



GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION : A CAUSE OF CONCERN

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Abstract: *Gender discrimination in education is an insidious problem that causes very few people to stand up and take notice. Whatever be the cause there is a gap in enrolment and retention. The social barriers standing in the way of girls attending schools- poverty, compulsions of older girls in the family having to look after the home and younger siblings, the misconceptions that girls don't need education and that what is taught in the schools is irrelevant to them, parents seeing no benefits in educating daughters, lack of women teachers and separate schools for girls, support facilities and transport facilities, all these inhibit parents from getting the girl child enrolled. Even if they enroll at the primary stage owing to the various intervention strategies of the government, their chances of completing secondary or higher secondary level is very bleak.*

The present study is an effort to throw some light on the causes of gender bias in education.

Key Words: enrolment, retention, standing, attending, compulsions, siblings, misconceptions.

INTRODUCTION- We all know that India is a signatory to all the major human rights instruments. Also, its constitution makes a commitment to establish an egalitarian society. However, the ground realities are quite grim and still there is a vast difference between theory and practice. The girl child in India is discriminated in every possible aspect whatsoever. She is violated socially, psychologically, economically and even physically. The girl child is considered a burden as she is to be married off with huge dowry. Girls are not sent to school or even if they manage their entry into the school, they are made to depart soon after joining at the slightest possible pretext. Girls' rights take a back seat in comparison to those of boys who are considered as the future bread winner and heir of the family. Girls have to take care of all the household chores right from fetching water to cooking to bringing fuel and fodder. They have to look after the animals and their younger siblings. In case if girls go to work to lend a helping hand to family, they are paid less than the boys. They are taken to a hospital only in emergency. They are denied proper nutrition and immunization. Though the situation is changing fast yet in most families a girl child's demands are met with reluctance and that too only after meeting the demands of the male

child. The situation is worse still, in rural and poor sections of the society where the very survival is often at the stake.

This discrimination or bias which puts women or girl children at a disadvantage is usually referred to as gender bias. Gender bias is the most pervasive form of inequality which operates across the board. Yet, while gender equality has been a key objective of state policy in India and is inherent in our constitution as well (be it education, employment, health or any other sphere), it has lacked critical edge in implementation.

Gender bias in education, from a sociological perspective, refers to the idea that the educational system does not offer the same type of opportunities for upward mobility to both genders equally. The gender discrimination in education is just an extension of what we think in the family, in society and the community in which we live. Gender discrimination in education is an insidious problem that causes very few people to stand up and take notice. Whatever be the cause there is a gap in enrolment and retention. The social barriers standing in the way of girls attending schools- poverty, compulsions of older girls in the family having to look after the home and younger siblings, the misconceptions that girls don't need education



and that what is taught in the schools is irrelevant to them, parents seeing no benefits in educating daughters, lack of women teachers and separate schools for girls, support facilities and transport facilities, all these inhibit parents from getting the girl child enrolled. Even if they enroll at the primary stage owing to the various intervention strategies of the government, their chances of completing secondary or higher secondary level is still very bleak.

OBJECTIVE- The objective of the study is to understand the causes of gender bias in education.

METHODOLOGY- The study is based upon the collection of secondary data. The secondary data was collected from various sources of publications such as Journals, Research articles, Internet and published records.

CAUSES OF GENDER BIAS INHERENT IN OUR SOCIETY- Shevani (1998) in her study discussed the social forces working against the girl child in India. To survive and grow, the girl child has to face discrimination at every phase of her life. She has to put up with sexual abuse and forced labour within the family and the community. The findings in the document uncover the fact that there are loopholes in the policies to protect the rights and interests of girl child.

Pandit (1999) studied the problem of drop-out of girl students. The study indicated that the main causes of drop-out among girls include poverty, unfavourable ethos and early marriage.

Sharma (2003) in his study pointed out the reason for the inherent gender bias in many societies. The study explained the gender inequality in education and employment. Girls' lack of access to education is not always related to scarcity of places in schools. It also emerges from expectations, attitudes and biases in families as well as communities at large.

Rani Das S. (2010) in her study elaborates the problems of literacy and education in case of Indian Women. She points out that burden of

inequality falls disproportionately on women due to six types of inequality-1) mortality, due to gender bias in healthcare and nutrition, 2) natal destruction that is self-selective abortion and female infanticide, 3) lack of basic facility of education and skill development, 4) lack of opportunity of higher education and professional training, 5) lack of employment opportunities, 6) denial of ownership rights to women in acquiring property.

In the light of the studies conducted by various researches, the following emerge as strong contributory factors towards the problem of gender discrimination in education in India.

Preference of Sons over Daughters- According to a number of studies discrimination against girl child is the direct outcome of son preference. There are three major factors that contribute to this preference. Firstly, the continued belief is the economic utility of sons as the future bread winner of the family as well as support for parents during old age. Besides, dowry also serves as an economic incentive to have sons the very same way as it serves as a disincentive to have daughters. Secondly, the socio-cultural factors like patriarchy and inheritance serve to create conditions that sustain female disadvantage and inequality. Lastly, within religions across the board sons have been accorded the unique privilege of performing various rites and rituals, including the last rites for deceased parents.. All these factors create a higher premium on having sons.

Dowry- The practice of dowry is widespread across all geographic region, class, caste and religion. The dowry system in India is largely responsible for gender inequalities by influencing the perception that girls are a burden on the families. Such beliefs limit the resources invested by parents on their daughters and thereby limit her bargaining power within the family. The payment of dowry has been prohibited under various sections of the Indian Penal Code. Several studies also show that while attitudes of people are slowly changing about dowry, yet the institution itself has changed very little, and



even today it continues to prevail across the board. And since parents have to pay huge dowry to marry off their daughters, they do not consider it wise to invest in their daughters' education. Girls are considered as someone else's property and so the parents are reluctant to invest in them.

Patriarchal Society

According to the famous sociologist Sylvia Walby, patriarchy is a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. The major cause of gender inequality in Indian society lies in its patriarchy system. The system of patriarchy finds its validity in our religious beliefs, whether it is Hindu, Muslim or any other religious belief. Women's subjugation and exploitation in the name of this patriarchy is an age old cultural phenomenon of Indian society. Men in our society do not want women to be at par with them. And depriving her of education is probably the most important tool in their hand to maintain this status quo.

REMEDIES- In the light of the given findings the following measures can be adopted to improve the scenario-

- * The structural inequality and the ideology of discrimination and subordination between men and women must be addressed.
- * Mass awareness on the importance of girl child education should be created to reduce the gendered practices in education.
- * Girl students should be given training in self defense as it is a critical component of gender sensitive education. This will instill a sense of confidence in them
- * Awareness should be raised among the parents about their girls' inborn child right to education and there must be continuous flow of interactions between school and parents.
- * The environment should be made attractive for girl students so as to keep them motivated to attend school daily.
- * Strategies for advancement of women should be higher literacy, more formal education

and greater opportunities for employment.

* The real change will only come when the mindset of men will change. In fact women also need to change their mindset as they have made themselves part of that exploitative system.

CONCLUSION- Although changes have been observed in our society, yet the situation has not turned out to be completely favourable to girls' education. What really matters at this juncture is the change of mindset. Considering the role played by women as that of a mother, a wife and a daughter, they deserve to be treated as equal partners and not viewed as competitors. The Constitution of India, under Article 14, 15, and 16, might have guaranteed women equality before law, protection and opportunity to work without discrimination on the grounds of religion, caste, creed and sex. The same cannot happen unless both men and women are reluctant to change their attitudes.

Time and again women have proved that they are in no way inferior to men and they can walk neck to neck in all walks of life. The male dominated society is not yet ready to accept it. Women just need the necessary support and encouragement of the family and the society. Besides, the role of government and private players in this regard is also crucial.

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