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Empowering Girls in India

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Abstract

If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. 'Woman empowered means Mother India empowered' has rightly been said by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru on the eve of Independence. We are now living in a democratic country and all the citizens, male or female, in such a country have the right of equality according to constitutional provisions. The same is also applicable in concerning the education of a girl. Today in India there are many Schemes and Acts in practice which are for the all-around development of girls. Education is the major issue. All Acts and schemes are useless if the beneficiary is not literate and not able to know. Only an educated girl can fight for her rights. Before making so many other schemes and providing facilities, we have to make sure that the girls, for whom schemes/programmes are made, can access the existing provisions. It is possible and easier for a well aware and educated girl to access her rights. Education should be a priority for girls. Recently Central Government as well State Governments have introduced many schemes for the improvement of girl's education. Some of them are: 'Dhanlakshmi scheme', 'Bhagyalakshmi scheme', 'Ladli scheme', 'Rajlakshmi scheme', 'Rakshak scheme' etc. After RTE Act, 2009 a positive attitude has been noticed in the Indian society, particularly in Rural areas regarding girls education. The role of media and information technology cannot be ignored in this regard to promote and popularise the expanded outlook of people. It is the right of a child (girl or boy) to get education. Between the age group of 6 and 14 years the elementary education is completely free for each child. There are also some special schemes for the single girl child. For the girls in higher education, there are some other schemes too. In this paper the focus is on how girls can be empowered by education and to analyse the role and impact of RTE to enhance

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girls education after the execution of Children's Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. This paper also analyses the impact of various means for communication, Films, Television and Information Technology to enhance the empowerment of Girls through Education in India in post-RTE era.

INTRODUCTION

If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. 'Woman empowered means mother India empowered' has rightly been said by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru on the eve of Independence. We are now living in a democratic country and all the citizens, male or female, in such a country have the right of equality according to constitutional provisions. The same is also applicable regarding the education of a girl. Today in India there are many Schemes and Acts in practice which are for the all-around development of girls. But all Acts and schemes are useless if the beneficiary is not literate and not able to know about. Only an educated girl can fight for her rights. Before making so many other Schemes, we have to make sure that the girls, for whom these Schemes are made, are able to access and get benefit on their own behalf. It is possible and easier for a well aware and educated girl to access her rights. Education should be a priority for girls. Recently Central Government as well State Governments have introduced so many schemes for the improvement of girl's education. Some of them are 'Dhanlakshmi scheme', 'Bhagyalakshmi scheme', 'Ladli scheme', 'Rajlakshmi scheme',

'Rakshak scheme' etc. After RTE Act, 2009 a positive attitude has been noticed in the Indian society, particularly in rural areas regarding girl's education. The role of media and information technology cannot be ignored in this regard to promote and popularise the expanded outlook of people. It is the right of a child (girl or boy) to get education. Between the age group of 6 and 14 years, the elementary education is completely free for each child. There are also some special schemes for the single girl child. For the girls in higher education there are some other schemes too.

WHY THERE IS LESS EMPHASIS ON GIRLS' EDUCATION IN INDIA

Indian society feels that a girl is a liability who gets married and will not contribute to the economic and social development of the family. It perceives a girl as somebody who has to do duties of cooking and housekeeping. As a result, Indian society considers home training more important for girls as compared to formal education.

Another contributing factor is the rapid growth of the population. Most Indian households have a number of children. Thus their needs are much higher than their earnings. This leads to the

neglect of the girl education and put more emphasis on the education of the boy child. In this instance, marriage is taken more seriously as compared to education hence a number of Indian girls are married at a younger age. This becomes as an impediment in the education of the Indian girl.

Some of the important Committees and Institutes established by Indian Government after the Independence to improve the status of girls' education –

1. In 1904, Annie Besant established Central Hindu Girls' School at Banaras.
2. Prof. Karue established SNDT Women's University at Poona for the promotion of women education.
3. Radhakrishnan Commission or University Education Commission (1948)
4. Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh Committee (1959),
5. Smt. Hansa Mehta Committee (1962),
6. M. Bhaktvatsalam Committee to look into the causes of Public Support particularly in Rural Area for girls Education and to public Corporation,
7. Kothari Commission (1964-66),
8. Resolution on the National policy on Education (1968),
9. Report of the Committee on the status of women in India (1974),
10. Challenge of Education (1985),
11. National Policy on Education (1986),
12. Programme of Action (1986) and (1992) etc.

To develop the primary education and to achieve the aim of universalisation of primary education up to age level 6-14 years, some schemes or programmes like, Operation Blackboard (OBB), District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), National Literacy Mission (NLM), National Programme of Nutritional Support of Primary Education (NPNSPE) or (Mid-Day Meals), RTE Act, 2009 etc., were introduced. Despite these government efforts to educate girls, women are still lagging behind in literacy.

The following are some of the reasons for a girl child to get education –

1. to educate the future generation;
2. to decrease the infant mortality;
3. to decrease the maternal mortality;
4. to decrease the population explosion;
5. to increase involvement of women in political process;
6. to decrease domestic and sexual violence;
7. to decrease the support for militancy;
8. to improve socio-economic growth;

PRESENT STATUS OF GIRLS' EDUCATION IN INDIA

At present the people are getting educated and their way of thinking is also changing. Now the educated people do not discriminate between a girl and a boy. They are providing education to both. Girls are also

getting aware about their rights. The enrolment of girls is getting high comparatively.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

Education for women is the best way to improve the health, nutrition and economic status of a household that constitute a micro unit of a national economy. The trend of literacy reflects some positive and astonishing changes if we look at the scene behind the curtain. In table, we can see a wide gap between the literacy rate of the male and female but the same is decreasing after 1981. This will have far reaching consequences on the development of society.

IMPORTANCE OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

Women constitute half the human race. Education has been recognised as an essential agent of social change

and development in any society of any country. Education is considered as a potent instrument through which processes like modernisation and social change come to existence. Education exposes people to new thoughts and ideas and provides necessary skills. Hence to think harmonious development without educating girls is impossible. Moreover it has been rightly said that to educate a girl is to educate the whole family. Therefore, the emphasis with regard to girl education should be to equip her multiple role as citizen, homemaker and contributor to family income, builders of new society and builder of the nation. Education is the most important factor for girl empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Discrimination of girl from womb to tomb is well known to all of us. There is continued inequality and vulnerability of girls in all sectors – Economic,

Table 1
Trends in Women Education (Literacy Rate during Decades)

Year	Persons (Total)	Males	Females	Literacy Gap
1951	18.33	27.16	08.96	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.75	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.98	23.98
1981	43.56	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	02.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.88	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India, 2011

Education, Social, Political, Health Care, Nutrition, Rights and Legal etc. Girls are oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walks of life. In order to fight against the socially constructed gender biases, girls 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. More importantly, an educated woman in a society like India will contribute to reducing the infant mortality rate.

Some of the Constitutional Provisions for the Girls' Education –

1. The Constitution of India in Article 15(1) on right to equality, provides the basic policy framework that enshrines the vision of girls' and the spirit in which their education is to be provided.
2. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002 has made elementary education a Fundamental Right for children in the age group of 6-14 years by providing that "the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as State may, by law, determine".
3. A new thrust was provided to girls' education in the National Policy on Education 1986, (as modified in 1992) which provided a holistic vision for the education of girls and women and recognised a cross-cutting issues that inhibited the

realisation of this goal. It aims at using Education as an agent of basic change in the status of women in society.

ROLE OF ICT IN EMPOWERMENT OF GIRLS AND THEIR EDUCATION

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have played a vital role in the development of societies. ICT sector encompasses segments as diverse as telecommunication, television, radio broadcasting, computer hardware and software and services and electronic media like the Internet and the electronic mail. ICT enable girls to create access, store, transmit and manipulate information. In other words it consists of IT as well as telecommunication, broadcast media, all types of audio and video processing and transmission and network based control and monitoring functions. There has a rapid and unprecedented growth of ICT since the 80's. The growth of information technology has been phenomenal and its impact is seen in almost all spheres of life.

HOW ICT CAN HELP THE EMPOWERMENT OF GIRLS AND THEIR EDUCATION

Through ICT, girls are getting empowered. They can access important information very easily and see so many encourageable programmes which are specially broadcasted for motivation and inspiration of girls. Some of the most important

advantages for the girls from ICT are as follows –

1. Communication has become inexpensive and affordable and has extended to remotest areas (rural and tribal).
2. The broadcasting industry, especially the television and radio, have also grown by leaps and bound and are now easily accessible to rural areas also.
3. The broadcast in television is now in all languages with many channels being aired.
4. The radio broadcast is also freely available to most of the people and has been well integrated with mobile technology.
5. The potential of ICT for girls in developing countries is highly dependent upon their levels of technical skill and education.
6. Government is also imparting the technical education on the use of ICT as a part of both formal and informal educational systems and initiating distant learning and vocational courses.

In Indian context, this revolution of ICT has not been passed on to the girl folk primarily due to the social structure, values and beliefs. But now the thinking and attitude of the people regarding education and ICT are changing. They are also sending their girl child to the vocational institutes to get education so that

those girls can also come in the mainstream. The Girl ICT Day Was Celebrated on 7 May 2013, in New Delhi.

GIRLS' EDUCATION IN RTE ACT 2009

According to RTE Act, 2009, “child” means a male or female child between the age of six to fourteen years. Some specific recommendations for the girl child education are given below –

1. Every girl child of the age of six to fourteen years shall have the right for the free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till the completion of elementary education.
2. For the purpose of the sub-section (1), no child would be liable to pay any type of fee or charge or expenses which may prevent her from pursuing and completing the elementary education.
3. As defined in clause 1 of section 2, the person with disability will not be discriminated.
4. For seeking admission in such other school, the head teacher or the principal have to provide the transfer certificate immediately without any delay.
5. For each girl child school will be in the neighbourhood area so that the parent can send their daughters to the school without any hesitation and fear.

FACILITIES AND SCHEMES PROVIDED BY THE STATE AND CENTRE GOVERNMENT

Both the state and the central governments are providing facilities to empower the girls and improve their status in the society. There are many schemes run at state and centre levels like 'Dhanlakshmi scheme', 'Bhagyalakshmi scheme', 'Ladli scheme', 'Rajlakshmi scheme' and 'Rakshak scheme'. But once again the same question comes to our mind that the benefit of these schemes and facilities can be taken by the common people only when their mindset changes and they become ready to send their girl child to school.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The situation and status of girl child is improving in India. The government of India is making umpteen efforts to uplift the girl child. Education also brings reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. To encourage the education of girls at all levels and for dilution of gender bias in providing knowledge and education, the Government has established schools, colleges and universities exclusively for girls. To bring more girls, especially from marginalised families of Below Poverty Line (BPL),

in mainstream of education, the government is providing a package of concessions in the form of free books, uniform, boarding and lodging, mid-day meals, scholarships, free cycles and so on.

Yet one cannot speak of women empowerment when cases of violence against women are rampant. Society needs to change itself and the way it thinks. What needs to begin is a movement to empower the girl child right from the womb, means before her birth to her existence. Her upbringing needs to be changed. She cannot be brought up in an environment where girls are taught to remain subdued. Their aspirations cannot be curbed because they are females, they cannot be ignored. The girl child needs to grow learning that she is not less than her brother. She needs to know that a wide range of avenues wait for her to be explored in this world of hi-tech lifestyle. The urban India is adopting these changes, but the situation has to be improved in rural parts where the major part of our population lives. The government and NGOs are doing their best to bring out changes in these areas. Women empowerment drives and initiatives will continue and some will do wonders in achieving their goals. But the real difference will come only once the foundation of our society undergoes dramatic transformation.

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