

A STUDY ON PREVALANCE OF GENDER BIAS AND INEQUALITIES IN INDIA - POST INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract: Women constitute nearly half of the population in India. But unfortunately women folk are victims of gender inequalities and deep-rooted gender biases prevalent in our society. They are not even aware of the rights conferred on them by the Constitution of India. Only education can enlighten and empower women and enable them to be aware of all the rights guaranteed by the constitution and fight against any sort of inequality and discrimination. The need of the day is to create an environment where every girl-child will be provided with equal opportunities of life as her male counterpart and will be given proper and functional education. With the passage of time, it has become necessary for womenfolk to take keen interest in education, because education gives economic independence which improves the status of women and ultimately the status of society.

The plight of women calls for a fresh look at the measures adopted by the government to provide education to all Indian women, the present condition of women education in India as reflected in statistics, the causes of disparities between male and female literacy and a few suggestions to remove gender disparities in education. My present paper will focus on all these points.

Introduction: Education is the sole means to liberate women from the oppression and the deprivations which the women have been facing since time immemorial. We know, "Knowledge is Power". It is only through education that women can be enlightened and empowered. An enlightened woman can be aware of the rights conferred on her by the constitution. Education enables one to take right decision in every sphere of life, be it social, or economic, or political, or familial. According to Swami Vivekananda, there is hardly any problem that cannot be solved by education.

Despite the fact that the Government of India gives top priority to education for all and the Indian Constitution guarantees gender equality, statistics show that half the women in this country are still illiterate.

The aim of this paper is to throw light on the measures undertaken by the Government of India to promote woman education in post-independence period, the current status of women education in India, the causes of disparities between male and female education and a few suggestions to remove gender disparities in education.

Section-I: Measures Undertaken for Female Literacy in Post-Independence Period: In this section I will concentrate on the major policies adopted by the Government of India for the development of education and the recommendations of the different commissions and committees set up to promote women's education in India in the post-independence period.

1948-1949: The Government of India formed the University Education Commission under the chairmanship of Dr. Sarbopalli Radhakrishnan. The Commission, in its report, recommended the expansion of educational opportunities for women

and providing them with some kinds of special education suited exactly for their roles and requirements.

1950: Women's right to equality and non-discrimination are guaranteed under the constitution constituted in 1950. Article 45 states that the state shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education to all children upto the age of 14 years. Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters of public employment and Article 15(3) empowers the State for making special provisions for women and children. Article 42 states that provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief is to be made by the state.

1951: The First Five Year Plan (1951-56) emphasized that special attention should be paid to three major areas of women's development. These are : (a) Education, (b) Social Welfare and (c) Health. With the aim to implement social welfare for women, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was established.

1956: The Second Five Year Plan (1956-61) stressed certain issues regarding education of women. These are (a) to provide absolutely free education to girl children at schools, (b) to arrange for some special grants to girl students as a means of encouraging them to get admitted to schools, (c) to provide training to enable women to compete for higher jobs.

1958: The National Committee on Women Education was set up to look specifically into the question of women education. The committee made some recommendations for expansion of women education. One of these recommendations was to establish a National Council for the education of girls and women and accordingly the National Council on

Women Education was constituted with Durgabai Deshmukh as the Chairperson in 1959.

1959: The National Council on Women Education made some important recommendations with regard to women education. These are :

- (i) Education of women to be given top priority and special funds to be allocated for educating women.
- (ii) To increase financial support for women's educational institutions to be set up in rural areas.
- (iii) To construct women's hostels.
- (iv) To adopt special schemes for adult women education.

1961: The Third Five Year Plan (1961-66) put special emphasis on the importance of education for women. This plan made provision for expending the largest permissible amount for the establishment of girls' school, appointing teachers in rural areas and encouraging parents of girl-children to send them to school. It also adopted measures for introducing condensed courses of education.

1961-62: The Hans Mehta Committee was constituted under the Chairmanship of Smt. Hansa Mehta. It recommended co-education at primary level, appointment of lady teachers, same curricula for boys and girls at the primary and middle level. At the Secondary level curricular should be diversified according to the aptitudes of all pupils, irrespective of boys and girls. The committee made recommendation for encouraging girls to study mathematics and science.

1963: The National Council on Women Education appointed a committee under the Chairmanship of Sri M. Bhaktavatsalam, the then Chief Minister of Madras, to look into the question of why there was a lack of public interest in expanding girls' education. The committee recommended the establishment of a primary school in each locality extending over an area of one mile with a population of 300 people, construction of hostels for girls and quarters for female teachers, distribution of books and uniforms free of cost for the girls etc.

1964: An education commission, called Kothari Commission, was constituted under the Chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari. The Commission emphasized the removal of all sorts of discriminations in the field of education and laid stress on providing equal educational opportunities to women.

1969: The Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74) also emphasized the importance of women education. The basic policy was obviously to promote women's welfare. Women's education was given top priority with the aim to reduce the mortality rate of infants and expectant mothers and to improve the nutrition level among children.

1974: The Committee on Status of Women in India (CSWI-1974), in its report "Towards Equality" has mentioned "women are considered to be handicapped by social customs and social values, and, therefore, social welfare services have specially endeavoured to rehabilitate them."

The committee suggested that schools should have a place for kids so that the girls who are unable to attend school due to the burden of housework and responsibility for siblings can bring their siblings along with them to school.

1975: The Fifth Five Year Plan (1975-79) recognised the importance of providing training to women for income generation activities. In this plan schemes of adult education and special provisions for reducing gender gap in education were adopted. From the Fifth Five Year Plan there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development.

1980: The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-84) stressed the importance of education, economic independence, health and family planning for women's development. This plan made provisions for distributing books, uniforms to girl-students and arranging mid-day meals for them free of cost. This plan also made provisions for encouraging girls to study science subjects.

1985: The Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-89) emphasized the importance of creating awareness among women about their rights guaranteed by the constitution of India. During this plan period, the Indian Parliament adopted National Policy on Education, 1986, which included a chapter on Education for women's equality.

1986: National Policy on Education was adopted in 1986 and revised in 1992. The Policy states "In our national perception, education is essentially for all". Some of the key areas on which the policy laid stress are : (i) Accessibility of all children to quality education; (ii) removal of all sorts of discriminations and providing equal educational opportunities to all who have so long been deprived of equality, (iii) emphasis on girls' enrolment to secondary education, particularly in science, commerce and vocational streams, (iv) education for women's equality, with special emphasis on the removal of women's illiteracy.

1987: Centrally sponsored schemes such as "Operation Blackboard" and the "Scheme for restructuring and reorganisation of teacher education" were launched.

1988: National Literacy Mission was introduced to eradicate illiteracy. It aimed to introduce mass and functional literacy to non-literates between the ages 15 and 35 years in 'time-bound manner'.

1989: In 1989 the Government of India launched the Mahila Samakhya (MS) programme with the aim to

educate and empower women in the rural areas, particularly the women from socially and economically backward classes. The MS programme recognises the importance of education in empowering women to achieve equality. Besides empowering women, it strives to make them aware and self-reliant.

1990: From the Eighth Five Year Plan (1990-94) there has been a definite shift from development to empowerment of women.

1992: The Programme of Action (POA) 1992, in the section "Education for Women's Equality" recognises education as the most essential tool of empowerment of women. It stresses the need to develop the educational system and puts special emphasis on women's education.

1994: District Primary Education Programme of the Central Government was undertaken with the objective to make primary education accessible to all children in selected districts.

1995: The National Programme of Mid-Day Meal (MDM) in schools was launched to ensure the enhanced participation of children in elementary education and to improve the nutritional levels among children.

1997: The Ninth Five Year Plan was launched in April, 1997. An important objective of the plan was the empowerment of women.

2001: (i) Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was introduced "for universalisation of elementary education"; (ii) The Government of India declared 2001 as Women's Empowerment Year; (iii) The National Policy on Empowerment of women was adopted. The policy aims at achieving its noble object of uplifting, developing and empowering women in social, economic, political and cultural aspects by generating in them a consciousness about various issues related to their empowerment.

2002: (i) Prior to 2002 Primary education was not the fundamental right in India. Under Article 21A of the Constitution (Eighty-Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002, primary education became the fundamental right of all children between the ages of 6 and 14; (ii) The Constitution (Eighty-Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 substituted Original Article 45. The new substituted Article 45 states that the state shall put forth every effort to provide all children with early childhood care and education till their completion of six years (iii) The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) was duly launched. This plan targeted to reduce gender gaps in literacy rates by at least 50 percent by the end of 2007.

2007: Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) aimed at increasing literacy rate to 85 percent for persons aged 7 years and above and to reduce gender gap in literacy to 10 percentage points.

2009: (i) The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 has come into effect from 01.04.2010. The Act, besides specifying the duties of government to provide free and compulsory education to all children aged 6-14 years, also specified the duties of parents and guardians to get their children admitted to neighbourhood schools for elementary education. The law, thus, is expected to bring a change in the attitude of biased parents towards their girl children; (ii) The National Literacy Mission (NLM) was recast with a special emphasis on women education and the "Sakshar Bharat" (Literate India) programme focussed on adult education; (iii) The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) was launched in March 2009 to make secondary education of good quality accessible to all youngsters aged 14-15 years; (iv) The centrally-sponsored scheme "Construction and Running of Girls' hostel for students of secondary and Higher Secondary schools" was approved.

2011: The Centrally sponsored scheme "Vocationalisation of Higher Secondary Education" was approved. The Scheme aims at increasing the accessibility of students to vocational education and employable skills.

2012: The Twelfth Five Year Plan launched in 2012-2017 targets to raise the overall literacy rate to over 80 percent and reduce the gender gap in literacy to less than 10 percent by the end of 2017. The laudable object behind launching the XII Plan is improvement not only in the position but also in the condition of women by doing away with "the structural and institutional barriers."

2013: National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy adopted. The policy emphasized care and early learning for every child below six years of age.

Kanyashree Scheme for empowerment of girls was launched. The scheme which aims at reducing the drop-out rate in schools and checking child marriage, was introduced in October, 2013. School girls enrolled under the scheme and studying in Classes VIII to XII receive an annual stipend of Rs.750. A one-time grant amounting to Rs.25,000/- is given to girls aged 18 years, if they are unmarried and are attached to an educational institute.

2014: (i) National Youth Policy, 2014, adopted. The policy laid stress on education, employment, skill development, entrepreneurship, health, etc. of all youths of the age-group of 15-29 years; (ii) "Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat" programme, launched on 26th August, 2014, laid emphasis on reading and writing in comprehension and teaching mathematics in such a way that the interest and understanding of the learners are created during early years of childhood, particularly in Classes I and II.

2015: “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao” programme was launched on January 20, 2015 to encourage education among girl children. The programme is a joint initiative of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

Section-II: The Current Status of Female Education in India: In spite of the fact that the Government of India has undertaken so many programmes and policies to increase female literacy, India is still one of the few Asian countries which lag behind some other countries with regard to women education. Disparities between male and female literacy rates persist from pre-independence to post-independence period. Table-1 shows that while the rate of male literacy increased from 9.83 percent in 1901 to 24.90 percent in 1941, female literacy rate increased from 0.60 percent in 1901 to 7.30 percent in 1941. The figures clearly reveal the pitiable plight of women education in pre-independence period. During the post-independence period, literacy rates have shown an upward trend in general. Between 1951 and 2001, male literacy rate increased from 24.95 percent to 75.85 percent, i.e., literacy rate for males has almost tripled over the period. However, female literacy rates also registered a substantial increase during the same period. The literacy rate for women increased from 7.93 percent in 1951 to 54.16 percent in 2001. This analysis clearly shows that though women education made a progress in post-independence period, male literacy rate remained quite ahead of female literacy rate. Even in 2011, the gap between male and female literacy rates still existed. Between 2001 and 2011, while the literacy rates for males increased from 75.85 percent to 82.14 percent, the literacy rate for females increased from 54.16 percent in 2001 to 65.46 percent in 2011.

During the year 2011, in rural areas the adult literacy rate for males was 74.1 percent as compared to 88.3 percent in urban areas, the difference being 14.2 percentage points. The adult literacy rate for females in rural areas was only 50.6 percent as compared to 76.9 percent in urban areas, the difference being 26.3 percentage points. This shows that almost 50 percent of females, aged 15 years and above, remain non-literate.

Table 1: Gender Disparity Profile in Literacy Rate

Year	Males	Females	Person
1901	9.83	0.60	5.35
1911	10.56	1.05	5.92
1921	12.21	1.81	7.16
1931	15.59	2.93	9.50
1941	24.90	7.30	16.10
1951	24.95	7.93	16.67

1961	34.44	12.95	24.02
1971	39.45	18.69	29.95
1981	56.50	29.85	43.67
1991	64.13	39.29	52.21
2001	75.85	54.16	65.38
2011	82.14	65.46	74.04

Source : Registrar General and Census Commissioner India 2011.

Though the adult literacy rate increased during the period 2001-2011, gender inequalities and regional disparities in adult literacy levels persist. Nationally the gender gap was 19.5 percentage points, 9.5 percent more than the targeted 10 percent.

In 2011, the adult literacy rate for males (aged 15 years and above) ranged between 96 percent in the union territory of Lakshadweep and 67.5 percent in Bihar. Twenty one states and Union Territories achieved a male literacy rate of 80 percent or more. In the same year, the adult literacy rate for females (aged 15 years and above) ranged between 91.3 percent in Kerala and 42.2 percent in Bihar, the difference being 49.1 percentage points. Only four states and one Union Territory have achieved a female literacy rate of 80 percent or more. Gender gap in adult literacy rates ranged between 4.6 percentage points in Kerala and 32.5 percentage points in Rajasthan. Table-2 depicts the State/Union Territory wise percentage of adult literacy rates for males and females (aged 15 years and above) and gender gap in 2001 and 2011.

Education of women is directly related to the well-being of the society as well as of the family concerned. Besides contributing to the economic growth of the nation an educated woman can take care of the family health, personal hygiene, improvement of nutrition among family members and also can provide better guidance to all children and tend to promote education of her girl child. Moreover, literacy of women is highly correlated with the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population. For example, Kerala has the highest women literacy rate and lowest infant mortality rate, whereas Rajasthan and Bihar have lowest literacy rate for female and highest infant mortality rate.

Table 2: Adult Literacy Rate (Age 15 years and above), 2001 & 2011

State / Union Territory	Adult Literacy Rate, 2001 (%)			Gender gap, 2001 (% points)	Adult Literacy Rate, 2011 (%)			Gender gap, 2011 (% points)
	Persons	Male	Female		Persons	Male	Female	
A&N Islands	79.0	85.1	71.3	13.8	85.0	89.4	79.9	9.5
Andhra Pradesh	54.2	65.7	42.5	23.2	62.2	71.5	53.1	18.4
Arunachal Pradesh	51.9	63.5	38.4	25.1	62.0	71.0	52.3	18.7
Assam	61.2	71.1	50.4	20.7	69.0	76.1	61.5	14.6
Bihar	44.2	59.0	28.2	30.8	55.4	67.5	42.2	25.3
Chandigarh	59.1	74.6	43.6	31.0	65.3	77.7	53.0	24.7
D&N Haveli	53.6	68.8	33.1	35.7	72.0	83.1	56.7	26.4
Daman & Diu	75.5	85.8	59.6	26.2	86.1	91.2	76.8	14.4
Delhi	79.6	86.6	70.8	15.8	84.8	90.5	78.3	12.2
Goa	79.9	87.2	72.2	15.0	87.7	92.2	83.1	9.1
Gujarat	65.3	77.6	52.2	25.4	75.0	84.2	65.2	19.0
Haryana	62.4	75.5	47.5	28.0	72.0	82.1	60.8	21.3
Himachal Pradesh	71.7	82.6	60.7	21.9	80.4	88.3	72.4	15.9
Jammu & Kashmir	51.3	64.2	36.4	22.8	62.7	74.3	49.8	24.5
Jharkhand	49.8	65.9	32.5	33.4	60.4	73.6	46.5	27.1
Karnataka	61.6	72.9	50.0	22.9	71.9	80.2	63.4	16.8
Kerala	89.9	93.8	86.2	7.6	93.5	95.9	91.3	4.6
Lakshadweep	85.4	92.8	77.5	15.3	91.6	96.0	86.9	9.1
Madhya Pradesh	58.8	73.7	42.5	31.2	63.9	75.8	51.2	24.6
Maharashtra	72.9	84.1	60.8	23.3	80.2	87.4	72.6	34.8
Manipur	69.7	81.7	57.6	24.1	75.7	83.8	67.7	16.1
Meghalaya	63.2	67.6	58.6	11.0	72.8	75.4	70.3	5.1
Mizoram	89.4	91.8	86.9	4.9	91.3	93.7	88.9	4.8
Nagaland	65.1	70.8	58.6	12.2	78.9	82.9	74.5	8.4
Odisha	59.7	74.0	45.1	28.9	69.4	79.8	58.8	21.0
Puducherry	79.1	87.9	70.4	17.5	84.4	90.7	78.4	12.3
Punjab	65.3	72.0	57.8	14.2	73.0	78.3	67.3	11.0
Rajasthan	54.4	72.1	35.6	38.5	60.3	76.1	43.6	32.5
Sikkim	66.0	75.3	54.8	20.5	79.0	85.4	71.6	13.8
Tamil Nadu	69.8	80.4	59.3	21.1	77.5	85.2	69.8	15.4
Tripura	70.4	79.9	60.2	19.7	85.8	90.9	80.4	10.5
Uttar Pradesh	51.1	66.2	34.3	31.9	62.4	74.6	49.2	25.4
Uttarakhand	66.6	81.3	51.9	29.8	75.5	86.1	64.8	21.3
West Bengal	65.8	76.0	54.7	21.3	73.3	79.9	66.3	13.6
INDIA (All States)	61.0	73.4	47.8	25.6	69.3	78.8	59.3	19.5

Source: O/o RGI, Census 2001 and 2011.

Enrolment is an important index of literacy progress in a nation. As a result of so many policies and programmes adopted by the Government of India to promote women education and women welfare, the disparity in enrolment of boys and girls is gradually getting reduced. Even more significant is the fact that the enrolment of the female students, both in primary and upper primary education increased substantially between 2000-2001 and 2013-2014. During the period 2000-2001 to 2013-2014, in primary

education, the overall increase in enrolment of boys and girls was 4.6 million (from 64.0 million to 68.6 million) and 14.0 million (from 49.8 million to 63.8 million) respectively. Similarly, between 2000-2001 and 2013-2014, in upper primary education enrolment of girls increased by 14.8 million (from 17.5 million to 32.3 million) while that of boys increased by 8.9 million (from 25.3 million to 34.2 million). The increase in enrolment has been much higher for girls (84.6 percent) than that for boys (35.2 percent).

Table 3: Enrolment in primary upper primary and elementary education (2000-01 to 2013-14) [in Millions]

Year	Primary education (Classes I-V)			Upper Primary education (Classes VI-VIII)			Elementary education (Classes I-VIII)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2000-01	64.0	49.8	113.8	25.3	17.5	42.8	89.3	67.3	156.6
2001-02	63.6	50.3	113.9	26.1	18.7	44.8	89.7	69.0	158.7
2002-03	65.1	57.3	122.4	26.3	20.6	46.9	91.4	77.9	169.3
2003-04	68.4	59.9	128.3	27.3	21.5	48.8	95.7	81.4	177.1
2004-05	69.7	61.1	130.8	28.5	22.7	51.2	98.2	83.8	182.0
2005-06	70.5	61.6	132.1	28.9	23.3	52.2	99.4	84.9	184.3
2006-07	71.0	62.7	133.7	29.8	24.6	54.4	100.8	87.3	188.1
2007-08	71.1	64.4	135.5	31.0	26.7	57.2	102.1	90.6	192.7
2008-09	70.0	64.5	134.5	29.4	26.0	55.4	99.4	90.5	189.9
2009-10	70.8	64.8	135.6	31.8	27.6	59.4	102.6	92.4	195.0
2010-11	70.5	64.8	135.3	32.8	29.3	62.1	103.3	94.1	197.4
2011-12	70.8	66.3	137.1	31.8	30.1	61.9	102.6	96.4	199.0
2012-13	69.6	65.2	134.8	33.2	31.7	64.9	102.8	96.9	199.7
2013-14	68.6	63.8	132.4	34.2	32.3	66.5	102.8	96.1	198.9

Source: Statistics of School Education, 2007-08, MHRD, GoI; Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2011, MHRD, GoI; Statistics of School Education, 2010-11, GoI; and U-DISE, NUEPA.

Section-III: Causes of disparities between male and female literacy: Though the enrolment of girls in primary and upper primary education exceeded that of boys during the period 2000-2001 and 2013-2014, the fact remains that a large number of girls drop out of schools from classes I to V. The data of school enrolment does not in itself ensure continuance. While enrolment data may be accurate, the data collection mechanism does not reflect either continuance or attendance regularity.

The reasons which led girls to drop out of schools and ultimately to female illiteracy can be classified into the following categories:

- (i) **Economic:** In our society, particularly in rural areas, acute poverty is one of the prime reasons for drop-out of girl-children. Parents who cannot afford to send all their children to school, usually prefer to educate the sons and not the daughters. Boys are viewed as future bread winners and are expected to look after their parents in their old age and so, boys are the first to be sent to study.
- (ii) **Socio-cultural:** Socio-cultural constraints constitute another major cause of drop-out of girl-children. Parents are often of the opinion that there is no need to educate a girl-child since she has to be given marriage and so the investment made on her education is, according to them, a sheer wastage. Parents do not perceive any direct relation between education and economic betterment and so they are not motivated to send their girl-children to school.
- (iii) **Familial:** Many girls drop out of schools due to familial reasons. At home, the girl-child is overburdened by household duties and spends a large portion of her time helping her mother and looking after her younger siblings. This means that she does not have time to attend school.
- (iv) **Personal:** Many girls drop out of school because of personal reasons. They suffer from a low self-image and also from a fear of examinations.
- (v) **Infrastructural:** Of the infrastructural causes leading to the drop-out of girl children, mention should be made of the dearth of schools in their villages and in the surrounding areas, lack of

girls' toilets and proper sanitation in most schools, the teachers' high-handed behaviour, the absence of teachers from schools and their indifference to girl students in classes.

Apart from these causes, the most significant cause leading to girl-children's drop-out from schools appears to be the hidden curricular segregation. For example, we find that in classroom teachers focus attention on boys and interact more with them than with the girls thereby reinforcing the notion that boys are more social and outgoing than girls. Again, curricular disparities have resulted in girls being encouraged to take up for studies subjects like home science, nutrition and to acquire domestic skills, while boys are encouraged to take science subjects and mathematics. An examination of curricular in our schools reveals gender bias. Instead of removing gender inequalities text books reinforce it. For instance, it would not be very rare to find a prose piece on a happy family where father is depicted as the sole earning member and the mother, as a house wife. A girl child is shown helping her mother in the kitchen while her brother is shown playing cricket or football with his friends. The gender imbalance distinctly noticeable in the entire system of education can be traced to the rigid, age-old curricula based on discrimination between the two genders and also to instructions imparted through class lectures which does not encourage fruitful interaction and exchange of ideas between the teachers and the taught. Our girl children have become victims of hidden curriculum inconsistencies and disparities.

All the five categories of causes discussed above reveal that girl children, in our society, face tremendous problems and difficulties in gaining access to schools. Most of the policies and efforts of the government have remained limited to ensuring enrolment of girl-children. But their retention in schools is no less important than enrolment. It is only recently that various incentives are provided for education of the girl-children. But unfortunately, it has been found that most financial benefit schemes for the girl-children enter directly to the back accounts of either the parents or the local guardians of the incumbent. Many economically challenged parents enrol their girls only to gain financial benefits. Not only this, they also use their daughters as earning members of their families though child labour is banned and hence illegal.

Section-IV: Suggestions for removing gender disparities in education: It is true that only recommendations, regulations and national policies cannot sustain or improve the status of women in society. Social awareness is the key to the empowerment of women. Youths can try to create awareness among people to stop gender inequality. By making the parents of girl-children aware about

the different provisions and recommendations of the government of India to promote education of girl children, youths, NGOs can eradicate gender inequalities in rural areas as well as in families belonging to low socio-economic strata in urban areas. They can exhibit charts, graphs etc. highlighting the glorious achievements of the girls in different spheres of national life. And this is exactly what has been done by the people of Una, a district in Himachal Pradesh. Una is incidentally one of the hundred districts in the country with a very low child sex ratio as is evident from the Census in 2011 which shows that the district with its child sex ratio (0-6) at 875 girls per thousand boys lags behind the states' 909.

The district authority has taken some concrete steps to arrest the upward trend in female foeticide :

Firstly, several hoardings with the names and pictures of two female IPS officers, two female civil judges and a female army captain have been put up at different prominent public places obviously to convey to the teeming millions the message that given proper opportunities women too can achieve many glorious feats just like their male counterparts. The Deputy Commissioner of Una has publicly given an assurance that any girl with similar remarkable achievements to her credit is sure to secure a place on hoardings thus setting example for other girl children.

Secondly, introducing a caller tune on mobiles is another very laudable step taken by the district administration to hammer the message to save girl child.

Thirdly, female foeticide has registered a sharp rise in Una due to the mushrooming of illegal ultrasound clinics. The health department of Una has made arrangements for installing trackers on ultrasound machines 'on pilot basis' as a remedial measure.

Fourthly, the district authority has embarked upon a novel scheme of earmarking 'tree plantation in the name of daughters' and people are encouraged to water trees for the sake of their girl children.

Another important step for removing gender disparity is to bring about a change in the psyche of each and every human being. Every individual has to realise that women are equal in their human demands and hence equal opportunities in social, cultural, economic and political spheres should be made available to them. Women education is related with women empowerment and it should start from the family, the primary unit of the society. Parents should overcome the deep-seated social and cultural prejudices and gender-biases, and provide their girl children with opportunities of life at par with their sons. They should not neglect or exhibit apathy to their daughters.

The school education plays an important role in creating a gender neutral environment. Schools are

important institutions for imparting education as well as for socialisation. Teachers should be oriented on gender related issues. They should be provided with information and teaching methodologies to promote gender equality. Teachers have the potentiality to bring about attitudinal and behavioural changes in the students and ultimately the parents. Efforts should also be made to make the curriculum “both gender-neutral as well as utilitarian”. Patriarchal notion of society is still reflected in text-books of history where kings are depicted as warriors and protectors of the country and the countrymen and queens are depicted as playing passive roles. So curriculum reform is the need of the day.

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Conclusion: Education of women is the sole means of women emancipation. Only proper and functional education can empower a woman and only an empowered woman can fight against any form of gender discrimination and can contribute to the economic growth of the nation. Any desired change of the status of women as well as of the society as a whole can be brought about only and only through education. I will come to an end of the discussion of my topic with a famous saying of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru :

“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.”

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