

Opportunities and Challenges for Girl Child Schooling and Education in India

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Abstract

Education is a lifelong process of learning things; it always focuses on the learners. Education plays a significant role in the life and development of mankind. Education creates knowledge, awareness and understanding among the human beings for the betterment of society. As a human right, in the 21st century education directs an individual to creativity. The Indian education system is the biggest system in the world where primary, middle, secondary, higher secondary and college plays a very important role in sharpening the personality of individuals. But, there are many hurdles in the way of education system of our country that large numbers of school going children are continuously leaving the school system before completing the secondary education. India is a country where female population is 48.04% compared to that of males which is 51.96%. India has 54,197,555 more male's population than female's population. India is at 189th position out of 201 countries in terms of female to male ratio. Among Asian countries, India is at 43th position out of 51. As per Census 2011, Gender ratio of India is 943 females per 1000 males. Gender differences can be seen everywhere in the education system of the country where male dominating society exists. So, the educationist should be aware to the specific needs of the girls. Even after the formation of so many committees and commissions, Government aided initiatives and schemes the enrolment rates of girls are still declining day by day. Those who are enrolled in the

schools they are not prepared adequately due to the lack of sufficient facilities. Besides the current culture, shared norms, values, standards, expectations and priorities of teaching and learning in the society is not powerful enough to support true higher learning. This paper is an attempt to discuss the opportunities and challenges of girl's education in the country.

Keywords: Girl child education, Opportunities & challenges, Government initiated schemes and programmes

Objectives of the Paper

- To highlight the various policies and programmes made by Government.
- To discuss the opportunities and threats in the way of girl's education.
- To suggest some points for the improvement in girl's education

Introduction

Education, knowledge and skills are necessary to fully participate in the development process. This is not only because education is an entry point to opportunities but also has positive ripple effect within the individual and across the society. Knowledge is power, but knowledge equally shared between men and women is more powerful. Men and women are considered to be equal partners for the development of a society as well as a family.

A well educated population, equipped with the relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills is essential for economic and social development in the twenty-first century. Education is the most potent tool for socioeconomic mobility and a key instrument for building an equitable and just society. Education provides skills and competencies for economic well-being. Education strengthens democracy by imparting to citizens the tools needed to fully participate in the governance process. Education also acts as an integrative force in society, imparting values that foster social cohesion and national identity. Government of India (GOI) and States increasingly recognize the significance of girl's

education due to multiple benefits that accumulate to women and their families. Education in India is placed in concurrent list of the Indian Constitution through 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, thereby making it a joint responsibility of Centre and State Governments in the new millennium (Snehi, 2007). An attempt was made on girl's education through the 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE) and the 1992 Programme of Action (PoA) followed by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) launched in the year 2010. Further, these were complemented by many other schemes such as: National Programme for the Education of Girls at the Elementary Level (NPEGEL), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBVS) for imparting education and empowering skill to girls. The Mahila Samakhya programme was launched in 10 states targeting marginalized sections of rural women. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education is known as Right to Education Act, 2010, considered as the biggest effort for bringing gender equality in education in India. Article 15 of the constitution says that the no discrimination can be made on the grounds of the religion, race, caste, caste, sex and place of birth. The article gives favourable statement in support of girl a child. It is a general agreement that girl's education needs special attention in the context of country's development and as an important sector of our society (Das & Mohanty, 2009). It is important to educate girls for improving their status in the society. How much efforts are needed may be judged from the literacy rates given below in the table no.1

Table-1

Literacy Rates in India

| Census Year | Persons | Males | Females | Male-Female gap in literacy rate |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|---|
| 1951 | 18.33 | 27.16 | 8.86 | 18.30 |
| 1961 | 28.30 | 40.40 | 15.35 | 25.05 |

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|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1971 | 34.45 | 45.96 | 21.97 | 23.98 |
| 1981 | 43.57 | 56.38 | 29.76 | 26.62 |
| 1991 | 52.21 | 64.13 | 39.29 | 24.84 |
| 2001 | 64.84 | 75.26 | 53.67 | 21.59 |
| 2011 | 74.04 | 82.14 | 65.46 | 16.68 |

Source: Census of India *Figures shown are in percentages

The table 1 shows year wise literacy rates. The literacy figures reveals that the female literacy rates were increasing continuously which were (8.86 per cent) in the year 1951 and increased to (65.46 per cent) in the year 2011. The gender literacy gap was very minimum (16.68 per cent) in the year 2011. This gap was highest (26.62 per cent) according to the census year 1981. After seeing the literacy gap between males and females, it can be noticed that although the literacy gaps are decreasing according to the figures but there is a great need to give attention to the girl's education at school level for their survival in the society. Major Policies and Programmes Education sector is the important part of the service sector which is generating and efficient human resource in a country like India, but on the other side, there are number of problems in the education sector of the country such as: students are not satisfied with the school facilities, teachers are not satisfied with their jobs besides this the major problem is girl's education. Specific problem requires specific solution. Indian government has framed and implemented number of policies and programmes to improve the education of the girl child which can be discussed as under the different heads shown in table no. 2:

| Programmes | Policies |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Education in the Concurrent List | District Primary Education Programme |

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| NPE, 1986 & Program of Action | Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan |
| Secondary Education | NPEGEL |
| Tenth Five Year Plan | Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalay |
| Free & Compulsory Education Act | Mahila Samakhya |

Table - 2: Policies and Programmes for the Promotion of Girls Education in India
Education in the Concurrent List

The 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976 brought about tremendous changes in the Indian Constitution. It affected the status of Indian education also by putting it on the Concurrent List. After this legislation, Centre and the states has been empowered to legislate on any aspect of education from the primary level to the university level. The main purpose of this effort was to ensure uniformity in the education system through better utilization of funds, quality leadership and supervision from the Union Government.

National Policy on Education 1986 & Program of Action 1992

The education policy 1986 as modified in the year 1992 stated that free and compulsory elementary education of satisfactory quality shall be provided to all children up to the age of fourteen (Bopal, 2009). According to the policy following steps can be taken to improve girl's education system.

- It has given emphasis on the elimination of disparity between girls and boys in other words the policy provides equal opportunities.
- Adequate location of the school and balwadis can provide the equal access of educational opportunities to the girls.
- Opening of new libraries in the schools containing large number of quality books, journals and newspapers.

- Start new programmes of distance learning for democratising education and to make it a lifelong learning.

The policy ensures if the basic facilities will be provided to the girls students then they can contribute to the development of society.

Secondary Education

As compare to the past large number of girls are getting admissions in the school system completing primary education and pursuing secondary and tertiary education. Secondary education is provided between the age groups of 14-18 years. It is proposed to bring more and more girl students in the various streams mainly in arts, science, commerce and vocational streams. According to the Babylon's dictionary, "Secondary education is the final stage of compulsory education, preceded by primary education and followed by higher education".

The Secondary education is provided by the different organizations under the control of the Government of India.

- National Council of Educational Research and Training
- National Institute of Open Schooling
- Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan
- Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti

These are the organisations which are providing the secondary education at a large scale to the girls as well as boys and these are making efforts to decrease the gender gap in the country.

12th Five Year Plan

12th Five Year Plan of the Government of India was India's last Five Year Plan. The plan covers the period from the year 2012-17. This plan had made the major emphasis

upon school education to improve its quality in the country. The plan had some fixed objectives to maintain the development of a country which were as follows:

- To ensure universal access and, in keeping with letter and spirit of the RTE Act, provide good-quality free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years.
- To improve attendance and reduce dropout rates at the elementary school level.
- To increase enrolments at higher levels of education
- To raise the overall literacy rate to over 80 per cent and reduce the gender gap in literacy.
- To provide at least one year of well-supported and well-resourced pre-school education in primary schools to all children, particularly those in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs).
- Improve learning outcomes that are measured, monitored and reported independently at all levels of school education with a special focus on ensuring that all children master basic reading and numeracy skills by class 2 and skills of critical thinking, expression and problem solving by class 5.

It was also decided that during the plan Rastriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) will be made a single comprehensive effort to address the issue of quality education. The RMSA will make provisions for residential schools for boys as well as girls to enhance the participation of the students of hilly or remote areas. Besides this basic facilities to all schools like: buildings, separate toilets for girls and boys, cool drinking water, electricity, playgrounds, blackboards and other facilities will also be provided.

Therefore, it can be said that the plan is a big effort to protect the girl's rights. It had made significant provisions to improve the education of the girl child.

The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act - 2009

This Act was passed by the parliament on August 4, 2009 which came in to force from April 1, 2010. The act ensures that each and every child in the India will be provided elementary school education without any money charge. The main provisions of the Act can be discussed under these heads (Bopal, 2009):

- Every child has the right to free and compulsory education in the 6-14 age groups, in a nearest school of the area.
- Teacher-student ratio should be fixed so that the quality of the education may be improved.
- The Central and State Governments will share the financial burden of the school education.
- No admission test or interview will be conducted for the students and parents.
- Provide basic infrastructural facilities including school building, teaching staff and learning equipment.

The act is an attempt to bring equality in the education system that provides learning opportunities to the girls as well as boys at the school level. It creates an environment of learning things for the improvement of girl's education.

District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)

The centrally sponsored scheme of District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched in 1994 as a major initiative to revitalize the primary education system and to achieve the objective of universalisation of primary education.

DPEP adopts a holistic approach to universalize access, retention and improve learning achievement and to reduce disparities among social groups.

1. To provide all children access to primary education through either the formal or non-formal stream.

2. To reduce differences in enrolment, drop-out rates and learning achievement among gender and weaker section groups to less than five percent.
3. To reduce overall primary dropout rates for all children to less than 10 percent.
4. To raise the average achievement rate by 25% by measured baseline level and ensuring achievement of basic literacy and numeracy competencies and minimum of 40% achievement in other competencies by all primary education children.

The bulk of the funds for DPEP came from international bodies such as the UNICEF, ODA (UK), SIDA (Sweden), Netherlands etc. The first phase of the programme was launched in 42 districts in the states of Assam, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh. Later the programme was launched in 80 districts of Orissa, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, UP, West Bengal and Gujarat. The impact studies of the first phase projects are very positive.

The DPEP has made decisive impact on increasing enrolment, reducing stagnation and improving class-room transaction. While the DPEP has been operational in backward districts with female literacy below the national average, total literacy campaign has started up the demand for elementary education.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA)

The efforts for the improvement of primary education has been made by GOI in the last decade through the scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA). Many states in the country have achieved certain targets successfully in terms of educating girls. The centrally sponsored scheme was launched in 1994 for improving the primary education system in India. The basic objectives of the programme are:

- To provide primary education to all the children between the age group of 6-11 years.

- To bring quality in the primary school education.
- To reduce dropout rates of the students in the primary schools.
- Promotion of girl's education at primary school level.
- Reduction in gender disparity by providing equal opportunities to boys and girls in the primary schools.

The programme especially focuses on districts with below-average female literacy rates, it encourages public participation in the school level management.

SSA is a flagship programme introduced by the GOI in the year 2000-01 to achieve the objective of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). It has given special emphasis on girl's education. Several measures were taken in this respect like free textbooks were provided to all the girls and boys up to class 8th standard, separate toilet arrangement were done for girls and boys in the school, more and more girls were persuaded to enroll in the school system, more women teachers were recruited to understand the problems of girl children. The aim of the school education is to bring quality in the school education system of the country and SSA is a big effort in this direction which is reducing the gender gap and increasing the girl's enrolment in the schools.

Mid-day Meal Scheme

It is a big programme launched by the GOI in the year 1995 to support primary education in the country. According to the programme the Government provides food grains/cooked meals free of cost to students of primary classes. The main goals of the programme are:

- Increase in the enrolment rates of students.
- Increase in the school attendance and help them concentrate in the classroom activities.

- To check malnutrition among the students and improve their nutritional status.

India's mid-day meal scheme is one of the largest programme in the world, where more than 11 crore students are taking benefit of this scheme. In a result, the programme has shown a major impact on school children attendance, nutrition and social equity. It also contributed to the gender equality.

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level

GOI approved a new programme named NPEGEL which was launched in the month of September 2003. It is an important part of the SSA. It provides supplementary support for enhancing the education of underprivileged/disadvantaged girls at elementary level through more intense community mobilization (Tyagi, 2010). The scheme focussed on the working girls, drop outs rates and over aged girls who have not completed elementary education for some reasons. The aim of the scheme is to promote the basic school level facilities that can ensure maximum participation of girls in the field of education with the community support.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

KGBV is a scheme for the girls belonging to the Schedule Caste (SC) Schedule Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) which was launched in July 2004 for setting up of residential schools at upper primary level. At present the scheme is being implemented in 27 states of the country. The scheme provides better opportunities to those girls for rejoining school system who could not complete the school education. These vidyalayas can be opened by the GOI in educationally backward blocks of the country where the female rural literacy is below the national average and the gender gap in literacy is higher than the national average (Tyagi, 2010). The scheme is an effort to reduce gender gap in the enrolment at elementary school level which is serving the large section of the society with equality.

Mahila Samakhya

Mahila Samakhya programme was started in 1988 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) under the Department of Education. The basic idea of creating such an open environment was the development of women and girls education in the country. The scheme empowers the women to play an effective role in decision making, leadership, supervision and their own development in the society.

Challenges

Although, number of girls education programmes are in place to check the problems but, they are failed to provide quality education because of many reasons. Surprisingly, a large number of girls still remain outside the education system. There are many challenges in the way of girl's education which are as follows:

- Early child marriage is one of the most common barrier which stops them to get education.
- Child labour in domestic or household work is also a major barrier in the way of girl's education.
- Direct and indirect cost of school prevents the girl child from school education and parents do not want to spend the money on the education of a girl child.
- In rural areas most of the people are still against girl's education because of the traditional thinking. Some schools are very far away from the villages and it is very difficult to reach the school and come home daily. There are many cities and villages where separate schools for girls do not exist.
- Women teachers are available in the schools but when they are transferred to a rural area they always think about their re-transfer in a big city where all the facilities are available for them.
- The basic facilities like: fresh drinking water, play ground, separate toilet facility at right place, adequate number of rooms and teaching and non teaching staff are not adequately available in the schools.

Indian education system of the world is the largest system of the world which is providing education to the large number of boys and girls to make them efficient and effective human beings.

Strategies for Improving the Girl's Education at School Level

Girls are the equal partner with the boys in the society's development and the education of the girls is very important in a country like India where huge literacy gaps exist, but there are some hurdles in the way of girl's education which should be removed through some strategies which can be discussed as under these points.

- It is a moral duty of every parent/guardian to send their children to the school.
- Child centred classrooms with adequate teaching and learning facilities should be established.
- Women teachers can understand the girl's problems easily so recruitment of more women teachers should be made who can serve as role models for girls and parents.
- Appointment of qualified female teachers and extra incentives should be given to them particularly in rural and remote areas.
- Sports activities should be organised for the girls so that they can be promoted to be leaders and improve their confidence and motivation.
- Opening of girl's schools in each area having facilities of fresh drinking water, proper classrooms, adequate number of female teachers, proper hygienic and sanitation facility.
- Provide residential facilities, free and concessional bus pass facility to the school students.

These are some of the strategies by which we can improve the girl's education in the country. With this, there is a greater need that women themselves should take the first step to improve the girl's education in the country.

Conclusion

Eliminating the gender disparities is the biggest challenges for the today's world. In the modern era new efforts are being made in the form of the programmes and schemes by the Government of India to improve the girl's education because there is no effective tool for development than the education of girls but there is lot of work to be done to achieve the targets of girl's education in the country. The Central and State Governments must act to make education not only available but also accessible for the girls, then and only then, girls can receive primary, elementary, secondary and higher education in a safe environment.

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