

Education Key for Women Empowerment in India

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Abstract: United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said that “educating girls is not an option, it is a necessity”, and the 189 countries that signed up for the Education for All (EFA) initiative in 2000 showed their support by pledging to eliminate gender disparities in education by 2005. The value of girls’ education has received global recognition over the past two decades with the mounting awareness in the drive towards women’s equality and emancipation. Women are today venturing into different fields breaking the male monopoly in the political arena, administration, science, technology, journalism and the like. In fact, in certain professions like medicine, nursing care, teaching, social work, they have proved to be better than men. The Government of India has opened the door and windows of education for all so far as equalization of educational opportunity is concerned. Though the era of Sarva-ShikshaAbhiyan is continuing, the enrolment of girls is still lower than that of boys.

Keywords: Kasturba Gandhi BalikaVidyalaya (KGBV), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SAA).

1. INTRODUCTION.

In the Indian context, the concern for women’s empowerment was very visible in the thoughts and writings of social reformers of the 19th and 20th Centuries and this rich legacy of women empowerment was once again reemphasized by our constitutional framers which later on was translated by the government into policies, initiatives, schemes, and programs for promoting women empowerment, The growing concern for bringing and attitudinal change in society for empowering women got culminated in the declaration of 2001 as the empowerment year for women. India is a democratic country. Apart from this, it is a fact that there is a deep ignorance in the society about the values of women. Nowadays our government is trying to give special attention to the participation of women in society and to their education, socioeconomic and political awareness.

Education is a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities, to challenge their traditional roles and to change their lives similar ideas were supported in International Conference-1994. It was said that Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Educating women benefits the whole society. It has a more significant impact on poverty and development than men’s education. It is also one of the most influential factors in improving child health and reducing infant mortality. Educated women can be of immense help in different ways for the family. Education enhances the women empowerment in the following ways:

1. Education provides financial and economic security to a woman and with that she can prove her worthiness.
2. Education plays as important role in removing economic poverty by opening various job avenues for her so that she can work hand in hand with man and give support to the family, which in the long run strengthens the economy.
3. Every woman has got her own aspiration, which may be high or low, but education helps to maintain a balanced aspiration knowing her interest, ability and potential which further helps her to choose a correct field of her work so that she can become a contributing factor to the family and society.
4. Education helps in the mental development of women and a mentally satisfied and contented woman is an asset to a family, society and nation and she can use her efficiency and potential in the right manner.
5. An educated woman is a guiding light for the children, family members, society and nation.
6. Education is the input which a woman grasps and with the behavior comes the output.
7. An educated woman can bring change in the attitude of family members and society by questioning the conservative thoughts of the people and blind faith.
8. Education helps women to play a leading role in decision-making process at family level, and social, political and economic fronts.

2. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN EDUCATION

The Constitution of India in Article 15(1) on right to equality provides the basic policy framework that enshrines the vision of girls' education and the spirit in which their education is to be provided. In the National Policy on Education 1986, (as modified in 1992) a new thrust was provided to girls' education, which provided a holistic vision for the education of women and girls. In the 42th Constitutional Amendment (1976) the Central Government has played a more proactive role in the sector through several centrally sponsored schemes that had a distinct bearing on promoting education for girls. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002 has made elementary education a Fundamental Right for children in the age group of 6-14 years by providing the "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". Subsequently, on 26 August 2009 the parliament received the assent of the President and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education, 2009 was published in the Gazette of India on 27 August 2009.

3. NEW INITIATIVES FOR PROMOTING GIRL'S EDUCATION

Some of the notable schemes that have come up in recent years are as follows:

3.1. Mahila Samakhya

The Mahila Samakhya (MS) scheme was started in 1989 to translate the goals enshrined in the National Policy on Education-1986 into a concrete program for the education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly those from socially and economically marginalized groups through informal learning. The program has focused on awareness of the need to educate the children, especially girls, which has resulted in a direct impact on enrolment and retention of girls in schools.

3.2. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

The scheme has special features focusing on education of girls, which include provision of free textbooks to all girls up to class VIII, separate toilets for girls, back to school camps for out-of-school girls, bridge courses for older girls, recruitment of 50 percent women teachers, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centers in/near schools in convergence with ICDS program.

3.3. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)

The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) has been formulated for providing additional support for education of underprivileged/disadvantaged girls at elementary level.

3.4. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme was launched by the Government of India in August, 2004 for setting up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging predominantly to the SC, ST, OBC and minorities in different areas.

4. PROBLEMS AND ISSUES OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

Indians are conservative by nature. Their blind faith, dogmas, social taboos, conservative attitude and superstition stood against the girl's education of our country. As reported earlier, the enrolment of girl's constitutes only 35 percent of the total enrolment, as against their population proportion of 48 percent, indicating the huge quantitative gap that is required to be bridged to achieve the desired goal of equality of educational development between boys and girls. Various problems in connection with the development of girl's education in India can be discussed as follows:

4.1. Lack of Parental Awareness

India is a poor country where a large number of people are living below the poverty line. From a very early age, girls begin to look after their younger brothers and sisters and do household work to relieve their parents to go out as laborers or to work in the farms. Generally parents prefer boy's education to girl's education. Thus lack of parental aware-

ness towards girl's education holds back the girls at home.

4.2. Lack of Separate Institutions for Girls

The percentage of girl's institutions to total number of major types of educational institutions still works out to be 10 to 15, as against their enrolment proportion of 30. In the case of middle and secondary schools, the proportion of girl's schools is in the range of 10 to 14 per cent as against their enrolment proportion of 34 and 35 percent respectively.

4.3. Paucity of Women Teachers

All the committees and commissions to appoint more women teachers in the institutions in order to attract more girls and to improve their enrolment ratios. The recommendations have still gone further in relaxing educational qualifications and training in case of women teachers and provision of special facilities like accommodation and special allowances to attract more women teachers to the profession.

4.4. Lack of Transport Facilities

Lack of transport facilities, particularly in rural areas for girls to attend middle and secondary schools, which are sufficiently far away from their habitations, is one of the major causes of the large-scale dropout of girls after completing lower primary education.

4.5. Inadequate Hostel Facilities

Many girls desirous of pursuing education above middle level cannot avail the facilities due to lack of hostel arrangements.

4.6. Insecurity

Parents often complain about existence of insecurity for girls to attend schools. Occurrence of cases of abduction and molestation of girls often dampens the enthusiasm of girls in pursuing education beyond a certain age, when their parents bind them to homes.

4.7. Fixed Schooling Hours

Fixed schooling hours do not suit girls in rural areas, as they are wanted for domestic work at home or in farms and fields for collecting fire-wood, coal waste, cow dung and fetching water during these hours.

4.8. Unattractive School Environment

Lack of proper place for girl's sitting in the classrooms, absence of separate arrangements for games and sports, separate toilets for girls, separate arrangements for games and sports, separate common room, existence of unkind and discriminating attitude of

teachers and masculine atmosphere in the institutions affect adversely the enrolment rates of girls in schools.

5. SUGGESTIONS

Keeping in view the above problems, the following measures are suggested for the educational development of girls:

5.1. Community Awareness

The two possible ways of achieving this are: 1) The formation of women's organizations. 2) The second strategy is to sensitize the young ladies both at the primary and secondary school levels.

5.2. Women Teachers

At least 50 percent of the total strength of teachers at the elementary stage should be women to attract more girls to schools.

5.3. Access to Education

Schooling facilities should be provided to the girls nearer to their place of residence.

5.4. Transport and Hostel Facilities

Adequate arrangements should be made for free transport of girls to school. Free or cheap hostel facilities may be provided to girls.

5.5. Co-Education

Co-education has gained momentum in modern India. But co-education can be successful, if mixed staff is provided in mixed schools and separate toilet facilities and common room are provided for girls.

5.6. Incentives

Adequate provision of incentives in the form of freeships, free supply of books, stationery, uniforms and midday meals, attendance scholarships and stipends e.t.c.

5.7. Scholarships for Girls

Scholarships to the outstanding girls of different communities in different disciplines will motivate them to come ahead for education and compete with their classmates.

5.8. Reservation of Seats for Girls in Different Disciplines

There should be the provision of reservation of seats for girls in different disciplines as

there is reservation for SC and BC candidates.

5.9. Childcare Centre and Balwadis

Establishment of childcare centres or balwadis as a part of the elementary education system is necessary to enable girls to bring their younger brothers and sisters with them for whose care they have been charged with the responsibility. Otherwise, they would not be in a position to attend schools.

5.10. Social Changes and Legislation

The State Governments should strictly enforce the existing legislations on the age of marriage of girls, dowry system and compulsory education.

6. CONCLUSION

A well - integrated concentrated and holistic approach to the girls education is an essential requisite for generating an environment conducive to promote the condition of women empowerment. Maximum mobilization of human and material resources for qualitative and quantitative development of women education through formal and non formal approach will go a long way in women empowerment. A strong will and determination with wholehearted support of all concerned in education of girls is urgently felt and essentially inevitable for bringing the very vital section of the society to the mainstream of national development.

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