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Barriers to Female Education in India

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Education to females is constraint due to multiple factors; the prominent of them is poverty. Secondly rigid outdated social customs and practices also discriminate against girls. Lack of female teachers, early marriage, poor infrastructure, problem of transport, lack of toilets, inappropriate school timings, harassment by teachers, teasing by boys, molestation, lack of family support etc. are other reasons which inhibits female education. For the expansion of education among females, a number of initiatives have been taken by the Indian government, yet women access to education continued to be slow. Government should invest in resources and policies that help in preventing the obstacles of education. There is need to increase awareness of importance of female education in society. Research by the World Bank and other organizations has shown that increasing girls' schooling boosts women's wages and leads to faster economic growth than educating only boys. Moreover, when women earn more money, they are more likely to invest it in their children and households, enhancing family wealth and well being. The present paper is an attempt to understand different barriers that obstruct female education in India.

Keywords: Female, Education, Girls, India, Barriers.

Introduction

With the second largest population in the world, India is a home to 313 million illiterate people, of which 59 percent are females. Although girls have the same right to education as boys still equal access to education for women in our country still remains a problem. Girls in our country, do not finish school and colleges because they are forced (by the society, by their circumstances or by the threat of violence) to focus on household, care giving and child rearing responsibilities. In the patriarchal set up of Indian families, females have lower status and fewer privileges than males. A conservative cultural attitude prevent girls from getting education. They are considered as 'parayadhan' i.e. property of someone who will marry and take her away from the family. Therefore, spending on their education is just like wasting money. Also, there is a notion among some Indian males that it is difficult to handle educated and economically independent women as she might hurt male ego.

Objectives and Research Design

The present study is descriptive in nature. An attempt has been made to understand socio-cultural, economic, educational etc. barriers which hamper female education in India.

Keeping in mind, the need of the study, the data utilized are secondary in character, which are collected from internet, books, journals, magazines, published papers, government documents etc.

Review of Literature

According to Teachman et al (1996), some of the key obstacles to girls' education are cultural traditions, boy preference, high education prices, parental education and the financial condition and unsatisfactory school facilities.

According to Hardre and Reeve (2003), parents treated education for a girl as insignificant. Investments in girls' education are seen as unnecessary as it is considered that a boy can only help his family financially while parents have to pay dowry marriage costs for girls.

Dighe (2006) is of the view that increased female education is linked to improved health, lower fertility and other benefits that have high social returns. According to her research study in slums of South Delhi, almost all her respondents were school dropouts except few for various socio-economic reasons that spoiled the chances for girls to continue their studies.

Accordingly to UNICEF (2007), each child should have dignified and equal access to quality education without discrimination.

According to Odomore (2015), a girl faces a lot of challenges when she gets to education. The esoteric custom and patriarchal bias make these challenges more onerous and difficult.

According to Sahoo (2016), girl's education is a key factor in India's social and economic growth.

According to Abhijeet Mishra and Kanika Bera (2016), despite constitutional provisions of free education, dropout trend in government school still persist on a largest scale among girls students.

Pattnaik and Nagaraju Gundemeda (2016), through their empirical study on two villages of rural Odisha inferred two set of factors influencing girls dropouts from school-one is infrastructural shortcomings like non availability of high schools within the villages and other institutional problems like helping in domestic chores, taking care of younger siblings, earning for parents as child labour etc.

According to Singh and Rabindranath (2019), girls' education suffers from many factors, gender discrimination is the most prominent of them.

Barriers to Female Education

There are many social, cultural, economic, educational, demographic, political and administrative barriers that inhibits participation of females in education, viz.

Poverty

Poverty is the biggest cause of illiteracy in India. In poor families, girls are often denied to the opportunity of better education. In rural setting, illiteracy of parents multiply the risk of non-schooling and dropout rate of a girl child. The urban female literacy rate is 64 percent and rural women literacy rate is half of it, i.e., 31 percent. Also, in six of the 24 states, only 25 percent or less of the women in rural areas are literate.

Number of children

Sometimes, due to more number of children in the family, children (especially girls) are forced to abandon their education in order to work and provide support to the family. People, in India are interested in investing in boys education rather than girls because boys are considered the legal heirs of the family while girls will go to another house.

Gender Inequality

It is ironical that women in India are still facing gender based inequality in education. The wide gap between the male-female education i.e., male literacy 82.14 percent and female literacy 65.46 percent (according to 2011 census), clearly indicates gender disparity in India. Being trapped in traditional Indian mind set up, girls are often denied from sending to schools by some parents.

Child Marriage

One important factor which put an end to a girl's education is marriage in early age or we can say child marriage. Though illegal, such a practice is common in some Indian states as Rajasthan, U.P. Jharkhand etc. Researches showed that people belonging to rural areas with poor socio-economic background generally are involved in child marriages.

Dowry System

According to New Webester's Dictionary of the English Language, Dowry is, "the money (goods or estate) which a woman brings to her husband in marriage." Due to dowry system , some Indian parents feel extra burden on them. So, they did not want to spend money on their daughter's education and thus prevent them from getting education.

Shortage of female Teachers

Shortage of qualified female teachers in educational institutes is one of the major problem of girls education in India. Due to security reasons, parents prefer to send their girl in education centers with female teachers. As far as comfort level is concerned, girls feel more comfortable with lady teachers as compared to male teachers. But, there is a huge shortage of qualified female teachers in our schools and colleges. And this has, thus become a barriers in access to education of girls in India.

Problem of Transport

The large distance from girls home to school is another barrier to girls education. Families fear about kidnapping and other mishappenings if pick and drop facility was not available. So, they prefer to keep their girls at home instead of sending schools and colleges.

Inappropriate School Timings

Due to engagement in domestic chores or in field at morning time, girls in rural set up could not able to attend Schools. Enrollment and retention rate may be high if educational facilities are made available during periods suitable to them when they are free from household chores.

Harassment by Teachers and Teasing by Boys

Verbal and physical harassment as scolding, beating and insulting by teachers sometimes created fear among girl students which in turn encourage school dropout. Teasing by boys on the way to school prevented girls from feeling safe and also resulted in school dropout as well.

Lack of Support from Family

In some cases, the poor girls were interested in studying but due to lack of support from family members unable to continue their education. Lack of support was sometimes related to the fear of parents about engaging their daughters in some romantic relationship.

Toilet Facility for Girls

One of the critical barriers to female education in India was the lack of toilet facilities in some educational premises. According to recent ASER (Annual State of Education Report), only 55.7% of schools in India have useable toilets for girls.

Molestation/Abuse in Schools & Colleges

Cases of abduction, rape, sexual harassment and molestation discourage girls and parents in pursuing their education.

Poor School Environment for Girls

Poor infrastructure, poor basic amenities as drinking water, toilet facility and lack of teachers is another reason for not sending girls to school.

Obsession with Marriage

As females are considered as 'someone else's wealth' in India, most of the parents have the obsession to get their girls married as early as possible preferably to people in their own castes. It thus hinder education of females.

Lack of Girls School and Hostels

Many girls desirous of getting education above middle level, facilities for which are available away from their homes, cannot avail themselves of these facilities due to lack of hostel arrangements. Girls, particularly those belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes would continue their education at middle and above level, if they could find free or residential facilities near educational institutes. Many parents do not want to send their daughters to co-educational institutions especially at upper primary level. Thus, there is an urgent need to open separate schools and colleges for girls in support for more and more expansion of education among females.

Government Initiatives

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) is a campaign of government of India which aims for survival, protection and education of girl child. It was launched on 22 January, 2015 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Several schemes/yojna under BBBP has been launched for the empowerment of females, as follows:

1. Sukanya Samridhi Yojna
2. Balika Samridhi Yojna
3. Ladli Laxmi Yojna
4. Ladli Scheme
5. Kanyashree Prakalpa Yojna
6. Dhan Lakshmi Scheme and many more.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)

This scheme was launched in July, 2004 in order to provide education to girls at primary level. Actually, it is a chain of residential schools, run by the government of India for girls belonging to weaker sections of society.

Saakshar Bharat

Saakhar Bharat is an initiative launched in 2019, which promotes and strengthen adult education, especially of women.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

This Scheme was launched in 2001, which aims to provide useful and relevant elementary education for all children in the age group of 6-14 years.

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)

NPEGEL is an amended form of SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan). which was launched in 2003, to provide additional support to access to education of those girls which are not in school. Remedial classes, model schools, vocational training programmes etc. are the main features of this programme.

Kanya Saksharta Protshan Yojna

To reduce the dropout rate and to increase the interest of tribal girl students to continue their studies, this scheme has been launched.

Rashstriay Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)

In order to improve the quality of secondary education, RMSA was launched by the Indian government in the year 2009. It includes provision of laboratories, libraries, Art and Craft rooms, computer rooms etc..

SABLA

This is a Rajeev Gandhi Scheme of empowerment of Adolescent Girls, initiated on 01st April 2011. It aims to provide nutrition and vocational training to girls.

UDAAN

This programme give wings to girl students. It aims to enhance the enrollment of girl student in prestigious technical educational institutions through incentives and academic support.

Scholarships for Women

To encourage education among under privileged female folks, to uplift the status of female students and to empower girls and women, many scholarships have been announced by the Indian government e.g. Pragati Scholarship, Begum Hazrat Mahal National scholarship, Prabha Dutt Scholarship, Santoor women Scholarship, Abhilasha Scholarship etc.

Apart from the above schemes, multiple numbers of other programmes have been launched by the Government of India to encourage the enrollment of females in primary, secondary and higher education. But despite of all these efforts, women access to education continued to be slow.

Conclusion

An educated female population can increases a country's productivity and fuels economic growth. Educating girls can break cycles of poverty too, as also said by Kofi Annan (former UN Secretary), "To educate girls is to reduce poverty" Expressing the importance of education, Nobel prize winner famous economist and philosopher Amartya Sen says, "China has managed to reduce their fertility to a large extent because of basic expansion of women's education, not because of the one-child family". Actually, education to women is a most powerful weapon to bring change in the society."

Lack of education put females at the risk of exploitation. Keeping females illiterate means, we are creating an illiterate and ignorant generation. Girls should get the quality education, they need and deserve. To protect future generation, government should invest in resources and policies that help in preventing the obstacles of education. Socio-cultural practices that work as barriers to female education need to be rooted out at the earliest. It is high time to take strict steps against barriers of female education in India because no development can take place without women's education. Carla Koppell of the United States Agency for International Development, better known USAID, even called female education a "silver bullet" for empowerment and progress. So, 'Let us pick up our books and pencils. They are most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world' (Malala Yousafzai).

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