



## **BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES IN GIRLS' EDUCATION AND STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE THEIR EDUCATION**

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### **Abstract**

The problems of girls are different from the problems of the boys. The girl-child actually suffers at the basic stage of conception before she is born from the womb of her mother. Education has a crucial role to play in breaking the cycle of female disadvantage. Education is a way of bringing about attitudinal changes and should also be used as a way of simultaneously preparing boys to accept girls as equals. The paper studies the barriers in the way of girl child education, presents the short description of constitutional provision and national policies for promoting girl child education. Looking into consideration the present problems & position of girl child education in Ambala & Panchkula districts of Haryana the researcher explains some strategies which can help to promote it.

### **Introduction**

Education has a crucial role to play in breaking the cycle of female disadvantage. It provides skills to enhance capabilities and serves as a catalyst for emancipator struggles. Education is a way of bringing about attitudinal changes and should also be used as a way of simultaneously preparing boys to accept girls as equals. Education for girl child has long term economic implications for the nation. It is important to understand that increasing the number of girls in schools, and thereby increasing the number of literate adult women, has a positive effect on both economic growth and social wellbeing.

We also need to ensure equal status for the girl children as citizens in their own right. For any country to progress, one half of its population cannot be denied the right to education. This denial is also a gross violation of many rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution, primary among them being the right to education and the right to equality. Global statistics reveal that 75% of the 130 million children who are out of school are girls. Illiterate girls grow up to be illiterate women. This results in lopsided development as it denies equal opportunities to equal citizens.

The problems of girls are different from the problems of the boys. The girl-child actually suffers at the basic stage of conception before she is born from the womb of her mother. At this stage, she suffers the onslaught on account of sex selective abortion. In this process of selection, once a child is identified as female, she is subjected to inhuman treatment leading to destruction in the womb of the mother. This is known as the process of female foeticide. It is no doubt a fact that we have a strong legislation on this score known as the famous legislation of 1996 banning the process of sex-determination. Sex determination is a heinous offence. The physicians restoring to this practice if proved, are liable for severe punishment. But the legislation of 1996 in actual practice has done little to avert this disturbing trend. The programs and policies for infants are thus woefully weak, lacking in seriousness about protecting their rights. The female child is considered as a liability on the parents who are influenced by traditions, values, social norms and social institutions like family, kinship and marriage.

### **Barriers to Girls' Education**

In order to overcome gender inequality and ensure access to education for girls, several challenges need to be addressed by researchers. In addition to primary challenges such as cultural customs, poverty and insecurity, many other factors may play a role such as low quality of education and political unrest. There are some challenges discussed below which are identified in India in many surveys and reports.

**Cultural customs:** Certain cultural and religious customs mean that in many parts of the world, the role of women in society is largely limited to the domestic sphere. As a result, girls' educational achievements are expected to be lower than boys' educational achievements.

**Poverty:** Poverty is another important factor contributing to the denial of access to education for girls in many parts of the world. Parents have to make economic choices based on the situation they are in, and a state of poverty may lead them to make decisions which result in their daughters being involved in child labour and or being subjected to child marriage.

**Child labour:** Child labour especially affects girls' education, as parents in many instances prefer to send male children to school. Girls' education is a lower priority and they are in many instances kept home to do domestic or other work. The priority given to boys' education is also reflected in fewer job opportunities for girls.

**Child marriage:** In some cultures and regions of the world, girls may be subjected to child marriage which often has a direct impact on access to education. Many of these girls will drop out of school. In 2010, 67 million women aged 20- 24 worldwide was married before the age of 18, in many cases against their will.

**Cost of education:** Another factor which prevents access to education in practice is the perception that education is expensive, despite the obligation to provide free universal primary education.

**Safety risks for girls:** Another challenge to realizing the right to education is the safety of girls. Compared to boys, girls are more likely to be victims of discrimination, sexual abuse, punishment and social intolerance. The safety issue is even more challenging in rural areas where schools are established in geographical locations which are difficult to reach and appropriate transport is lacking. Girls will often have to walk to reach school, and they are easier

exposed to sexual violence or bullying by men or boys. Many parents in such areas may choose to keep their girls at home rather than risking their safety.

- Gender bias pervades all spheres of life and society and influences political decision-making as well as intra –familial attitudes and values.
- Young girls are expected to help their mothers in household chores, take care of younger siblings and are also expected to take on other household responsibilities by contributing to the family income. Young girls are expected to eat the last and the least compared to their brothers.
- Regarding daughters as “Paraya Dhan” or another’s property is a common norm as they eventually have to leave their parents’ home and get married into another family. This reduces parental incentives in the education of girls.
- Girls born into poor households face far more restricted opportunities for education than girls born into wealthy households.
- Women belonging to scheduled caste tribes or minority communities have fewer opportunities compared to general category households. Perceptions of the value role and abilities of young girls are brought into the classroom.
- Girls are often expected to conform to the values and norms of a male dominated society, in which little or no encouragement is provided for them to develop their own aspirations.

#### **Rights of the girl child (National Plan of Action for Children 2005, DWCD, Government of India)**

- Assurance of equality of status for girl child as an individual and a citizen in her own right through promotion of special opportunities for her growth and development.
- To ensure survival, development and protection of the girl child and to create an environment wherein she lives a life of dignity with full opportunity for choice and development.
- To stop sex selection, female foeticide and infanticide.
- To eliminate child marriages.
- To ensure the girl child’s security and protect her from abuse, exploitation, victimization and other forms of violence.
- To protect the girl child from deprivation and neglect and to ensure the girl child equal share of care and resources in the home and the community and equal access to services.
- To take measures to protect girl children from any treatment, which undermines self-esteem and causes their exclusion from the social mainstream and also to break down persistent gender stereotype?
- To eliminate all obstacles that prevents girls from full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom including equal rights in succession and inheritance.
- To ensure equal opportunity for free and compulsory elementary education to all girls.

The Indian Constitution provides a framework within which provisions are available for the education of children. Article 45 of the Directive principles of state policy of the constitution of India enjoins on the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14. In 1993 in the landmark Unnikrishnan judgment, the Supreme Court ruled that the right to

education is a fundamental right flowing from the Right to Life in Article 21 of the constitution. Subsequently in 2002 education was made a fundamental right through the 86th Amendment Act to the Constitution. Since the passing of the act no concrete steps have been taken to turn this into a reality. The Right to Education Bill has not been passed yet. The center has framed a “model bill” that has been passed and sent to the state governments to be enacted into a law.

### **Major Policies and Schemes paving way for Girl Child Education**

Strategy for Girl Child Education in National Policy on Education, 1986 & Program of Action 1992: The NPE, 1986 calls for a substantial improvement in the conditions of work of teachers and the quality of teacher education. The policy also emphasized Teachers accountability to the Pupils, their parents, the community and to their own profession.

#### **Policy Parameters**

The policy parameters and the strategies of the NPE to promote girls’ education were aimed

- To get the entire education system to play positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women.
- To encourage educational institutions to take up active programs to enhance women status and further women development in all sectors.
- To widen women access to vocational technical and professional education at all levels breaking gender stereotypes.
- To create dynamic management structure that will be able to respond to the challenge posed by the mandate.

### **The National Policy on Empowerment of Women, 2001**

The National Policy on Empowerment of Women, 2001 is aimed at women’s advancement in different spheres. This policy is the output of various international obligations along with internal interventions. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country. Therefore this policy is aimed at improving the status of women in the society by empowering them especially those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/ Other Backward classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and in the informal, unorganized sector, by providing them with educational and health benefits.

#### **Programmes for Girls**

- Balika Swashakthi programme was implemented in all the 1120 mandals covering 5600 identified gram panchayats. This programme is implemented to encourage enrolment, retention and capacity building among girls through vocational training, short term camps for out of school girls, supply of sports and musical equipment, remedial and supportive material for slow learners and child friendly elements at schools.
- Mothers’ Committees: Mothers’ and Women Committees in every school were empowered to decide on financial incentives for girls up to maximum of Rs.150/- per girl child per year.

### **Tenth Five Year Plan - Gender specific programs**

The tenth five year plan has also recommended gender specific programs to reduce gender disparity in education. To achieve the above, the plan has emphasized on the existing women centric programs such as Mahila Samakhya, and two new schemes, the Kasturba Gandhi

Swantantra Vidyalaya (KGSV) and the National Programme for the Education of Girls at the Elementary Level (NPEGEL).

### **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)**

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) is being implemented by the Government of India by setting up to 750 residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level for girls belonging predominantly to the SC, ST, BC and minorities in difficult areas. The scheme will be coordinated with the existing schemes of Department of Elementary Education & Literacy viz. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Mahila Samakhya (MS).

### **Components of the scheme**

- Setting up of residential schools where there are a minimum of 50 girls predominantly from the SC, ST and minority communities available to study in the school at the elementary level. The number can be more than 50 depending on the number of eligible girls.
- To provide necessary infrastructure for these schools
- To prepare and procure necessary teaching learning material and aids for the schools
- To put in place appropriate systems to provide necessary academic support and for evaluation and monitoring
- To motivate and prepare the girls and their families to send them to residential school
- At the primary level the emphasis will be on the slightly older girls who are out of school and were unable to complete primary schools (10+). However, in difficult areas (migratory populations, scattered habitations that do not qualify for primary/ upper primary schools) younger girls can also be targeted
- At the upper primary level, emphasis will be on girls, especially, adolescent girls who are unable to go to regular schools
- In view of the targeted nature of the scheme, 75% girls from SC, ST, OBC or minority communities would be accorded priority for enrolment in such residential schools and only thereafter, 25% girls from families below poverty line.
- Established NGOs and other non-profit making bodies will be involved in the running of the schools, wherever possible. These residential schools can also be adopted by the corporate groups.

### **The 'National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)**

NPEGEL has been formulated for education of under privileged/disadvantaged girls from class I to VIII as a separate and distinct gender component plan of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). This was started as an amendment to the scheme of SSA for providing additional components for education of girls at elementary level. This scheme targets the following categories of girl children:

- Out of school girls
- Drop outs girls
- Overage girls, who have not completed elementary education
- Working girls
- Girls from marginalized social groups.

- Girls with low attendance
- Girls with low levels of

### **Strategies to Promote Girl Education**

**Promoting health in schools:** The School-Based Healthy Living and HIV/AIDS Prevention Education programme should design to develop life skills such as communication, cooperation and problem-solving.

**Promoting sports in schools:** The chance should be given to girls be leaders and improve their confidence and self-esteem. As girls participate in sports, they acquire new interpersonal skills and through additional social networks gain access to different opportunities, allowing them to become more engaged in school and community life.

**Eliminating gender bias from textbooks and learning materials:** The Government should develop new gender sensitive teacher-training modules, ensuring that future textbooks are gender neutral, and providing training in gender and child rights to national education managers and members of local parent-teacher associations.

**Scheduling lessons flexibly:** The school schedule should be flexible; though it runs for two hours a day, six days a week, the times are set by local parents, and the school calendar is adapted to fit local considerations such as the harvest.

**Teaching in the local language:** The language of instruction should be different from the children's mother tongue; it is often more disabling for girls, who tend to be less exposed to social environments beyond their immediate families.

**Providing early childhood programmes:** All children are likely to benefit from pre-school care, but evidence suggests that it enhances girls' preparedness for school more than boys'.

**Enabling young mothers to return to school:** In many countries girls who become pregnant while at school are forbidden to return to their studies. They should be encouraged to come back.

**Taking special measures to reach the most disadvantaged girls:** In some countries and regions where ethnic minorities, people living in rural areas and the poor face discrimination and exclusion, girls often suffer a multiple disadvantage because of their gender. The more disadvantaged the girl, the more essential it is that the education system should reach out to her through special measures, rather than just assuming she will be drawn in as part of a general drive for education for all.

**Providing alternative education for girls:** One way of reaching girls who have dropped out of school, as well as other groups such as working children and children in conflict situations, is through education centers established outside the formal school system.

**Providing alternative education for overage children:** Girls were the initial focus of the project due to their low enrolment rates. But the difficulty in locating them, either because they were working indoors or they married, failed to adequately address gender in the enrolment process. It has been successful reaching excluded or 'hidden' groups of children, including orphans, children of single parents and young mothers.

**Locating schools closer to children's homes:** if necessary by establishing small, multigrade or multiage schools in remote rural areas. Girls are less likely to be able to make a long journey

from home to school, not least because of concerns about their safety en route. Burkina Faso, for example, has developed a network of ‘satellite schools’. These are small schools that accommodate only the first three grades, allowing the youngest children (who start school at the age of 7) to gain their first experience of school in or close to their own villages.

**Making sure girls and boys are safe:** Parents will naturally hesitate to send their daughters to schools that are thought to be sites of physical or sexual gender violence. Boys and girls are often susceptible to psychological and physical violence in different ways, and adolescents in particular can find themselves especially vulnerable to violations of their safety. Lack of safety and security in the school environment may be very obvious in terms of physical danger, such as beatings or rape. The abuse of girls – sexual, physical and emotional – by teachers is a common problem.

**Encouraging girls’ participation and activism for education:** Girls can be the most effective and inspiring advocates of child-friendly education if they are given the chance. Through the process of school mapping and the use of indigenous knowledge, the clubs were able to identify homes with out-of-school children, develop a list of all the children who were not going to school within the school’s catchment area and take the initiative in bringing them to school.

**Supplying safe water and wash rooms:** Many girls drop out of school at the onset of menstruation, partly because there are no separate toilet facilities. Sometimes it is not enough simply to provide the wash rooms; so these should be provided.

**Decreasing the domestic workload:** Many girls are kept at home to help with domestic tasks. Supplying communities or women’s groups with equipment such as mills to grind cereals, huskers, carts and plastic barrels for water conservation, can decrease the amount of work to be done so that girls can be freed to attend school. Girls may also be prevented from going to school because they have to fetch water from a traditional well or remote water pump. It should be controlled.

**National efforts:** The most successful girls’ education initiatives incorporate many or most of these facets into an integrated programme.

The nation cannot afford to ignore the needs of the girl child any further; the nation cannot discriminate at every stage of life in matters like basic nutrition, education and living standard or just relegate her to the stereotyped role of a wife, mother or a sister. She needs to be recognized as the “Woman of the future”. Education and training helps the woman to hone her talents. She can earn money. She has the ability to put the money earned in future education of her children. She can also spend the money of better healthcare of her children. An educated woman is sure to defend herself better than an illiterate one against men, crimes and abuse. There are still miles to go in this regard. We all are proud citizens of India. The need of the hour is to realize our responsibilities and give a halt to this evil crime. We should take all possible steps to curb the brutal and undesirable practice of mass killing of girls. A determined drive can initiate a spark to the lamp and show the world that we all are parts of mother India.

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