



MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN EDUCATION

Dr. Anju Aggarwal, Associate Professor
Maharaja Agrasen College
University of Delhi

Gender discrimination is prevalent in all kinds of societies. The distribution of power unfavorably to women arises from gender and patriarchy. Patriarchy in the structural hierarchy of Indian society has given women lower status and fewer privileges than men. Early marriage, early motherhood, double burdened responsibilities acutely affects women politically, economically and educationally as well as health wise. Social and economic disparities in society along with gender inequality affect the participation of girl-child in schooling. Gender disparity in India is considered as a big issue in reaching to the aim of universal elementary education. Nearly 57 million of children are denied their right to education and nearly two third among them are women.

Gender differences in education are visible in all social classes. Their status varies from region to region, rural to urban, backward to forward area, inter to intra community Muslim girls of Kerala and Tamil Nadu are in better position than of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, some tribes and Dalits are more educated than others.

While gender equality has been the main goal of education policy in India for over three decades, it lacked in implementation.

The sector of female education has remained underinvested so far. Though progress is shown on the primary education level but gap persists at secondary education or post-secondary levels.

Challenges in Gender equity

Physical access to schooling is the key factor of gender disparity and discrimination. Once girls are able to get enrolled in school, they are rather more likely than boys to continue their education with more success¹ leading to increase in the rate of improvement in girls' education and women's literacy. Wherever there are schools within access and where ever these schools were regular and functioning well – demand increased.² Availability of well-functioning schools is considered as an important variable that influences household decisions.³

Parents find it difficult to continue to send their daughters to school, which are located at a distance. The situation is worse if we see the enrollment rate of SC, ST girls, especially in states

like Gujarat, MP, UP and Bihar. Non-availability of educational facilities nearby their homes remained an acute handicap in girl education. Increase in number of school is leading to increase in enrollment rate, but the rural-urban difference has also been found in accessibility of resources. In National Health Survey NFHS II, 3.4% of urban and 5.2% of rural females were not enrolled because of lack of access to schools.⁴ Urban in slums is also affected. Even if they have the access then the quality of education comes as a challenge affecting their performance and achievement. Then there is rural urban divide also and public private school difference.

Not much difference has come in this ratio even today when situation of access to school has improved considerably the gender gap still is the same. More over where parents are not confident about further access to high school after primary school, they are reluctant to retain them in elementary school. This is truer for girls.

Globalization has also acted as a barrier in mainstreaming gender in education. It has increased job market for English speaking children, as boys have more access to private English schools than girls. Of course we also see the change in the era of liberalization and privatization, which has reinforced the demand for girls education in highly orthodox region of Rajasthan. Structural changes in the marriage and employment market have raised the demand and level for schooling.

Domestic Responsibility is another handicap. Rural areas, education is considered less important for girls. Teenage girls' dropout rate is more because of domestic responsibility. Girls are expected to do the menial task like sweeping thus reinforcing the gendered division of labor. They are taught that submissiveness and docility are the virtues of women hood. Gender inequality is also visible in their performance, which varies from state to state. While in MP, UP girls perform better, and in southern India like in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the performance of girls and boys is same. The gender difference in performance is found more in rural than urban areas. The difference in performance also varies due to domestic responsibilities on girls. In majority of states parents of low-income group prefer to educate their son if they have to choose. Moreover Parents do not want to invest in girls especially if they are sick and disabled

Gap between enrollment rate and attendance rate of children is also a matter of great concern. Dropout rate of girls is also alarming. Ramachandran has noted that dropout rate of girls in higher grade is significant and is more in states of Bihar and UP. As the girl approaches puberty restrictions are imposed on them.⁵ The girls start dropping out at the age of 11 and it is more after the age of 14. Socialization of girls is great significance to female sexuality affecting their education. Related with these are customs, rituals and social practices. Poverty and social discrimination and low quality schools also go against the girls However, the National survey reports show a reduction in its reports over the years, showing demand for education expanding.

Poverty and other discriminations are significant barriers in girl education. Women do low skilled work and are involved in sweeping and scavenging type of work in rural areas. Girls out of poverty are more malnutrition. More than fifty percent of married women are either obese or underweight There is a strong link between health and education. Girls' attendance in school is affected by poor health and frequent illness, malnutrition of girls, large family size. It is noted that higher the social economic status, lower is the gender difference. Mid day meal schemes in

many schools was started by the government to attract children to schools. But even this scheme could not integrate girls in the main stream. The worst is the case in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, where even this scheme could not be implemented. Situation is more bad for Muslim girls in India, especially in UP where girls are more in disadvantageous position. Low income and parental opposition in Muslim household are the biggest handicap for them.

Lack of sexual health education and resistance towards it, in turn affects the girl health wise. For e.g. spreading of HIV/AIDS .About 80 per cent of women get infected from their husbands, and mostly they get infected at an early age.⁶

Perpetuation of gender stereotyping is the biggest challenge. Schools reinforce gender stereotyping in India. Writers like Sadgopal, Pandey and Velcoff have noted that men are always projected powerful than women in textbooks. Their content, language all upholds patriarchy. The intellect of girls and their cognitive ability is ignored which is evident from the board exam performances. In schools of religious domination like Madarsas, their textbook limits girls' education, supporting orthodox activities for them.

Another factor responsible for fewer enrollments of girls in school is gender-based violence in home, school and society. Indian parents do not feel safe and confident to send their daughters to place distant from their residence. In northeast states and also in Kashmir incidents of sexual violence had been noticed in public sphere. Domestic violence too affects the children considerably. Sexual harassment affects the girl's performance negatively. School related gender violence is also lowly reported given the social fabric of India. Even if these cases are reported they are just sidetracked or ignored. Early marriage is also the reason for lower enrolment rate of girls in school.

Though the literacy rate is improving in India, irrespective of gender, the gender gap has also been reduced with time, yet the gap does exist. Female literacy has increased over the years of independence. Still we are not able to eradicate the gap that persists between male and female literacy rate. It remains according to location also, where as 81% males were literate in National Sample Survey of 2004-5, 69% urban women were there. Gap was more seen in older persons. Over 50 had only 21% literate while up to 14 were 75% literate. It is also true that over the years the drop out rate has also decreased with the increase in enrollment of girls.

Efforts in mainstreaming Gender in education

The post independence period shows a remarkable progress in participation of girls in education. But considerable gender gap still remains. Girls are still lagging behind at primary and elementary level. The problem of girl education cannot be dealt without enhancing the status of women. Gender equality finds its lace in MDG's. Are we moving in right direction is our main concern? While some has moved ahead some are still lagging behind. Girls education has progressed but not to the level of 'Education for all'

In the post independence policies women needs had not been addressed properly, education had failed to initiate any change rather deepened the class differences. Relevance of importance of education remained a dominant issue of debate in the 60's.⁷ The 4th five-year plan (1969-1974) linked women education with lower fertility and improving malnutrition of children. The major landmark was the Towards Equality Report by the Committee on the Status of Women in India in 1975 .It focused on Gender inequality. The post Independent policies addressed the issue of girls' education to make them better wives and mothers in future. The Shram Shakti Report of National Commission on self employment women said that to bring equality not only there should be equality of opportunity but also favorable conditions for their success. National policy of Education of 1986 played a major role in empowering women on the issue of education.

To ensure access to education Village Education Committees, Mother-Teacher Associations (MTAs), Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyala - residential upper-primary schooling program were started. Provision of more female teachers, separate schools for girls, availability of open learning resources, residential schooling and coaching facilities were initiated To ensure retention Gender sensitization of teachers and educational administrators was carried out. Incentives to attract to school such as mid-day meals, free textbooks, uniforms, dry rations (rice or wheat), etc. were given, Scholarships and merit-linked awards for girls and children from SC and ST communities, uniforms and transport including bicycles were provided. To bring them back to the school short courses under the aegis of Mahila Shikshan Kendra / Balika Shikshan Shivir were initiated.

To eradicate this inequality the government launched several plans in mid 1980's for girls. In 1987 – British ODA supported the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project and the Swedish supported the Shiksha Karmi Project, Rajasthan, in 1988 – the Netherlands supported the Mahila Samakhya – Education for Women's Equality project in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, in 1990 – UNICEF supported the Bihar Education Program and the World Bank supported the Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Program, in 1992 – the Swedish supported Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan. Programs such as Shiksha Karmi, Lok Jumbish, and Mahila Samakhya have shown the importance of building up women's capacities and skills.

Not only government, NGO's have also tried some programs. Meanwhile, the decentralization in education was felt. Decentralization has left a mark in Karnataka, where local communities made a point that teachings and learning should continue. Need to promote capacities of women leaders to bring them into mainstream was also felt. Investments were made in adult programs also. Women awareness and confidence was to be raised through them.

Mahila Samakhya promoted the view that education should be seen as a process in social relation and not aware of it.

The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002 made elementary education a Fundamental Right for children in the age group of 6-14 years by providing that “the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine”.

This has been a path breaking legislation in India,

From 1990 to 2006 numbers of strategies were introduced and the aim was universal access to education for all. No doubt government policies have tried to reduce gender gaps by promoting gender equality like reports of KC and NPA 1986 and PUA in 1992. Shiksha Ka Haq Abhiyan was planned for the implementation of RTE. The government was to be engaged with the community, media, states, and other stakeholders to create an environment and mechanism to ensure implementation at every level for girls' education.

Unfortunately all these programs do not reveal that in terms of attendance and drop out rate huge gender disparity can be seen. The enrollment rate is not matching with the success of policy (dearth of study is there, except the Mahila Samakhya Project which is clear, government plans have been narrowly calculated). Uniform strategies were provided across states but because of the limitation in budget and other factors, they were not implemented. For e.g. Mukhtangan program in Rajasthan could go on till 2004 only but later was merged with SSA and could not serve the purpose for which it was started i.e. for the most deprived.

The education policy in India has failed to address issue of gender equality. There is a need to revise textbooks. Even women's movement has focused their attention more on women's health, violence and other issues. They rarely addressed issue of education Government policies and programs are not sustained. In the absence of social pressure, gender difference remains barring all children having access to good quality education. Though KGBV programs of government of India is helping girls from least disadvantaged groups. Ramachandran snakes and ladder analysis points to certain factors such as empowering adult women which affects girls education. For example in Mahila Samakhya project for education and women's equality, mothers encourage daughters so that they should not suffer as they suffered under constraints.⁸ Decline in the number of children shows a positive impact towards girls education. Even among illiterate women is visible. Decline in quantity of children leads to quality of life. Still more effort is required to push them to pass the elementary level and go for secondary level.

The need of the day is intensive process-based, multi-sectoral approaches to increase and maintain enrolment rate. Recent strategies and policies need to be monitored and assessed. There is a need to follow holistic approach to remove wide range of barriers of girls' education in India. Health violence, socio economic and religious practices, HIV/AIDS are the issues that needs attention to bring them into framework of education. Policy wise we are in the right direction but in implementation we are failing. 'Mainstreaming gender is possible only when state, society and leaders work together.

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