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Girl education: A lifeline to rural transformation in India

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Abstract

Education is very important for every child whether boy or girl. It is sad that some communities still discriminate against the education of the girl child. Education is the key factor for girls' empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Discrimination of girl from womb to tomb is well known. There is continued inequality and vulnerability of girls in all sectors- Economic, Education, Social, Political, Health Care, Nutrition, Right and Legal etc. Girls oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walk of life. In order to fight against the socially constructed gender biases, girls & women have to swim against the system that requires more strength. Such strength comes from the process of empowerment and empowerment will come from the education. And rural transformation will come from girls' education. This paper emphasis on girl's education because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. So that we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to girls empowerment.

Keywords: Girls' education. Gender inequality, Provisions for girls' education, rural transformation

1. Introduction

"If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women Empowered means Mother India Empowered". PT. JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Women and girls in the developing world are often denied opportunities for education. Lack of education limits prospects, decreases family income, reduces health, puts women and girls at risk of trafficking and exploitation, and limits the economic advancement of entire countries.

Education for girls and women is the single most effective way to improve the lives of individual families as well as to bring economic development to poor communities worldwide.

Education has a long history of successfully working with local partners to design, manage, and evaluate community-based initiatives to advance the conditions of girls and women. World Education's programs help girls enroll and stay in school and help women gain access to or create new educational, financial, and social resources in their communities. They also help girls and women improve their own lives, the lives of their families and the conditions in their communities. For parents—and especially mothers—this means creating conditions that ensure their daughters have equal access to basic education, are able to make informed decisions about their futures, and are able to protect themselves from trafficking, sexual exploitation, HIV, for example.

By improving educational opportunities for girls and women, World Education helps women develop skills that allow them to make decisions and influence community change. In turn, these programs have a positive impact on some of the most profound issues of our time: Population growth, HIV, peace and security, and the widening gap between the rich and poor.

2. Why Girls Remain Undereducated?

What explains the gender differentials in educational attainment? What makes women to remain outside the preview of change? Studies have tried to answer these questions on various planes. Economic benefits of education and the costs involved in undertaking such educational attainment have been perceived differently for men and women. Parents who bear the private costs of investing in schooling for girls and women fail to receive the full benefits of their investment. This is largely true because much of the payoff in educating women is broadly social in nature rather than economic. This endures the gender differentials.

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Parent's perception of current costs of education and future benefits there from influences the decision whether girl child should continue taking education or not. Costs are often measured in terms of distance to school and other direct costs involved such as fee paid, books bought, dress made etc. At times, the favor to son is made not only in education but also in allocation of food at mealtime, distribution of inheritance and even the language used. Apart from economic costs and benefits, there are costs involved at psychological planes well. The differential access based on the psychological perceptions is more firm and real threat. The factors herein include all such motives, which tend to make a parent reluctant to send daughters to school. One of the glaring factors is the concern for the physical and moral safety of a girl child which makes parents unwilling to let them travel distances to school each day. Religion and socio-cultural factors influence parents' choice they may tend to search for a school where only girls are admitted and the one where women teachers are employed. The concern arises when girls reach puberty even education beyond the level of literacy for girls may be perceived as threat for their possibilities for marriage. Naturally, girls who would work more than their brothers at home will have less probability of attending school. In a joint family, the possibility of increased opportunity costs in these terms will be more. Does this mean when opportunity costs of educating girls and boys are identical, both will have equal chances of going to school? The answer, unfortunately, is no. Parents still keep girls at home to work and send their sons to school.

3. Gender Inequality in Access to Education

Education seems to be the key factor, which only can initiate a chain of advantages to females. However, the access to education is differently perceived for male and female. Key indicators such as literacy, enrollment and years spent in school explain the situation in the access to education and each of these indicators reveal that the level of female education in India is still low and lagging far behind their male counterpart. The low adult literacy rates for women are a reflection of past underinvestment in the education of women and thus do not necessarily capture the recent progress. The problem is not only confined to low enrollments, the girl's school attendance has also been found incredibly low. Rural girls belong to disadvantaged groups as if SC and ST present the worst scenario. As per the data, girl dropout ratio has tended to increase with the enhancement in the level of education. This clearly outlines the pattern of gender inequality in access to education, which seems to be deepening as we move from lower to higher educational attainment and from urban to rural and to disadvantaged group in the society.

4. Barriers and Problems against Girl education

In spite of certain outstanding examples of individual achievements, and a definite improvement in their general condition over the years, it remains true that Indian women still constitute a large body of under - privileged citizens. Women of course do not form a homogenous group in class or caste terms. Nevertheless, they face distinctive problems that call for special attention. The Backward Classes Commission set up by the Government of India in 1953 classified women of India as a backward group requiring special attention. The Ministry of Education clubs girls with Scheduled Castes and Tribes as the three most backward groups in education. The educational, economic, political and social backwardness of women makes them the largest group hindering the process of social change. It is inevitable that when this 'backward' group

has the major responsibility of bringing up future generations the advancement of society cannot be rapid or take any significant form of development. In the report of the committee appointed by the National Council for Women's Education it was emphatically stated that what was needed to convert the equality of women from de jure to de facto status was widespread education for girls and women and are education of men and women to accept new and scientific attitudes towards each other and to themselves.

A changing society and a developing economy cannot make any headway if education, which is one of the important agents affecting the norms of morality and culture, remains in the hands of traditionalists who subscribe to a fragmented view of the country's and the world's heritage. The differences between the positions of men and women in the society will not lessen; leave alone disappear, as long as there are differences between the education levels of men and women. Inadequate education or no education is the most important factor contributing to the backwardness of our masses, especially women. The low literacy among women brings down the national literacy. This gap which exists between the literacy rates of the two sexes also exists between the enrolment of girls and boys at all levels of education. Right from the primary school to the university, we find that the number of girl students is considerably lower than boys. According to Article 45 of the Constitution, universal compulsory and free education until the age of 14 was to be achieved by the year 1960. Looking at the present condition of primary education in villages, it is doubtful whether we can achieve 100% enrolment of girls. It is unfortunately true of our society that children are sent to school not according to their intelligence or aptitude but according to their sex. The reasons for not sending girls to school are both economic and social. In rural areas, girls are required to help in household work. The resources of the rural poor are so limited that they do not have anything to spare for children's education. If resources are available, it is the boy who is sent to school first. Parents also do not see the value of educating especially a daughter who would get married and remain a housewife. Since they cannot see any direct relationship between education and economic betterment, they have very little motivation to send their children to school. It is still not being realized that there is definite connection between education, good motherhood and efficient house management. The management of millions of households and the upbringing of millions of children is thus in the hands of illiterate women. It is here that a change is required if our democratic and socialistic intensions are not to remain a mere pretence. People can be motivated to have their children educated only if educational system is directly linked with economic and social development.

The plight of women, in terms of education is further compounded by the negative attitude of parents toward female education. Some parents are usually reluctant to send their girl child for formal education especially to higher levels like their male counterpart. Another problem closely related to this is the reluctance to acquire western education and misunderstanding on the part of the girls themselves about the values of the acquisition of formal education. In education, equity means equal access to good schooling. Restricted access to education by women in this country is profoundly rooted in history, religion, culture, the psychology of self, law, political institution and social attitudes which interact in several ways to limit women's access to formal education when compared with their male counterparts. It has been observed that Indian women are lagging behind their counterparts in developed and

some developing nations due to the late start in educating them. This is caused by our traditions and culture which are hostile to women. This tradition reduces them to kitchen manageresses and producers of babies. Thus, their education ideally, is expected to end in kitchen a condition which ironically is detested by many parents thereby discouraging their investment in girl-child education. Other problems against women education include the familiar problems like lack of funds, inadequate facilities, inadequate manpower, sexual harassment, conflicting societal role expectations, government policies and lack of political will power to implement the entire educational programme. The inferiority complex observable in Indian women can be attributed to the influence of environmental manipulation. Through the traditional socialization process of the typical society, women are made to accept negative self-fulfilling prophecy, stereotyping and stigmatization that they are members of a weaker sex. At present, the forces which combine to hamper women education and development in India could be viewed broadly to include denial of access to education, early marriage, confinement to solitary living, subjugation by culture to accept choices forced on them, discrimination and harassment at work, political disenfranchisement from elective and political appointment and exposure to cruel mourning rites upon the death of their husband.

5. Need for Girl education

Women empowerment can only be achieved through the provision of adequate and functional education to the women folk. This is crucial because no matter how rich or vast a nation is, without an effective, efficient, adequate and functional education for all its citizens (men and women) education which is relevant to its immediate needs, goals and objectives, such a nation would find it difficult to stand on its own. The brand of education being advocated is that type of education in which is embedded the spirit of self-realization and all that are needed for the country's overall development like mass literacy, economic empowerment etc. The need for women education is also informed by the fact that purposeful occupational achievement and satisfaction is ensured by deep self-awareness and understanding which can only be achieved through the provision of effective and functional education and guidance & counseling. This, has been noted is likely to guarantee women empowerment with its root based on women struggle to improve their status. The empowerment suggested is such that entails the process of challenging power relations and of gaining wider control over source of power. This, however, cannot be achieved without the provision of reasonable access to formal and functional education to the women folk. This is based on the premise that education has been adjudged to be a viable instrument of change in the positive direction. Provision of formal and functional education is needed for the women folk, because:

5.1 Future educated generations – An African proverb says, “If we educate a boy, we educate one person. If we educate a girl, we educate a family – and a whole nation.” By sending a girl to school, she is far more likely to ensure that her children also receive an education. As many claim, investing in a girl's education is investing in a nation.

5.2 Decrease infant mortality: Children of educated women are less likely to die before their first birthday. Girls who receive an education are less likely to contract HIV & AIDS, and thus, less likely to pass it onto their children. Primary

education alone helps reduce infant mortality significantly, and secondary education helps even more. The Girls Global Education Fund reports that when a child is born to a woman in Africa who hasn't received an education, he or she has a 1 in 5 chance of dying before 5.

5.3 Decrease maternal mortality: Educated women (with greater knowledge of health care and fewer pregnancies) are less likely to die during pregnancy, childbirth, or during the postpartum period. Increased education of girls also leads to more female health care providers to assist with prenatal medical care, labor and delivery, delivery complications and emergencies, and follow-up care.

5.4 Decrease child marriage: Child marriage – in some cases involving girls as young as 6 or 8 almost always results in the end of a girl's schooling. The result is illiterate or barely literate young mothers without adequate tools to build healthy, educated families. On average, for every year a girl stays in school past fifth grade, her marriage is delayed a year. Educated girls typically marry later, when they are better able to bear and care for their children.

5.5 Decrease population explosion: Educated women tend to have fewer (and healthier) babies. A 2000 study in Brazil found that literate women had an average of 2.5 children while illiterate women had an average of six children, according to UNESCO.

5.6 Increase involvement in political process: Educated women are more likely to participate in political discussions, meetings, and decision-making, which in turn promote a more representative, effective government.

5.7 Decrease domestic & sexual violence: Educated girls and women are less likely to be victims of domestic and sexual violence or to tolerate it in their families.

5.8 Decrease support for militancy: As women become more educated, they are less likely to support militancy and terrorism than similarly educated men.

5.9 Improve socioeconomic growth: Educated women have a greater chance of escaping poverty, leading healthier and more productive lives, and raising the standard of living for their children, families, and communities.

6. Policy Perspectives for Girls education

The policy framework, provision of educational opportunities for women and girls has been an important part of the national endeavor in the field of education since Independence. Though these endeavors did yield significant results, gender disparities persist, more so in rural areas and among disadvantaged communities. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) as revised in 1992 was landmark in the field of policy on women's education in that it recognized the need to redress traditional gender imbalances in educational access and achievement. The NPE also recognized that enhancing infrastructure alone will not redress the problem. It recognized that “the empowerment of women is possibly the most critical pre condition for the participation of girls and women in the educational process”. The programme of Action (POA, 1992), in the section “Education for Women's Equality” (Chapter-XII, pages. 105-107), focuses on empowerment of women as the critical precondition for their participation in the education

process. The POA states that education can be an effective tool for women's empowerment, ensuring equal participation in developmental processes; The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan stresses on improving access to secondary schooling to all young person according to norms through proximate location (say, Secondary Schools within 5 kms, and Higher Secondary Schools within 7-10 kms) / efficient and safe transport arrangements/residential facilities, depending on local circumstances including open schooling and ensures that no child is deprived of secondary education of satisfactory quality due to gender, socio-economic, disability and other barriers.

7. Educational Provisions in Centrally Sponsored Schemes in School Education (CSS) Major Schemes for Elementary Education

1. Operation Black Board
2. Teacher Education
3. Education Guarantee Scheme & Alternative and Innovative Education (EGS & AIE)
4. Mid-day Meal Scheme
5. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)
6. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)
7. Shiksha Karmi
8. Mahila Samakhya
9. District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)
10. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)
11. Lok Jumbish
12. Janshala Programme
13. Padhe Bitiya Badhe Bitiya
14. Ladali Scheme

7.1 Major Schemes for Secondary Education

1. Access and Equity
2. Quality Improvement in Schools (QIS)
3. ICT in Schools
4. Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC)
5. Vocationalisation of Education

8. Conclusion

Education is one composite single variable, which has the capacity to transform many odds turning in favor of girls more specially so in the rural India. Therefore, an exclusive emphasis on girls' education is necessary. Education for adolescent girls is constraint due to many factors; the most prominent of them is non-availability of infrastructure and schools. Secondly, the travel time taken in reaching school, fear of crime and unknown eventuality would rise therefore provision of public transport exclusively for girl child is necessary. A legal provision would help rescue girls from the early marriages and open doors of development for them. Awareness programme are needed which would focus on the dynamics of nutrition in physical and mental growth. However, it is to be reiterated at the end that girls need a lot of compassionate treatment and favor to enable them to lead a respectable and meaningful life, and in ensuring this, the role of family members and society is undoubtedly crucial and of prime significance and the change attitude of elders towards girls is urgently called for.

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