

## Rural Girl Child Education: Need of the Hour

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### Abstract

Education is very important for every child whether boy or girl. It is sad that some communities still discriminate against the education of the girl child. Education is the key factor for girls' empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Discrimination of girl from womb to tomb is well known. There is continued inequality and vulnerability of girls in all sectors - economic, education, social, political, health care, nutrition, right and legal etc. Girls oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walk of life. In order to fight against the socially constructed gender biases, girls & women have to swim against the system that requires more strength. Such strength comes from the process of empowerment and empowerment will come from the education. And rural transformation will come from girl's education. This paper focuses on girl child education in rural areas because it enables them to gain basic knowledge of good living-being, responding to the challenges, tackle their traditional role as being daughter, wife and mother. All these faces of life are equally important and here comes the role of education to improvise their thinking and standard. So the importance of education can't be neglected in reference to girl's empowerment.

**Keywords:** Girl child education, Gender inequality, Provisions for girls' education, rural transformation

## 1. Introduction

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said: “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”. When women who contribute almost half of the population are empowered it will strengthen the national economy. Education is considered as a milestone for women empowerment. Increasing access to education notwithstanding, gender discrimination still persists in India and lot more needs to be done in the field of women's education in India. Women have so much unexplored potential which has never been tapped. As education is both an input and input of human development, educational equity will ensure enabling and entrepreneurial development. Today, the female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 census are 65.46% where the male literacy rate is over 80%. Even beyond literacy there is much that education can do for women’s rights, dignity and security. Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom for development. Eileen Malone Beach sees education, health care, and income as a blessed trinity because they are so closely related. Women and girls in the developing world are often denied opportunities for education. Lack of education limits future prospects, decreases the family income, reduces health and wellbeing, puts women and girls at risk of trafficking and exploitation, and limits the economic development of the entire country.

Education for girls and women is the single most effectual way to improve the lives of individual families as well as to bring economic development to poor communities worldwide. Education has a long history of successfully working with local partners to design, manage, and evaluate community-based initiatives to advance the conditions of girls and women. World Education's programs help girls enroll and stay in school and help women gain access to or create new educational, financial, and social resources in their communities. They also help girls and women improve their own lives, the lives of their families and the conditions in their communities. For parents — and especially mothers — this means creating situations that ensures their daughters have equal access to basic education, are able to make informed decisions about their futures, and

are able to protect themselves from trafficking, sexual exploitation, basic hygiene knowledge for example. By improving educational opportunities for girls and women, World Education helps women develop skills that allow them to make decisions and influence community change. In turn, these programs have an optimistic impact on some of the most reflective issues of our time.

## **2. Why Do Girls Remain Under-educated?**

What explains the gender differences in educational attainment? Why there are no changes done for improving the education level of women? Studies have tried to answer these questions on various aspects. Economic benefits of education and the costs involved in undertaking such educational attainment have been perceived differently for men and women. Parents who bear the private costs of investing in schooling for girls and women fail to receive the full benefits of their investment. This is largely true because much of the payoff in educating women is broadly social in nature rather than economic. This endures the gender differentials. Parent's perception of current investment made in education and future benefits therefrom influences the decision whether the girl child should continue taking education or not. This investment is often measured in terms of charges of transport facility due to the distance to school and other direct costs incurred like fee paid, books and stationary bought, uniform stitching etc. We might have seen many times that the son's demands are given priority as compared to that of daughters. Even the favour is made not only in education but also in allocation of food at mealtime, distribution of inheritance and even the language used. Apart from economic costs and benefits, there are costs involved at psychological level as well. The differential access based on the psychological perceptions of the parents is a more firm and actual threat. The factors herein include all such motives, which tend to make a parent unwilling to send their daughters to school. One of the obvious factors is the concern of the parents for the physical and moral safety of a girl child which makes them unwilling to let them travel distant located schools every day. Besides, religious and socio-cultural factors also influence the parent's choice. Because

of this they may tend to search for a school where only girls are admitted and the one where women teachers are employed for teaching.

The concern arises when girls reach their teenage years even education beyond the level of literacy for girls may be perceived as threat for their possibilities for marriage. Naturally, girls who would work more than their brothers at home will have less probability of attending the school as parents think they must do the household chores. In a joint family, the possibility of increased opportunity costs in these terms will be more. Does this mean when opportunity costs of educating girls and boys are identical, both will have equal chances of going to school? The answer, unfortunately, is no. Parents still keep girls at home to learn and do the household chores and send their sons to school for education.

### **3. Gender Inequality in Access to Education**

Education seems to be the prime factor, which only can initiate a sequence of advantages to females. However, the access to education is differently perceived for male and female. Key indicators such as literacy, enrollment and years spent in school describes the situation in the access to education and each of these indicators reveal that the level of female education in India is still low and lagging far behind with their male counterpart. The low adult literacy rates for women reflect the negligence in making investment in the education of women and thus do not necessarily meet the set standards. The problem is not only confined to low enrolments in schools, the girl's school attendance has also been found incredibly low. Rural girls belong to disadvantaged groups as if SC and ST present the worst scenario. As per the data, girl dropout ratio has tended to increase with the enhancement in the level of education. This clearly outlines the pattern of gender inequality in access to education, which seems to be deepening as we move from lower to higher educational attainment and from urban to rural and to disadvantaged group in the society.

### **4. Barriers and Problems against Rural Girl education**

In spite of certain exceptional examples of individual achievements, and a definite improvement in their general situation over the years, it remains true that Indian women still constitute a large part of under - privileged citizens. Women of course do not form a homogenous group in class or caste terms. Nevertheless, they face distinctive problems that call for special attention. The Backward Classes Commission set up by the Government of India in 1953 classified women of India as a backward group requiring special attention. The educational, economic, political and social backwardness of women makes them the largest group hindering the process of social change. It is inevitable that when this 'backward' group has the major responsibility of bringing up the future generations, the advancement of society cannot be rapid or take any significant form of development. In the report of the committee appointed by the National Council for Women's Education it was emphatically stated that what was needed to convert the equality of women from de jure to de facto status was widespread education for girls and women and are education of men and women to accept new and scientific attitudes towards each other and to themselves. A changing society and a developing economy cannot make any progress if education, which is one of the important agents affecting the norms of morality and culture, remains in the hands of traditionalists who subscribe to a fragmented view of the country's and the world's heritage. The differences between the positions of men and women in the society will not lessen as long as there are differences between the education levels of men and women. Inadequate education or no education is the most important factor contributing to the backwardness of our masses, especially women. The low literacy among women brings down the national literacy. This gap which exists between the literacy rates of the two sexes also exists between the enrollment of girls and boys at all levels of education. Right from the primary school to the university, we find that the number of girl students is considerably lower than boys. According to Article 45 of the Constitution, universal compulsory and free education until the age of 14 was to be achieved by the year 1960. Looking at the present condition of primary education in villages, it is doubtful whether we can achieve 100% enrolment of girls. It is unfortunately true of our society that children are sent to school not according to their intelligence or aptitude but according to their sex. The

reasons for not sending girls to school are both economic and social. In rural areas one of the major barriers is high dropout rate. The major problem faced by the girls is that they may be enrolled at the beginning of the year but they do not always remain in school. It is estimated that 45% of the girl's dropout of school between grades 1 to 5 (The World Bank, 1997b). Girls are often taken out of school to share the family responsibilities such as helping in household work, taking care of younger siblings etc. The resources of the rural poor are so limited that they do not have anything to spare for children's education. If resources are available, it is the boy who is sent to school first. Parents also do not see the value of educating especially a daughter who would get married and remain a housewife. Since they cannot see any direct relationship between education and economic betterment, they have very little motivation to send their girl child to school. It is still not being realized that there is definite connection between education, good motherhood and efficient house management. The management of millions of households and the upbringing of millions of children is thus in the hands of illiterate women. It is here that a change is required.

People can be motivated to have their girl child educated only if the educational system is directly linked with economic and social development. The plight of women, in terms of education is further compounded by the negative attitude of parents toward female education. Some parents are usually reluctant to send their girl child for education especially to higher levels like their male counterpart. Another problem closely related to this is the reluctance to acquire western education and misunderstanding on the part of the girls themselves about the values of the acquisition of formal education. In education, equity means equal access to good schooling. Restricted access to education by women in this country is profoundly rooted in history, religion, culture, the psychology of self, law, political institution and social attitudes which interact in several ways to limit women's access to education when compared with their male counterparts. It has been observed that Indian women are lagging behind their counterparts in developed and some developing nations due to the late start in educating them. This is caused by our traditions and culture which have hard bound rules for women. This tradition reduces them to kitchen managers and producers of

babies. Thus, their education ideally, is expected to end in kitchen a condition which ironically is detested by many parents thereby discouraging them in making any investment in girl-child education. Other problems against women education include the familiar problems like lack of funds, inadequate facilities, inadequate manpower, sexual harassment, conflicting societal role expectations, government policies and lack of political will power to implement the entire educational programme. The inferiority complex observable in Indian women can be attributed to the influence of environmental manipulation. Through the traditional socialization process of the typical society, women are made to accept negative self-fulfilling prophecy, stereotyping and stigmatization that they are members of a weaker sex. At present, the forces which combine to hamper women education and development in India could be viewed broadly to include denial of access to education, early marriage, confinement to solitary living, subjugation by culture to accept choices forced on them, discrimination and harassment at work, political Disenfranchisement from elective and political appointment and exposure to cruel mourning rites upon the death of their husband.

## **5. Need for Girl child education**

Women empowerment can only be achieved through the provision of adequate and functional education to the women folk. This is crucial because no matter how rich or vast a nation is, without an effective, efficient, adequate and functional education for all its citizens (both men and women) education which is relevant to its immediate needs, goals and objectives, such a nation would find it difficult to stand on its own. The brand of education being advocated is that type of education in which is embedded the spirit of self-realization and all that are needed for the country's overall development like mass literacy, economic empowerment etc. The need for women education is also informed by the fact that purposeful occupational achievement and satisfaction is ensured by deep self-awareness and understanding which can only be achieved through the provision of effective and functional education and guidance & counseling. This, has been noted is likely to guarantee women empowerment with its root based on women struggle to improve their status. The empowerment suggested is such that entails the process of challenging power relations and of gaining wider control over source of power. This, however, cannot be achieved without the provision of reasonable access to formal and functional education to the women folk. This is based on the premise that education has been adjudged to be a viable instrument of change in the positive

direction. Provision of formal and functional education is needed for the women folk, because of the following reasons:

5.1 Future educated generations – An the saying goes, “If we educate a boy, we educate one person. If we educate a girl, we educate a family – and a whole nation.” By sending a girl to school, she is far more likely to ensure that her children also receive an education. As many claim, investing in a girl’s education is investing in a nation.

5.2 Decrease infant mortality: Children of educated women are less likely to die before their first birthday. Girls who receive an education are less likely to contract HIV & AIDS, and thus, less likely to pass it onto their children. Primary education alone helps reduce infant mortality significantly, and secondary education helps even more.

5.3 Decrease maternal mortality: Educated women (with greater knowledge of health care and fewer pregnancies) are less likely to die during pregnancy, childbirth, or during the postpartum period. Increased education of girls also leads to more female health care providers to assist with prenatal medical care, labor and delivery, delivery complications and emergencies, and follow-up care.

5.4 Decrease child marriage: Child marriage – in some cases involving girls as young as 6 or 8 almost always results in the end of a girl’s schooling. The result is illiterate or barely literate young mothers without adequate tools to build healthy, educated families. On average, for every year a girl stays in school past fifth grade, her marriage is delayed a year. Educated girls typically marry later, when they are better able to bear and care for their children.

5.5 Decrease population explosion: Educated women tend to have fewer (and healthier) babies. A 2000 study in Brazil found that literate women had an average of 2.5 children while illiterate women had an average of six children, according to UNESCO.

5.6 Increase involvement in the political process: Educated women are more likely to participate in political discussions, meetings, and decision-making, which in turn promote a more representative, effective government.

5.7 Decrease domestic & sexual violence: Educated girls and women are less likely to be victims of domestic and sexual violence or to tolerate it in their families.

5.8 Decrease support for militancy: As women become more educated, they are less likely to support militancy and terrorism than similarly educated men.

5.9 Improve socio-economic growth: Educated women have a greater chance of escaping poverty, leading healthier and more productive lives, and raising the standard of living for their children, families, and communities.

## **6. Policy Perspectives for Girls education**

The policy framework, provision of educational opportunities for women and girls has been an important part of the national endeavour in the field of education since Independence. Though these endeavours did yield significant results, gender disparities persist, more so in rural areas and among disadvantaged communities. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) as revised in 1992 was landmark in the field of policy on women's education in that it recognized the need to redress traditional gender imbalances in educational access and achievement. The NPE also recognized that enhancing infrastructure alone will not redress the problem. It recognized that "the empowerment of women is possibly the most important precondition for the participation of girls and women in the educational process". The programme of Action (POA, 1992), in the section "Education for Women's Equality" (Chapter- XII, pages. 105-107), focuses on empowerment of women as the critical precondition for their participation in the education process. The POA states that education can be an effective tool for women's empowerment, ensuring equal participation in developmental processes; The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha

Abhiyan stresses on improving access to secondary schooling to all young person according to norms through proximate location (say, Secondary Schools within 5 kms, and Higher Secondary Schools within 7-10 kms) / efficient and safe transport arrangements/residential facilities, depending on local circumstances including open schooling and ensures that no child is deprived of secondary education of satisfactory quality due to gender, socio-economic, disability and other barriers.

## **7. Educational Provisions in Centrally Sponsored Schemes in School Education (CSS) Major Schemes for Elementary Education**

1. Operation Black Board
2. Teacher Education
3. Education Guarantee Scheme & Alternative and Innovative Education (EGS & AIE)
4. Mid-day Meal Scheme
5. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

6. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)
7. Shiksha Karmi
8. Mahila Samakhya
9. District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)
10. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)
12. Janshala Programme
13. Padhe Bitiya Badhe Bitiya
14. Ladali Scheme

### **7.1 Major Schemes for Secondary Education**

1. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan
2. Girls Hostel Scheme
- 3 National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education
- 4 Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage
- 5 Scheme of Vocational Education
- 6 National Merit-cum-Means Scholarship Scheme
- 7 Scheme for construction and running of Girls' Hostel for students of secondary and higher secondary schools
- 8 Scholarship schemes for Minority students
- 9 National Scholarships

### **8. Conclusion**

Education is one composite single variable, which has the ability to transform many odds turning in favour of girls more specially so in the rural India. Therefore, an exclusive emphasis on girls' education is necessary. Education for adolescent girls is constraint due to many factors; the most prominent of them is non-availability of

infrastructure and schools. Secondly, the travel time taken in reaching school, fear of crime and unknown eventuality would arise therefore provision of public transport exclusively for girl child is necessary. An official provision would help rescue girls from the early marriages and open doors for their development. Awareness programme are required which would focus on the dynamics and importance of nutrition in physical and mental growth. However, it is to be reiterated at the end that girls need a lot of compassionate treatment and favor to enable them to lead a respectable and meaningful life, and in ensuring this, the role of family members and society is undoubtedly very important and of prime significance and the change attitude of elders towards girls is urgently called for.

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Girl education: A lifeline to rural transformation in India

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