

Mirian Paz de Almeida  
Advanced Writing  
International Language Institute  
St. Petersburg College  
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### Why Eve Doesn't Read

Today's society requires literacy as the means to secure subsistence and in order to participate in the economic and social spheres. However, a grim picture rises on the near horizon: 781 million illiterate people, of whom 496 million are women ("International Literacy Data 2014"). Cicero, the Roman philosopher, couldn't be more right when he wrote: "A room without books is like a body without a soul" ("Marcus Tullius Cicero – Quotes"). We are what we read: that is what makes our souls and minds memorable. Therefore, by not reading wouldn't we be condemning our souls to famine? However, this massive quantity of illiterate women will struggle to earn enough for life's basic necessities and education in their lifetimes. Several interlaced factors like cultural background, early marriage, and poverty are holding them in a vicious cycle of exclusion.

Women's rights have evolved throughout humanity's history. However, in some countries, women still remain pushed to the fringes of self-development opportunities due to cultural background. In India, for example, just one out of three girls will complete grade school. Parents force girls to abandon school to help with housework, while at the same time investing in

boys' education because of strong social beliefs and biases ("Why are two out of three illiterate people female?"). In fact, the percentage of female illiteracy in India is one of the highest in the world: 27 million out of 40.7 million youth (67%) are females between 15-24 years old. 189 million out of 283 million of adults (65%) who are illiterate are women ("Youth and Adult Literacy Numbers in Countries with Highest Number of Illiterates"). Another example of cultural values blocking girls' school access is found in Sub-Saharan African countries. Parents believe that it is of more value to send boys to school because after marriage they remain in the same family, while girls don't ("Girls Denied Education Worldwide").

Early marriage, also called child marriage, is when marriage occurs before age 18 ("Child marriage"). While this is a custom in many countries, the highest percentage of marriages following this pattern is found in the poorest regions. For example, it is 45% of weddings performed in South Central Asia, 25% of those in the Caribbean and Latin America and almost 40% of those in Sub-Saharan Africa ("Prevalence of Early Marriage Around the World"). As a consequence, these children are cut off from school and cannot earn basic education. The level of the mothers' literacy is going to affect their children, even more so the weakest ones: the girls. Therefore, generation after generation girls and women are locked out of personal, economic, and social development ("The tip of the iceberg").

When it comes to the connection between literacy and poverty, not only the developing countries are affected, but also some wealthy nations. Minority groups like disabled people and poor urban residents are prone to exclusion from education in developed nations (Otaegi). Nevertheless, the

dimension and diversity of the issue are far bigger in the poorest countries: in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, parents cannot support their children's expenses at school, such as uniforms and school fees. In addition to that infrastructure is another component. Scarcity of and a lack of qualification for teachers, and children's closeness to school are frequent problems ("Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Problems Abound"). Poverty also affects a child's emotional, social and cognitive capacity (Brooks-Gunn, et al). That is to say that the basic needs like shelter, food and clothing are bound to a child's educational development, in addition to happiness and health.

Eve is not a real person: she is a metaphor representing girls and women worldwide who have real faces and real names. And yet neither can they write nor read their own names, medical instructions, numbers or simple things that could bring them a better and more secure livelihood. The current 496 million of Eves are mostly kept in a cycle of exclusion due to deeply entrenched cultural norms and poverty. Culture is a matter that must be respected. Actions to bring positive results should be focused on bridging the differing ways of thinking and should not be imposed. Poverty, on the other hand, is addressed through a variety of campaigns in order to help those in need. Many actions are done around the world to break the ball and chain, but million of Eves are still locked inside a room without a soul.

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