



## Promote Girls' Education Rajesh Sharma

### ABSTRACT

“If you educate a man you only create a skilled person, but if you educate a girl you educate the whole family”. The belief is internally felt true in words and practice. But there seems little will for to promote educational possibilities for girl child. The girl child does not only contribute in the growth of the family but also in the economic growth of the nation. There have been several government initiatives and non-government organizations initiatives but the results have not been realized in that proportion. There are several constraints but possibilities also. The necessity of the time is to come out of gender biasness and bring up children whether it is a girl or a boy to its fullest capacity so it can contribute for the development of the family and the nation at large. The happiest note is that the political will and social awareness has made a significant change in the statistics of women literacy. The gap between the literacy rate of boys and the girls is decreasing. Girls are gaining confidence to take up responsible positions. They are making the world realize with special reference to India that women are no less than man. Still miles to go before India become a developed nation.

In 2002, the 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act made elementary education a fundamental Right for all children in the age group of 6-14 years. There is a consensus amongst educational experts that the primary hurdle in achieving this target if bringing the girl child to school, especially those from lower and backward economic classes and castes of the Indian society ( report of the task force on education for women's equality) it is of little surprise that the current united progressive alliance government at the centre, now entrusted to implement the requirement, has a particular emphasis on education reforms, with special weight age being given to “empowering women” and “education for women equality” in their national common minimum program ‘. The NCERT frame work that provides guidelines for the syllabi in the primary, middle and high school curricula is due to be released in April 2005. The central Advisory Board of Education’ which is the apex body on Education, has formulated a special subcommittee

for Girl's Education and common school system' as well as committee for “universilization of secondary education”, to identify the obstacles for achieving gender parity in the current educational set up.

Education is on the concurrent list of the constitution and hence the responsibility of both the central and the state Governments. In July 2003, a special thrust on women's education came from the Indian Government through the National Program of Education for Girls at Elementary Levels (NPEGEL), as a party Sarva Shikha Abhiyan (SSA). A budget of over Rs. 10 billion has been promised to this scheme. The program aimed to develop a model Girl Child Friendly School at the cluster level (10 villages) with incentives to provide, among other things, uniforms, stationary, free text books, remedial teaching and bridge courses. Another scheme was formulated on behalf of the government – Kasturba Gandhi Balika

Vidyalaya (KGBV) to encourage preferentially backward class caste girls to be in school.

Women education is a critical focus for any 'welfare state' and India is no exception. Numerous reports of various committees and subcommittees are at test to this. Each five year plan has made special provisions for the education of women in India. Under the constitution of India, men and women are equal citizens in the eyes of the law and hence have the equal rights to all state resources. But social, economic and cultural dynamics have prevented them from translating into reality. Statistics available for as recent as 2001-2002 suggests the participation of girls in primary, middle and high school are 44.1, 41.8 and 39.5% respectively. Female literacy stands at 53.7% compared to 76% for men, according to the 2001 census report. According to Government reports, 45 districts in India, mainly in the status of Bihar, Utter Pradesh, Jarkhand and Orissa have female literacy below 30%

What we have seen so far is that the policy makers have time and again opened the dialogues and tried to impress upon the state and its people the gravity and the need to address the role of education in attaining gender parity and situating gender in educational framework. In 19 67-68 the education Commission clearly stated in their report that " For full development of our human resources, for improvement of homes and for moulding the character of children during the most impossible years of infancy, the education of women goes much beyond the home and bringing up of children. She is now adopting a career of her own and sharing equality with man the responsibility for the development of society in all its aspects. This is the direction in which we will have to move."

The national policy on education (NPE) that was drafted in 1986 and revised in 1992 was a landmark in the field of policy on women's education in that it recognized the need to address traditional gender imbalance in educational access and achievement." It recognized that the entire 'educational system is alive to the gender and regional dimensions of educational disparities" and that there is a need for a positive interventionist role in the improvement of women." Their plan of action recommended that

all bureaus of the Department of Education prepare a concrete action plan addressing gender related concerns as well as a monitoring unit be created in planning division of the department to ensure integration of gender issues into policy programmes and schemes. In addition, all annual report had to clearly spell out what steps had been taken to improve women and girls' access to education. The Report of the Task Force on Education for Women's Equality also states that, "It is impossible to achieve Universal Elementary Education unless concerted efforts are made to reach out to the girl."

The question then begging to be asked is: Despite a progress policy on Education, why does India still face an acute challenge in bringing the girl child to school? One of the key challenges to women's education and one that suggests sharp divisions in planning amongst policy makers themselves are two different visions on why education is important for India's women. There is one school of thought that would like education to augment the 'traditional' role of women. Educating the woman in a family almost inevitably advances access to education and basic health for the children. She can also supplement the income if she chooses to work. Such women are better informed about their rights, access to resources and can strive to make her home and family reach better living standards. There is another view, which is increasingly gaining popularity with human right activist and feminists who demanded that the state should consider women's education a fundamental rights of an individual. In other words, these groups do not consider women's access to education as instruments of achieve development, but as yardsticks of a 'developed' society. In reality, these are both true and it is important to recognize that both emphasize that progress in society and women's education go hand in hand.

Even as there is dissonance among the activist and educationists over the purpose of educating girls, there is unanimity that the barriers of education are both at school level as well as system level. While school level barriers include lack of adequate infrastructure like separate toilet facilities for girls and fewer women teachers , an inadequate legal

framework that makes educating the girl child compulsory form a system- level barrier. An attempt is made to scale some of these impediments and suggests broad intervention strategies.

### **SON PREFERENCE**

The task force report on education for women equality's recommendations for the national education policy highlighted some staggering statistics. For every 100 girls enrolled in classes 1, 82, 62 and 14 girls in urban areas remained in class V, VIII and XII respectively. However the decline is even more alarming in rural areas where 40, 18 and 1 girl student remained in the corresponding classes. In a society where female feticide is on the rises (923female per 1000 males below age of six), girls are considered a curse and burden on the family. Whether, we choose to look at this problem from an existing social bias against women in society or from an economic point of view. A poor family struggling with resources will often make sacrifices for the boy to go to school for higher education, but not for the girls.

### **LACK OF PURPOSE**

'Why educate girls?' "They will be married"-is a common sentiments echoed by many parents from all economic strata since it is perceived that she will be married and leave the family, and that the family will have to spend large sums of money on her dowry . Unsure of whether she can have a career of any sort after marriage. Families find it less willing to make investments for the girl's education. We need to understand these dynamics and how they affect the education of the girl child.

### **LACK OF INCENTIVES**

If the government of India is seriously interested in encouraging increased participation of the girl child in the educational process, it must invent strategies and incentives on how to make education of the child high on its priority list. Inadequate legal framework and awareness that the education is compulsory and free, contributes to lower female enrolment in schools. Absence of birth certificates prevents eligibility for admissions or examination. Often girls are less likely to be registered than boys.

Also programmes need to be in place that encourages. "Back to school" initiatives include the pregnant girls and even post delivery. It might be interest to note that in the late 80s and early90s the state of Bihar had a policy where women candidates to professional colleges in Bihar were awarded 30 points (out of 300) extra in the entrance exam. In the latter 90s, this policy was challenged in the high court and overturned. While this policy was held as contentious, this helped greater enrolment of women candidates in engineering and medical colleges in Bihar the government must explore similar policies that encourage greater participation of girl in primary and secondary education.

### **LACK OF SAFETY**

Safety has been a major barrier to girl's education in a society that looks upon them as vulnerable and weaker sex. Though, safety issues concern both young boys and girls. A family will very often let the son travel miles to go to the high-school or college, but not be as comfortable letting the daughter travel alone. Concerns for inadequate safety in school are justified. Perhaps the biggest example of the Tamil Nadu which were brought to the new India press telling hundreds of stories of molestation of girls in Tamil Nadu which were brought to light by the Tamil Nadu women's commission. Stories of teachers groping young girls, of menstruating girls being humiliated in school, of complacent administrators and unrepentant teachers are horrifying. These are not isolated incident occurring only in Tamil Nadu.

### **LACK OF EASY ACCESS TO SCHOOLS**

The educational system in India is set up in a tiered structure such that for every 100 primary schools there are only 25 middle and 1 high school. If the school is not easily accessible, dropouts are automatically ensured. This is especially true in places that are conflict and instability leads to preventing girl children from going to school. Children are often separated from families and thus unable to attend schools. In conflict-ridden places, girls are often required to head households and there is a disproportionate care-taking burden on

girls. This is true for places that have been severely affected by natural disasters.

### **LACK OF PROPER TIMING**

The girl child in rural India is often engaged in family chores and house-hold duties from an early age. She is often entrusted with taking care of siblings. Child labour is an important concern that must be addressed; it is closely related with opportunities for education. Between 50 and 120 million children in India are involved in child labour, as per estimates from human rights watch, south Asian coalition on child servitude 3 and operations research group Baroda. A significant number of these children –about 15 million – are bonded labourers. They are indentured by their parents as security for loans between Rs 500 to Rs 5000 that they might have taken from money lenders. They have little choice but to work under conditions that are often abusive and inhuman. Girls from a greater part of the child labour force than boys. Under these conditions, numerous human rights groups have argued that participation in education processes is closely correlated to child labour.”

### **LACK OF TOILET FACILITY**

Schools that do not have provision for proper sanitation can easily be of no use for girls, there are very striking correlation between number of girl students and the availability of toilet facilities in the school. Any new school that is built and all existing schools need to ensure that these toilets exist and are maintained in good conditions. There are serious health problems that may arise if a child is not able to access the toilet during school hours. At the same time this strongly ensures that beyond a few years, she will find it impossible to continue in school. If the school infrastructure is not sensitive to her biological needs.

### **LACK OF AWARENESS ON NUTRITION**

Gender bias in society is tied to the health of the girl child. A young girl who is mal-nourished cannot be asked to go to school. Integrating health requirement for girl child in the frame work of the school should be compulsory. 80% of Indian

women today are anaemic. Malnutrition is much higher amongst girls than boys. It is imperative that this issue be addressed through ‘mid-day meal programs’ of the government that will ensure the basic nutritional requirement of the girls. Provisions for these schemes exist within the current framework of government schemes. The central government funds a mid-day meal program for all primary and secondary schools that is aimed towards providing cooked and nutritious meals.

A curriculum approach that incorporates educating children the distinct advantages of healthful meal is required to correct this imbalance.

### **LACK OF TRAINING FOR TEACHERS AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS**

The 1992 task force report calls for all teachers and instructors to be agents of women’s empowerment. NCERT, SCERT and the university systems are asked to develop innovative training programmes with assistance from concerned organization and women’s groups. Keeping these recommendations in mind gender and poverty sensitization programs need to be developed for teachers and school administrators. This can be done either through workshops for existing schools or the B.ED. Training/curriculum, district institutes of education and training (DIET) and National Council for Teacher Education. Existing women’s studies developments in leading universities as well as grass roots organizations working on gender issues should be especially involved in designing these training programs.

An important constraining factor for girl’s education is the lack of women teachers in rural areas. In order to meet the existing shortfalls, special training programmes and incentives for women to join teaching should be designed. Women teachers often instill confidence in parents to send their girls to schools. In fact, if necessary, preference should be given to recruiting women teachers in rural areas.

Another major system-level barrier to promoting gender parity in education is that learning outcomes are not defined in terms of literacy, numeracy and

life-skills based education. There is a lack of learning assessment tools, which is a major impediment to ascertaining the efficacy of the current process. A broad strategy to address this should include an assessment tool that shows the links between curriculum teacher training and outcomes for learning.

## **STEREOTYPES AND GENDER ROLES**

In a democratic and socialistic pattern of society, we visualize that education will be related to individual capacities, aptitudes and interests, which are not strictly related to sex. Numerous cases where schools and educational contents reiterate prejudices that our society thrusts on the girl child. That she has lesser worth, that she is 'not as good', examples constantly focus on the achievements of man at the expense of women feeling consistently left out and inferior. We do not even realize that they are left out. Often these examples are not left out deliberately. But because we do not care to know and because stereotypes make us fail to see the inadequacies pertaining to recognize women's achievements and when we list examples of achievements of women, we list those that reiterate our biases, for e.g. we know Florence Nightingale as the great nurse. But do we know her as the inventor of the pie chart?

The education commission had addressed this issue in their report, as early as 1964, to encourage young girls in schools; they had prescribed special emphasis on curricula for girls. The following were specially mentioned in the report 1. Home science should be made a subject in the curriculum in the higher- secondary stage, as this would be popular amongst girls. But they also mentioned that this should not be compulsory for girls. 2- music and fine arts is popular amongst girl students and should be thought in the curriculum, but it is important to know that boys may also have very strong aptitudes in these subjects. Gender stereotypes often prevent them from pursuing these skills. Some universities like Vishwa Bharti in Shantiniketan that was started by Rabindranath Tagore, attempted to provide a gender free environment for students to pursue education in fine arts. Educational policies need to absolutely

understand the visions and the philosophy of such educational pioneers like Tagore and adopt some of these models in the design of schools and universities.

The lack of gender sensitivity in the design and content of curriculum seeps into the psyche of the youth who are not sensitive to the biases against women. In the transitional phase in which we are at present. Certain psychological difference and divisions in social functions exist and need to be taken into account in design of curriculum, numerous groups, especially those that have been addressing the problems of domestic violence have identified that redress is necessary at an early stage to prevent men and women of tomorrow from dragging these biases into the future. It is important to address the problems of the adolescent males and present the gender sensitive perspectives to them this is explained in the article "Gender Sensitivity education for adolescent male student" given the strong correlations between social biases and domestic violence these perspectives must become integrated into our mainstream school curriculum. But care should be taken to see that values and attitudes that are essential in the long run are increasingly built up in boys and girls and that no step should be taken that will perpetuate or intensify the existing differences.

In today's world, mathematics and sciences are often important subjects as well as the secondary stage and special efforts need to be made to prepare women teachers in these subjects. Computer training for boys and girls is useful and needs to start at an early stage without gender bias. Many schemes and projects under the Bharat Gyan Samithi have succeeded in talking computer center to the villages. In another case Vignyan Vahini in Pune, Maharashtra developed an interesting mobile science laboratory in school van and went around village schools that would allow children to perform their physics, chemistry and biology experiment with the help of the mobile laboratory. Such interesting models that have been developed in the non formal sector are worth investigating in designing a curriculum for children that achieves its purpose.

Numerous studies in the last decade, in the international arena have show that educating the women population in country helps economic growth. A study by the UN showed that increased education of the girl child might allow for the building of a greater labour force than increased education of the male child, from the current baseline, also some economists contend that increased economic and educational empowerment of women –more so than that of the man – contributes to reducing poverty in the family case studies from India, Bangladesh, Zambia and Kenya are cities as proof of this contention. These studies make a case rather convincingly that increased educational empowerment of the women will lead to greater poverty reduction and increased economic progress. There could not be a better argument for investment in education for the girl child than form an economic perspective

The analysis of gender and education highlights two aspects – the socio-cultural issues and economics that dictate the position of women in the society, albeit overlapping, these have distinct roles as well. We needs to understand the social and cultural frameworks within which our communities live and how these affect education (though the reverse is also important for other discussions) the article “education trends in India” clearly presents the correlation between our biases and the absences of the girl children from our schools. Our reason might be that the biases of our societies have resulted in our schools not meeting the needs of the girl child. The existing infrastructures in schools are highly inadequate to address this issue. At the time some time, the problems. One has to analyze what keeps them away.

Economics is the other critical factor in determining why girls drop out. however it is equally important to remember that while limited resources (economics) as well as existing social and cultural biases are impediments to girls education, it is not necessary that there is a strict one to one correlation between these and women’s empowerment. We have seen like Punjab and Haryana that are economically most advanced have the worst sex–ratio and dowry death, along with the metropolitan cities like Delhi and Chandigarh.

“Education, gender, and social change” adders this conflict and contrasts situations where improving economic conditions have and have not brought about empowerment of women.

And yet women’s education is not the solve-all panacea for gender empowerment. As the article “Feminist Pedagogy in a modernization Framework” points out, these are issues of conflict arising within gender and even within women’s movements, class and caste stratifications exist within women’s groups. These are very often impediment to empowerment of grass roots women – the very developmental cause that the movements champion.

In this journal issue on gender and education, we have to ask how gender biases affect education. We have found that several schemes and policies and the intent of purpose exist within the set up the government. We have tried to explore. If there is a relationship between the biases in society and that even after fifty years of independence and despite the intent, we have failed to bring a large section of our girl children into the system of formal education. This has translated into an obvious absence of social sensitivity towards the needs of women, living them most vulnerable to poverty and abuse. What the impact of this will be on our future of our entire society is a question we have not even begun to fathom.

This journal is intended to thread together various aspects of bringing the girls child in to the mainstream education forum by identifying impediments to such a goal. A modest effort is made to address the issue and identify broad intervention strategies. The Indian constitution recommends 6% of annual budget to be spent on education. However in reality only 3.2% is spent. An increase in that amount would be very helpful in removing infrastructure deficiencies that hinder access to schools, it is very important to bring a gender sensitive perspective in to design and infrastructures of the schools and make schools more accessible to girls and school timings more flexible especially in areas where there are more drop outs amongst girls, policy maker should also engage in thinking beyond traditional school models and encourage open school/ distance

learning system and others innovative educational programs will reach out to remote rural areas. However, these need to be run as government programs to ensure the state responsibility in educational system,

Despite the fact that the journey with several years, it is encouraging to note that literacy rates amongst women have increased and that the gap between enrolment of boys and girls in schools are decreasing over the years. It is also heartening to note that policy makers see the glaring inadequacies in our education system and have reinitiated a dialogue on gender and education.

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