

## IMPORTANCE OF GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN INDIA

Kanchan Joshi\*, Neeta Bora Sharma\*\*

### Abstract

The main purpose of this research paper is to understand the importance of girl child education in India. It is very important to educate girls because education can mould the life of a woman in a considerable way. She can make correct decisions regarding her career, marriage and family on her own. She would recognize her rights in society and act upon them as per her conscience. She would become confident enough to put her opinion in front of the family and society. An African proverb “if you educate a man you educate an individual, But if you educate a woman you educate a nation” remind us of the importance of education for girls. As we know that women possess half of the total population of the world and it's not possible to think about the prosperity of the world without thinking about female development. Then why girls still don't stand equally with boys when it comes to providing them with adequate resources?

**Keyword:** Discrimination, women fertility, women mortality, socio-economic, socio-cultural

### Introduction

In ancient times it was believed that it is not necessary to educate girls. But in the modern age, all women and men are equal to each other and possess equal talents and skills. Then why there is still a concern about girl's education and equal opportunity for them. There is adequate scope for universalisation of education to one and all, including the girls. Malala Yousafzi, a Pakistani activist, was honored with a Nobel Prize for promoting education for girls in the world.<sup>1</sup>

If we look at the history of India, Savitribai Phule, the social reformer who is considered to be India's first modern feminist, and especially remembered for being India's first female teacher. She worked for the upliftment of women in the field of education and literacy.

The Indian government has made several plans and policies to promote girl's education. The status of women has improved a lot since independence. As per the 2011 census, the total literacy rate in India stands at 74.00 percent and the women's literacy rate is at 65.46 percent.<sup>2</sup> From the database, it is clear that there is an increment in the female literacy rate in India. But the growth is slow. In rural India, social norms dictate that women should remain inside their houses and should not go out to work. Several factors affect the education of girls such as socio-economic, socio-cultural, educational level of parents and distance from the school, etc. Placing girls in a position where they can stand on their own feet is one of the biggest challenges today. After a Decade the Right to education (RTE) Act (2009) came into existence, nearly 40% of adolescent girls in the age group of 15-18 years are not attending school while 30% of girls from the poorest families never set foot in a classroom according to the status report. RTE Act of 2009 mandates compulsory education for children between the age of 6-14 years under article 21A of the constitution.<sup>3</sup>

### Importance of girl child education

Girl child education is an instrument of power, prestige, survival, approval, greatness, and advancement for men and women. Women are the nucleus of the family, society, and the nation. How a nation can be called a developed nation without the development of its women? There are several health benefits an educated girl can get rather than the uneducated one. It includes reducing infant and child mortality rates, reduces women's fertility rates, decreases maternal mortality rates, and also it decreases early child marriage, improves communication between couples and a sense of control over one's life, and protecting HIV and other related infections.<sup>4</sup> Educating girl children will help in improving the health of the women if she has the proper knowledge. The future of the girl, her family, society, and the nation will be brighter and better. It will also help in growing the economy of the country if more women will participate in financial activities. The major problems like unemployment and poverty will be eradicated. Though in India, several initiatives have been

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\* Research Scholar, Dept. of Political Science, D.S.B. Campus, K.U., Nainital

\*\* Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Kumaun University, Nainital

taken by the government to reduce the major problem of educating the girl child. Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (2001-2002), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (2009), Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (2015), Sukanya Samridhhi Yojana (SSY), Balika Samridhhi Yojana (BSY), to name a few. Women assume a significant role in creating a society. Many philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, and Karl Marx also emphasized educating all men and women without any discrimination. It is known by all that education helps an individual to think freely and develop naturally without constraints imposed on them by society. In today's modern world, where nothing is free of cost and competition is very tough, it is very difficult for a man in the family to fulfill the needs of the family alone. If the woman also works to support the finances of the family, then it will be very easy to run the family for both of them. An educated woman can also take part in the decision-making process for the family and society. She would have her own opinion. Education has widened the thought process of the people in the society to that extent that girls have started to perform the cremation rites of their folks in many places in India, despite the fact that they are not allowed to do such activities in Hindu culture.

**Factors affecting girl child education in India**

The major factors that are responsible to affect girl child education can be a poor family background, religious isolation, disability, early marriage, gender-driven violence, pregnancy, cultural dimensions, and attitude against women's status and roles.<sup>4</sup> The problems of the girl child education start from home. In rural villages in India, the problem of early marriage and poor family background is the main reason for the severe condition of girls. They think girls are liabilities and boys are assets who are the ones to improve the poor condition of the family in the future. This sick mind set has to be changed for the better condition of girls. In villages, the people are not literate enough to understand the importance of education. Girls lack proper guidance from their parents and elders. From an early age, they get involved in household works like cooking, fetching water, washing clothes/utensils, look after their animals, etc. they don't even get to know why education is important? The poor mentality that boys are more intelligent and responsible than girls is illogical. Both girls and boys are born and brought up together at home and within the same community, and then having such poor mind set is not appreciated at all.

There are still restrictions imposed upon girls and they are forced to grow up differently in society. They are not able to possess the same abilities as boys, only because they're being provided with fewer resources and opportunities as compared to boys. Had they been provided with proper education and opportunity like boys, they would have stood equally in the society and taking care of their whole family by themselves.

**Challenges of girl child education in India**

Most of the parents think it is a waste of money to educate a girl child. An educated girl can take decisions with a free mind and can fight against all social evils such as child marriage, dowry, and domestic violence, etc. educating a girl means improving their standard of living along with the gender discrimination at work. Girls face several challenges in getting proper education especially in rural areas; it's tough for girls to step out from their house to get a proper education. People in the rural areas are mostly uneducated and are unaware of the importance of education for girls. Apart from it, their financial condition is not that good to educate all their children so mostly boys are sent to school and girls look after the household work. Also, schools in most remote areas are far-reaching for children. Covering such a huge distance every day is a big challenge. There are many obstacles on their way to achieving the aim such as socio-economic, socio-cultural, and lack of proper guidance. Culture shouldn't hinder the girl child's education. Variation in the literacy rate among males and females in urban and rural areas over a period of time is mentioned in the figures given below-<sup>5</sup>

**India's literacy rates, 7+ yrs (In Percentage)**

Total	Person	Males	Females	Rural	Persons	Males	Females	Urban	Persons	Males	Females
<b>2001</b>	64.84	75.26	53.67	<b>2001</b>	58.74	70.7	46.13	<b>2001</b>	79.92	86.27	72.86
<b>2011</b>	72.99	80.89	64.64	<b>2011</b>	67.77	77.15	57.93	<b>2011</b>	84.11	88.76	79.11

From the table mentioned above, it is clear that the literacy rate in rural areas is very low as compared to urban areas in India. And this is the need of the hour to uplift the condition of girls especially in rural areas.

### **New Education Policy**

The NEP was passed by the Indian government on 29th July 2020. That outlines the vision of India's new education system.

The New Education Policy will bring more inclusivity for the girls. It will help in exploding the prevalent gender stereotypes in the society. For example, there are new subjects that will be added in the NEP like carpentry and coding from the 6th grade itself. It may seem like a normal course to many, but girls are never considered to do works like carpentry in our society. It has always been associated with manly profession.

Secondly, there is a concept of gender that is to be introduced at a very young age. The children have to be taught the difference between gender and biological sex at the earliest. Education is the key to cure any curiosity in adolescence age.

The New Education Policy mainly focuses on girl children and women. By looking at the dropout rates of girls from school in India, it targets to lay out more support and comfort to girls. The main focus of this policy is the dropout rates at higher education level. This policy mentions the GER for grades 6-8 was 90.7% while for grades 9-10 and 11-12 was only 79.3% and around 50% respectively.

Menstruation is one of the major reasons that lead to girls dropping out. These statistics are startling and should be taken as a wakeup call to talk openly about menstrual health in the society.

To ensure the increment in literacy rates among girls, teachers should form small groups of students to engage them in a discussion about health, gender identity, menstrual health, sex education etc. this will help them to become more self-aware.<sup>6</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Education plays a vital role in the socio-economic and political aspects of woman's development. Through the use of education, the world has become a better place to live in. There has been the formulation of several policies and plans to improve the literacy rate in the country. RTE has brought some positive changes in gender disparity in schooling. But it focuses more on primary level of schooling that is the major reasons for dropping out drastically after ending their basic education. NEP is considered to play a vital role to tackle this problem. For the faster development of females, we all must recognize the significance of education for girls. Gender inequality is one of the biggest challenges today. This can be tackled by eradicating poverty, providing free and compulsory education to girls, proper counseling, parenting enlightenment, and enhancing their safety. To ensure the enrollment of girls in schools government should take proper measures to implement the policies on the ground level. The task of undisputable girl-child education should be given priority. Though, the increment can be seen in the literacy rate among girls since independence. It is because of the steps taken by the government for the development of the girl child. It is hard to imagine the development of a society where the condition of girls is poor. Girls make up a family that makes a society which further helps in nation-building.

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