes

Logistical challenges has been one of the major key areas that are needed to be addressed. Some of the major ones are-

- a. Lack of proper physical facilities like sanitation, lack of infrastructure, safe environment etc.
- b. Lack of suitable curriculum for girls, problem of co education, lack of separate classes for girls and one of the major problems of transport.

All these issues are needed to be addressed in formulating proper action plan. There is a need to make schools and environment safer for girls. A lot of people will consider sending their girls to school by providing a safer and healthier environment.

4. Mind engineering for Girls for re-building their self esteem

Mind Empowerment is the centre of all dimension of empowerment. It is common understanding that mind always fails first. Women and girls ind have been subjected to hardship and generational torture since ages. This has led to degradation of Women and girls self esteem. In order to get them back on track, there should be mind engineering process that facilitate re-awakening of self image of women and girls. This social process will gain the awareness that will enhance their knowledge for the need to be educated. A lot of women themselves don't know the prospects of education and literacy in their life. Women labour in India is highest in rural affairs, yet the gender wage gap is much higher. Lack of education plays a major role in this scenario as well. Through awareness regarding all the affairs women themselves will be highly motivated to study and encourage others women and girls as well.

5. Incentivisation-

There is a lack of background push and willingness to change the situation at grass root levels. Unwillingness of lady teachers to work in rural areas, lack of enthusiasm, financial constraints are the major setbacks to name a few. With incentives provision to female teachers working in rural areas and recognition of officials who show significant changes in their

areas this problem can be addressed. If people will be encouraged to work even if through incentives this will be a major win.

The education of girls and women is an integral part of national development. Steps that are being taken to improve and expand their education will not recede to the background due to lack of finance. It must be remembered that there is still a big gap to be filled between the education of the boys and girls, further; mother is the pivot of family life in India. Our way of life depends on her. It is essential; therefore, that at least the programs for girls and women that have already been included in the current plan are not disturbed.

The lack of coordination that existed between the home, the school and the life outside had to be remedied; and a close integration must be secured between the process of education and the social and economic life of the country. The facilities for education should be adjusted as accurately as possible to the actual needs and opportunities which arise. Any wastage of training should not be tolerated in a country so poor as India. The methods of education had to be so designed that the inherent appeal and the value of education would win for it the loyalty of the pupils and support of the parents.

Our late Prime Minister Pandit Nehru said, “the most reliable indicator of a country’s character is the status and social position of women more than nothing else. He said, “I am quite convinced that in India today progress can be measured by the progress of women’s of India”. Dr. Radha Krishnan quoting Manu believed “Where women are honored there the Gods are pleased, where they have not honored all work becomes fruitless”. Women as human beings have as much right as men have and the honor they expect in society depends on the degree of their education.

Conclusion

The article clearly reviews about flaws in education system and socio-economic conditions that discourage female education. This article is not written for the sake of work/project. This is to highlight the problems faced by women and their preventive measures. On a rather serious note, I request whoever reads this article should support and withstand with women to tackle their way through all these challenges. We are the people who have created this discrepancy and we should be the ones to pull out the society from this Abyss. It is the responsibility of each one of us.

The word education is directly related to "Saraswati" the goddess. Learned and the erudite individuals attach great importance to the worship of goddess Saraswati as a representation of knowledge and wisdom. They believe that only Saraswati can grant them moksha—the final liberation of the soul.

Indians claim to hold the feminine power in nature above all Gods they worship, in every religion they practice. Yet, they fail to understand, and acknowledge the suppression of their own feminine partners, without whom, we have literally no existence.

The ways which can be adopted or encouraged for educating women, have by no means been left out in the article, but the main key for the change to actually happen is changing the mentality of the people and this is definitely a big task at hand for the betterment of our country’s future. Hence we want to conclude that the “the education of women is the best way to save the environment and the world.”

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