

Impact of Educational Attainment on Women's Passport Access in India

Tanya Sood¹

Abstract:

“Education is the ‘passport’ to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today”.

-Malcolm X.

The quote beautifully encapsulates the transformative potential of education in unlocking boundless opportunities for human growth. However, in context of this paper, the ‘passport’ is a euphemism. While women in India have undergone the disproportionate brunt of patriarchy in terms of access to resources and opportunities, particularly education, this has had a spill-over effect, stifling their ability to access services essential for integrating them as equal citizens in the society.

One of those services is passport penetration, which remains largely stunted in most parts of the country with respect to women. What remains to be seen is whether education has any role to play in this. Particularly so because as per a survey by CPPR Youth Leadership Fellowship in March 2024, Kerala has the highest number of women passport holders in the country with the highest female literacy rate too.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to answer the research question “Does increased access to education improve women’s passport access?”, and also ascertain how this trend varies across different socio-economic and cultural contexts in India. While significant research has been undertaken on the overall impact of education in enhancing the position of women in society, this aspect remains under-researched.

The paper would draw on secondary sources of data collection, particularly surveys like NFHS, India Human Development Survey or Census Data to collect demographic information and conduct regression analysis to analyse the relationship between education, passport access and other variables like age, marital status etc. This would help reach conclusions about policy

¹ Tanya Sood holds an M.A. in Political Science from University of Delhi and is a Young India Fellow at Ashoka University.

potential in enhancing women's access to education and thereby facilitating their integration with global opportunities and reap the benefits of globalisation.

Keywords: Passport mobility, women, education, Kerala, global opportunities, patriarchy, literacy, globalisation.

Introduction

Celebrating a remarkable 75 years of a hard-won independence, India is poised to reflect on its past, and emboldened to chalk out a future for itself-that reflects the vision of its founding fathers, a vision of an India that truly embodies the idea of India- our very own '*Bharatavarsha*'- so eloquently defined in the Rig Veda- as the territorial expanse stretching from the Himalayas to the oceans, bound within the immutable integrity of a historic civilization that is truly timeless and exalted. Operating within the geopolitical and socio-economic-political praxis of today's transformative era, our '*Bharatavarsha*' is dealing with a number of exigencies, one of them being the unequal access to opportunities that plague the lives of women.

Ever since independence in 1947, India has been undergoing profound transformation within its societal, economic and political landscape. In keeping with these developments, the pattern of international migration has been exposed to significant changes, especially concerning women, explicating variations in domestic and global dynamics. A whole different set of determinants impinge on international migration concerning women, which includes political developments, societal perceptions, economic prospects and administrative and regulatory frameworks.

Deshingkar and Grimm (2005) have highlighted how the opening up of Indian economy in the wake of 1990 economic reforms aimed at liberalization and privatisation created novel opportunities for women. Sectors like healthcare, hospitality and IT provided better career prospects, spearheading an exodus of women seeking to venture abroad. For instance, Indian nurses travelling abroad to US, UK and Middle East had encountered grave setbacks back home surrounding poor working conditions and below-the-mark wages, prompting them to undertake international travel in the hope of better facilities and salaries. 'Nurses: If Florence Could See

us Now’, a documentary directed by Kathy Douglas in 2010 succinctly captures their experiences while migrating to the US, and what propelled their decision to move abroad.

Historical and political exigencies have played their part in influencing Indian women’s migration overseas. For a start, colonial legacies like recruitment of Indian labourers by the British Empire caused migration flows later on. Developments within the geopolitical matrix after independence for instance the 1970s Gulf boom and consequent oil crisis spearheaded mass exodus of Indian citizens including women to Middle East, particularly UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Many were absorbed into healthcare sector jobs but also had to face crisis situations like labour rights issues, cultural adjustment and other forms of exploitation. Furthermore, migration flows were recalibrated owing to specific policies of the government of India and their subsequent amendments, one such policy being the Emigration Act of 1983. Still, positive impacts of migration like skill enhancement, better financial opportunities and growing cultural and diasporic clout cannot be underscored.

Aims and Objectives

While women in India have undergone the disproportionate brunt of patriarchy in terms of access to resources and opportunities, particularly education, this has had a spill-over effect, stifling their ability to access services essential for integrating them as equal citizens in the society.

One of those services is passport penetration, which remains largely stunted in most parts of the country with respect to women. What remains to be seen is whether education has any role to play in this. Particularly so because as per a survey by CPPR Youth Leadership Fellowship in March 2024, Kerala has the highest number of women passport holders in the country with the highest female literacy rate too.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to answer the research question “Does increased access to education improve women’s passport access?”, and also ascertain how this trend varies across different socio-economic and cultural contexts in India. While significant research has been undertaken on the overall impact of education in enhancing the position of women in society, this aspect remains under-researched.

The paper would draw on secondary sources of data collection, particularly surveys like NFHS, India Human Development Survey and Census Data to collect demographic information and conduct regression analysis to analyse the relationship between female literacy and their passport access. This would help reach conclusions about policy potential in enhancing women's access to education and thereby facilitating their integration with global opportunities and reap the benefits of globalisation.

The paper follows the following format: Section III discusses the Literature Review, followed by Research Question and Hypothesis in Section IV, Research Methodology in Section V and 'Evolution of Passport Regime in India' in Section VI. 'Differential access to women' forms part of Section VII. The 'Research Analysis' for this paper is conducted in Section VIII, the discussions and implications of which have been listed in Section IX. Finally, Section X draws on conclusion and discusses the way forward with this research.

Literature Review

Education heavily impacts women's economic dependence. Kabeer (2005) has mentioned that it is highly likely that educated women participate in the labour force more directly. Furthermore, in sectors that require frequent international travel, securing employment is notably higher among women who are educated. Panda and Agarwal (2005) have also made a similar proposition. Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) have expressed that interacting with formal institutions, filing documents and navigating bureaucratic procedures are better met when women are educated. Education comes as a forerunner to understanding and being aware about legal rights and entitlements. Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000) contend that dogmatic social norms and practices are likely to be challenged when women are provided access to education. Education invariably enables women to tap wider social networks to seek support and relevant information about the passport application process, what Putnam terms as 'social capital' (Putnam 2000). Desai et al. (2010) in the "Human Development in India" report found that women with secondary or higher education are significantly more likely to own passports compared to those with lower levels of education. Financial resources can be accumulated better by women having optimal levels of literacy, thereby facilitating their integration into the societal and administrative structure governing the issuance of passports.

Roy (2016) asserts that Indian passport transgresses its legal strictures. It is not just a travel document enabling cross-border movement but also a legitimacy-enabler, a gatekeeper of sorts, enabling inclusion and exclusion within the contemporary matrix of Indian polity.

Torpey (2000) has contended that powerful Western states have deployed new-age tools of documentary authoritarianism like the passport to impose their ways on the rest of the world. Thus, post WW1, when the passport regime was first introduced in India, it was guided not only by racial issues in migration but also carried with it considerations about India's geopolitical locus within the British Empire. Singha (2013) argues that while the passport regime might appear as a universal form of international authority, behind its veil lie not just differential power equations of the nation-states it represents but also the stereotypes, discriminatory practices and various forms of social exclusion that manifest around identity documentation within those nation-states.

The following section will study the evolution of Indian passport and how far the state has been successful in easing out its access to citizens. However, as the subsequent sections would argue, disentangling the administrative process is in no way the only solution to ensuring the mobility of Indian citizens and making travel comfortable. Citizens have been travelling for ages, for a multitude of reasons, both out of compulsion and choice. The paper explores whether the state has been successful in capturing the needs of the diverse population. However, its particular focus will be on women. In the course of the following sections it will be assessed whether education has any role to play in facilitating access to passports for women. If so, has the state functioned effectively in catering to complex challenges of different kinds, which women across the demographic spectrum face. These challenges can range from administrative, to personal and we shall see if education can improve the situation in any way.

While the existing literature has projected its focus on whether literacy should be a significant determinant in granting access to passports at all, the present paper argues how far has education enabled citizens, particularly women, in attaining the relevant knowledge and intellectual wherewithal required to undergo the administrative process of obtaining a passport. The argument on 'literacy'/'education' is the primary concern of this paper, arguing how far education facilitates the access to passports particularly for Indian women. However, the debate around literacy as a 'state-sanctioned' determinant of one's entitlement to a passport is beyond the concern of this paper.

Research Question and Hypothesis

While women in India have undergone the disproportionate brunt of patriarchy in terms of access to resources and opportunities, particularly education, this has had a spill-over effect, stifling their ability to access services essential for integrating them as equal citizens in the society.

One of those services is passport penetration, which remains largely stunted in most parts of the country with respect to women. What remains to be seen is whether education has any role to play in this. Particularly so because as per a survey by CPPR Youth Leadership Fellowship in March 2024, Kerala has the highest number of women passport holders in the country with the highest female literacy rate too.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to answer the research question:

- i. “Does increased access to education positively impact passport penetration and mobility among Indian women?”
- ii. Ascertain how this trend varies across different socio-economic and cultural contexts in India.

While significant research has been undertaken on the overall impact of education in enhancing the position of women in society, this aspect remains under-researched.

Hypothesis

Increased access to education possibly facilitates greater passport access and passport mobility for Indian women, thereby leading to enhanced participation in India’s global and diplomatic engagements with the rest of the world. In light of the 2023 survey by Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR) Youth Leadership Fellowship, Kerala hosts maximum passport penetration among rural and urban women, while simultaneously having the highest female literacy rate. It is pertinent to understand therefore, to what extent education facilitates it and helps women contribute to Indian women’s global outreach in diplomacy, exchange programs, international organizations, global markets etc.

Research Methodology

Quantitative research approach will be adopted to answer the research question. The technique of regression analysis would help us understand the correlation between female literacy rate and number of female passport holders across seven select states of India. The seven selected states – Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Gujarat, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh have been reported to host the maximum number of female passport holders in the descending order. Under regression analysis, Y intercept would denote the independent variable – number of female passport holders and the X intercept would denote the independent variable – female literacy rate across seven select states of Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. The data for number of female passport holders across these seven states as of 2023 will be sourced from the official website of Ministry of External Affairs, India. Data on female literacy rate will be retrieved from NSO (2018).

Furthermore, the selection ensures that regional variations are adequately captured and larger applicability of results can be possible. The data pertains to the most recent five-year period so as to keep the accuracy and relevance of findings intact. Confidentiality and privacy of data have been taken care of and the demographic trends have been directly sourced from publicly available sources. The research design adopted has been specifically adhered to for the purpose of maintaining objectivity that can help in avoiding any potential subjective bias. However, while the research has the potential of providing crucial insights, it is still susceptible to potential limitations. Secondary data collection can bring in discrepancies. Given that the scope is limited to seven states, there is a possibility that heterogeneity across the country may not be fully captured. Causality cannot be adequately inferred, owing to the cross sectional nature of the data. Temporal challenges may arise as data collected may not capture changes in demographics over longer periods of time. Data availability can be another challenge as analysis may suffer due to outdated or incomplete data. Different sources might provide different quality of data that might impact the results. Additionally, it is imperative to understand that correlation does not imply causation. Direct causal links should not be deduced from the study, it only examines associations.

The paper draws on secondary sources of data collection, particularly surveys like NFHS, India Human Development Survey and Census Data to collect demographic information and conduct

regression analysis to study the relationship between female literacy and their passport access. This would help reach conclusions about policy potential in enhancing women's access to education and thereby facilitating their integration with global opportunities and reap the benefits of globalisation. The study fills a significant literature gap by directly exploring the intersection of education and women's passport access. The empirical analysis produced can inspire targeted government policies focused on educating and empowering women, while also producing academic knowledge.

Evolution of Passport Regime in India

In the course of India's pre and post-Independence history, political, historical and technological advancements significantly altered the way passport functioned as a document for giving the people of India their identity as 'citizens' and simultaneously shaping the contours of the Indian 'nation-state', as this paper argues.

Prior to gaining independence, the concept of a single unified passport was non-existent in India. Colonial authorities, both the British governments and rulers of princely states issued specific travel documents to make administration and trade seamless and smooth. British Indian passports were issued to Indian subjects for travel within the British Empire and to other countries under British influence. These passports were typically issued to individuals who needed to travel for official or commercial purposes, such as government officials, merchants, and professionals. Issued after the first World War vide the Indian Passports Act of 1920, these were prominently meant to pander to colonial needs.

To propel Indian travel overseas, the newly formed government in 1947, embarked on creating a unified passport system for its Indian subjects. Diplomatic relations, security assumptions and bureaucratic and administrative requirements significantly influenced the way passport regime was to be formulated in the coming few years. For the first few years, in its nascent stages, the Indian passport bore a simple basic design, including basic details like name of passport holder, photograph, signature, nationality and date of birth. They were issued to what was then defined as 'respectable people', stipulating a mandatory literacy test to be undertaken for the issuance of passports.

With the expansion of economy and advancement in India's diplomatic undertakings and interactions, the need for passport services was felt. Passport offices were set up through the length and breadth of the country to ensure a seamless application process for citizens. Special

emphasis was placed on delivering services to citizens. Technological progress heavily influenced the design and security features of the passport. Computerisation and biometric techniques for identification undeniably contribute to the prevention of fraud and identity theft, thus improving the integrity of the passport.

To comply with international standards while also meeting the demands of a burgeoning population, the passport regime in India has undergone formidable transformations. As of 2021, Machine-Readable Passports (MRPs) have been introduced to integrate the system with global passport standards and also enable automated passport control systems at international airports. These MRP exhibit certain novel features of traveler identification, such as facial features and fingerprints to enable authentication and improve security. India has also attempted to explore the concept of e-passports with microchips embedded in their surface bearing important biometric information and digital signatures. Travelers can be provided with a smoother travel experience through this. In contemporary times, passport application requests and appointments can be made online through the government's flagship 'Passport Seva Project', reducing administrative burden for the authorities and the applicants alike. Taking into consideration the extensive travel being undertaken by citizens for the purpose of education, employment, recreation and business travel, India seeks to leverage its growing diplomatic clout and negotiate for visa free or visa-on-arrival arrangements with many countries to make the travel process more comfortable and less burdensome for its citizens. (passportindia.gov)

Differential Access to Women

It is a no-brainer that passport has served as an important identity proof in India. Identity proofs are undeniably tangible facilitators for women to obtain important services including jobs, etc. Various government platforms including entrance exam applications and job portals accept passport as a valid proof of identity, which translates into the fact that passport indeed is an important document that can not only open up opportunities for women, apart from enabling international travel, but also define who they are, making women feel valued and conscious about their existence. Internationally, passport becomes the lone determinant of one's nationality and citizenship and therefore, impacts the way the traveller would shape their perception of their own self- as a legitimate, dignified citizen of India, as a human embodiment of India's rich cultural landscape, but also as a manifestation of deep socio-political divides that run through its historical fortitudes.

In India, even today, it is mostly men who keep hold of identity credentials and official documents belonging to women in the household- sisters, daughters, mothers, wives, etc. It is commonplace to see men accompanying women to carry out the requisite administrative procedures for gaining identity documents including a passport. In many countries in fact, the legal processes mandatorily establish women's dependence on men to obtain identity credentials.

Personal challenges can range from unwillingness on part of women to reach out to officials which stems from patriarchal misconceptions, fear of being unable to navigate male-dominated administrative spaces, stories of sexual harassment in public and cramped office spaces transmitted through oral and media narratives, orthodoxy in grassroots surrounding women's mobility in public spaces, hesitation with respect to bodily privacy while registering biometrics like fingerprints, face ID, or a strong preference to be catered to by a woman rather than a man, which is further obliterated by sheer lack of women officials as well. Women's access to mobile phones is also not too widespread in the present scenario and the legal insistence on linking every identity credential with a mobile number can stifle women's access to them altogether. In many cases, women rely on their husbands or other male members of the family for a mobile phone too, which can mean that their identity credentials can be primarily and directly accessed by the male members in the family. This has a serious bearing on the way women can be subject to 'control' by male and female patriarchs in the household, hampering their progress and access to opportunities and also their public mobility. Administrative interactions can affect women more gravely than men, owing to their perceived traditional role as 'caregivers' and 'providers' within the household, by keeping them away from the house for longer periods. Certain provisions entrench systemic gendered notions, for instance, the requirement for women to change their name on official documents post marriage.

In a survey conducted as part of the 'Identities Research Project', jointly spearheaded by Caribou Digital, Omidyar Network and the International Institute of Information Technology, Bangalore (IIITB), a woman in Assam, when enquired about how she managed to obtain her ID credentials, she mentioned that "*my father, brother-in-law and husband take care of these things.*"

Another woman explained "*it is better to let men deal with ID*":—"they know better"; "*they have better networks and can get things done quickly*"; "*I don't want to go to the enrollment space without a man*"; "*it's not the kind of space women should be*" and so on. Women have

reported their disinterest in visiting such official spaces as it just reminds them of the ‘skills they lack’.

‘Literacy’ as a Qualifier

Within the British dominions, the ultimate test of literacy which could be undertaken and methods used to ascertain identity were intrinsic to the ‘Asiatics’. The government of India, while rolling out the describable roll on the passport starting 1912, demanded a signature and thumbprint. While the former could be obtained only in English, the latter were ultimately to be the refuge of the ‘illiterate’. As different parts of the world formulated their own sets of immigration rules and evolved their respective passport regimes, it dawned upon the Government of India to re-fashion their passport regime in a plenary model that can prove its legitimacy the world over. However, objections were raised, that ‘respectable Indians’ particularly women were being demanded photographs, at a time when *pardah* and *gosha* were prevalent practices. The Defence of India Rules paved the way for ‘photograph’ formally entering the passport regime in India, parts of Bombay overthrew petitions against this photograph requirement. The thumb impression in place of photograph was being exhorted as a better substitute. Under the British Raj, the colonial government used thumbprint for identity verification of *pardah* women, for the purpose of signing agreements and contracts. The Indian passport now required deeper details like hair colour, specific marks, eye colour etc. apart from signature, photograph and thumbprint, while the initial passport regime in UK had far fewer details being asked. Indian merchants working overseas, particularly Muslim merchants from heterodox sects of Islam, saw it as an attack on heir status when pictures of female relatives seemed to be circulating. A Bohra merchant representing the Indian National Association of Zanzibar stated in a petition that this reluctance about submitting female photographs was more acute outside than within India. (Indian National Association, 1917, p.5).

Thereafter, passport authorities in Zanzibar and East Africa decided to issue passports to *pardah* women without mandating submission of photographs. It was in October 1918 that taking stock of requests from Madras and Bombay, the Government finally discarded the requirement of passport submission for *pardah* and *ghosha* women coming from specific parts of the world – Zanzibar, Uganda, Straits, Malaya, the East African Protectorate, Mauritius and Nyasaland, and later Iraq and Persian Gulf Ports. As war-time exigencies required British wives and widows in India to take up new roles and travel, it was observed that their passports

had virtually no space to accommodate their nationality and date of birth, which then had to be squeezed in a cramped up space.

Thus, in case of India, while the passport echoed the territorial bounds of India in a documentary form before and after independence respectively, but also exposed class, caste and gender parameters deeply moulded in the process of conferring citizenship.

Research Analysis

This analysis aims at examining whether higher female literacy positively impacts access to passports for women in India. The study undertakes the analysis for seven select states of India—that are home to highest number of female passport holders, as per the Ministry of External Affairs, further facilitating greater mobility and international travel for women in India and their subsequent contribution to socio-economic endeavours and access to opportunities.

Regression analysis has been used for the purpose of this study. The Y intercept denotes the independent variable – number of female passport holders and the X intercept denotes the independent variable – female literacy rate across seven select states of Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. The data for number of female passport holders across these seven states as of 2023 has been sourced from the official website of Ministry of External Affairs, India. Data on female literacy rate has been retrieved from NSO (2018).

Analysis

Table 1. State-wise data on Female literacy Rate and Number of female passport holders till 2023 for top 7 states.

STATE	FEMALE LITERACY RATE (X)	NUMBER OF FEMALE PASSPORT HOLDERS (Y)
Kerala	95.2	42.17
Maharashtra	78.4	40.75
Tamil Nadu	77.9	28.07
Punjab	78.5	27.72
Gujarat	74.8	24.96
Karnataka	70.5	22.72
Uttar Pradesh	63.4	17.27

SOURCE: Ministry of External Affairs, https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/RU705_01.pdf

Fig.1. Regression Analysis- Scatter Diagram

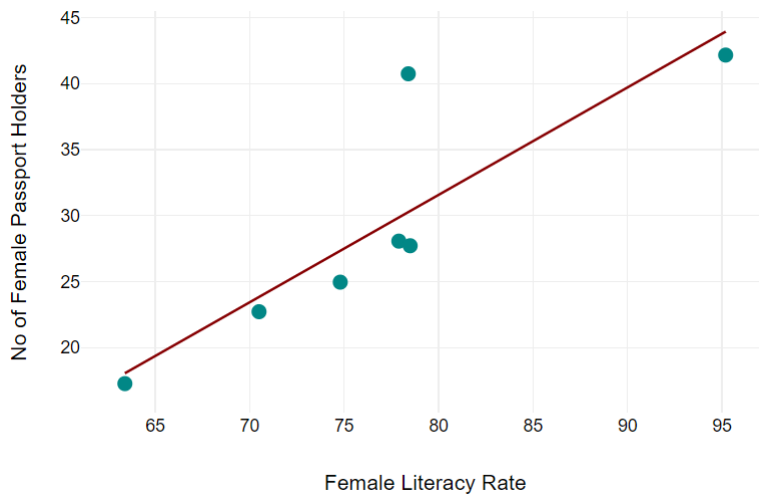


Figure 2. Results

Best-fit values	
Slope	0.9067 ± 0.2424
Y-intercept	50.66 ± 7.331
X-intercept	-55.87
1/Slope	1.103
95% Confidence Intervals	
Slope	0.2833 to 1.530
Y-intercept	31.81 to 69.50
X-intercept	-242.9 to -21.00
Goodness of Fit	
R square	0.7366
Sy.x	5.471
Is slope significantly non-zero?	
F	13.98
DFn,DFd	1,5
P Value	0.0134
Deviation from horizontal?	Significant
Data	
Number of XY pairs	7
Equation	$Y = 0.9067 * X + 50.66$

Figure 3. Values

Results

Best-fit values:

•**Slope:** The regression line’s slope represents the extent to which a unit increase in female literacy rate impacts the rate of change in the number of female passport holders. In a nutshell, there is an approximate increase of 0.9067 in the number of female passport holders for every percentage point increase in female literacy rate.

•**Y-intercept:** Here, Y-intercept is used to denote the value of number of female passport holders in each state, which forms our dependent variable for the purpose of this research when

the independent variable (female literacy rate) is zero. In this analysis, it is observed that when the female literacy rate is assumed zero, the approximate number of female passport holders is 50.66.

•**X-intercept:** In this scenario, the X intercept is used to denote the value of state-wise female literacy rate which forms our independent variable. It can be observed that when the number of female passport holders is assumed zero, the female literacy rate turns out to be around -55.87. In this context, however, negative values of X intercept are not relevant.

•**1/Slope:** This means the reciprocal of the slope of regression line which indicates at what rate the female literacy rate undergoes a change for every additional female passport holder. In the present analysis, there is an approximate increase of 1.103 percent in the female literacy rate for every additional female passport holder.

95% Confidence Intervals: these intervals are an indication of the values of our confidence level about the range within which our population parameters are likely to fall, which includes the x-intercept, y intercept and the slope. In this case scenario, slope's confidence interval indicates that 0.2833 and 1.530 is the range within which our true slope parameter is likely to fall.

Goodness of Fit:

•**R square:** R square refers to the coefficient of determination which represents the proportion change administered in the number of female passport holders owing to change in female literacy rate. In the present analysis, variation in the female literacy rate induces 73.66% of change in the number of female passport holders.

•**Sy.x:** This is the standard of error which indicates the mean deviation of observed values from the regression line. The lower the value, the better the regression line fits to the data.

Is slope significantly non-zero?:

•**F:** Known as the F-statistic, this evaluates if the slope of regression line is significantly distinct from zero.

•**P Value:** this refers to the probability value connected to the F-statistic. This analysis reveals a p-value of 0.0134 indicating the statistical significance of the regression line's slope. This

implies that there persists a notable relationship between literacy rate and the number of female passport holders.

•**DFn, DFd**: Degrees of freedom for the numerator and denominator, respectively.

•**Number of XY pairs**: This refers to number of observational pairs that have been used for the purpose of regression analysis. In this case, we have used 7 pairs, indicated by 7 select states – their respective female literacy rates and number of female passport holders.

•**Equation**: It is the equation of the regression line which can help us ascertain through the female literacy rate, the number of female passport holders.

Discussion and Implications

On the whole, it can be observed that a formidable positive correlation can be determined between female literacy rate and number of female passport holders in the selected states. As we register an increase in the female literacy rate, we see a corresponding uptick in the number of female passport holders in these states, as suggested by the positive slope coefficient. The finding underlies the positive role played by education in enabling female access to passports and enhancing not just international travel in the long run but also women's public mobility while going through the process of gaining access to the document in the first place, thereby playing their part in societal activities and social integration.

Socio-Economic and Cultural variations

It has been observed, as Schultz (1993) argues that financial and economic prospects derived from women's education are as likely to be tangible as those derived from men's education. Female illiteracy or gender inequality pertaining to women in rural India has received optimum attention, it is to be emphasized that the gap is equally palpable in urban India too. Kingdon (2002) undertook a study to understand this and has concluded that as far as urban data concerning their study is concerned, significantly fewer years of education have been attributed to women than men at the one percent level. Wealth bears heavily on school enrollment in India, despite the fact that subsidised and even free primary schooling in India is fairly available. Opportunity cost of schooling matters a lot for people hailing from poor backgrounds- they see children supplementing family income through cheap labour as more rewarding, in contrast to their inability to afford additional schooling expenditures over and above school fee. Kingdon (2002) has also deduced that in order for females to receive

education, parental education is of utmost importance, while that is not so much the case for male education. Also, once enrolled, men coming from low and backward caste are highly likely to achieve similar years of education as their male counterparts from other castes, all other parameters being equal. However, low caste women do not stand this chance vis-à-vis high caste woman. One may conclude from this, that reservation provision by the government augurs fairly well for low caste men in providing them representation in education, but not so much for low caste women. Another line of argument goes as such – that reservation has provided a preliminary niche to low caste men for them to avail public sector employment, but has not been able to offer enough incentive to low caste women to leave their conventional roles within the household and overcome household conservatism. Moreover, mother's education is a critical pivot for ensuring girl child's education but not that of boy. Father's education on the other hand, determines both the girl's and boy's education.

Upgrading the quality of primary schools has been suggested to be an important determinant in retaining students at primary levels of education and overcoming the menace of wastage in Indian education owing to premature drop-out rates as a result of poor conditions of primary schooling in India. Thus, it is a supply-side problem and not a demand-side problem in the Indian education system at the primary schooling level. But this comes only after other determinants leading to educational wastage like parental education, wealth, social, health and religious influences have been accounted for. (Kingdon 2002).

Expanding literacy by mitigating gender inequality will also make the country inch closer to realising the Sustainable Development Goals. As per the Gender Gap Report of World Economic Forum, countries advancing gender equality are seen as reliable partners on the path to progress, which bolsters their international standing.

Educated women constitute a substantial proportion of Indian Diasporas communities. Khadria (2009) remarked that this Indian Diaspora is a fundamental conduit, facilitating political, economic and cultural assimilation with host countries. Continuous flow of ideas, resources and capital through their steadfast contribution can help India strengthen its foreign policy objectives sooner. Remittances and investment contributions by Indian women working overseas are crucial factors in this regard, helping forge economic stability and contributing to India's economic growth and GDP substantially, as noted by Kapur (2010).

Conclusion and the Way Forward

This paper undertook a comprehensive analysis of Indian passport regime as it evolved from the colonial times to the post-Independence period and finally in the contemporary era. It touched upon various aspects of passport access, including why is it more difficult for women to obtain passports, the challenges they face and the inherent gender biases and stereotypes that sometimes implicitly creep into administrative procedures and legal codifications. The aim of the paper was to analyse, through the regression analysis method of quantitative research, the relationship between female literacy and number of female passport holders. The results depict a positive correlation between the two variables. Thereafter, its implications for India's foreign policy objectives have been analysed and it has been observed that women having better access to education are more empowered to undertake international travel, owing to better access to passports, thereby contributing significantly to India's bilateral and multilateral engagements, through their unique experiences, insights and collaborative leadership approaches.

In the long run, complementing quantitative research with qualitative research can prove beneficial in assessing broader policy implications and solutions. Partnering with NGOs and think tanks to understand ground realities through their lens can boost state efforts in this regard. Overall, scholarships and fellowships that uniquely target women in achieving literacy are already doing a good job. Their outcomes should be improved by strengthening them through public-private sector engagements. Customised education programs that emphasize on the need for passports for women and help them navigate through the complexities of the process can be explored. Consistent future efforts in policy formulation and implementation coupled with qualitative and quantitative research endeavours are needed to ensure greater national and international mobility for Indian women.

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