



Girls Education in India : A Scenario

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Abstract : Education is a basic human right that should be exercised fully in all nations, but for many girls in India, attending school is not an option. A girl's education is an essential starting point in establishing equality everywhere. Despite the Indian Constitution guaranteeing equality before the law and non-discrimination on the basis of sex, India remains a patriarchal society. Male inheritance and

ISSN : 2348-5612 © URR



property ownership, early marriage, dowry, honor crimes, lack girls' education, witch hunting, violence against women, and trafficking are all serious issues in the country. There are schools, but most girls do not attend, often because of religious reasons or cultural pressures.

A study conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau states that three out five girls receives primary education versus three out four boys. There should not be differences in the numbers of such a basic, universal human right. The law of the land makes it clear that both boys and girls have an equal opportunity to attend school from the age of six through fourteen, and that primary education is a fundamental right (Indian Constitution, Art 21). If the constitution does not make it clear enough, there is also an article in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defining that education is a universal human right (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art 26). Girls are not receiving equal access to primary education in rural India and therefore are not achieving equality.

Limited access to laws and rights

The laws governing education in India are remarkably similar to the laws of western nations. These laws are accessible to the citizens of India, but many of the citizens are unsure of how to properly live them out and where to go with complaints. Complaints usually fall on deaf ears and the citizen is told that there is equal access but that they are not fully utilizing it. It is a catch-22 situation.

In addition to national laws, there are also international laws that also govern these states. These laws, however, are harder to access for the average citizen. The citizens are only able to access these laws through local NGOs. However, the NGOs are not usually located in rural India. The



Universal Declaration of Human Rights has a clear article outlining that the access to education is a basic human right (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art 26). These declarations should give more power to the government to provide access to education to all children.

Girls and women’s right to education is guaranteed under international law

Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) is the most comprehensive provision on girls and women’s right to education. According to this article, states have the obligation to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and to ensure:

- The same conditions for access to studies at all educational levels, both in urban and rural areas
- The same quality of education; the elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women
- The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants, to access programmes of continuing education, including literacy programmes, and to participate in sport and physical education
- The reduction of female students drop-out rates
- Access to educational information on health, including advice on family planning

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) also guarantee girls and women’s right to education combining general provisions on non-discrimination with specific provisions on the right to education.

Reasons why girls are pulled out of school

Despite progress, girls and women continue to be discriminated against in accessing education and within education systems. 57 million children worldwide, including 31 million girls, are out of school and two thirds of illiterate adults are women. In developing countries, adolescent girls are more likely to drop-out of secondary school than boys, particularly in rural areas.



There are many reasons that prevent girls from going to school. Poverty, pregnancy, school-based violence, child marriage and discriminatory gender norms are some of the major obstacles to girls' education worldwide. School fees, the threat of violence on the way to and in school, and the perceived benefits of girls' domestic work also keep girls out-of-school. Pregnancy and child marriage cut short adolescent girls' schooling before they have completed secondary school.

- The first reason why girls are pulled out of school is because of family responsibilities. Girls provide free labor at home for the family. Home is also where they learn to be a better housewife. Many girls are kept at home because it is a better payoff than going to school. Having the girl attend school is not valuable to the whole family. This problem is lucidly evident in India, even in urban areas, but more prevalent with poorer families. Girls can be found doing everything from farm work to household chores. The family plays a central role in a girl's life and shaping her future. Respect is given to elders in all situations and no decision can be made without consulting an elder. This often leads to the practice of arranged marriages. The decision is entirely up to the family and the girl often does not even see her future husband until the day of the wedding. Compared to American norms, individuals growing up in India are much more dependent on their families, especially parents.
- The second reason why girls are kept from receiving a primary education is because they are pulled out early to protect family honor. This also can affect the dowry when the girl is married. The boy's side of the family can raise the dowry if they suspect she has been in school with boys during puberty. The practice of dowry is illegal, but laws are not always implemented. If the dowry cannot be paid, the bride runs the risk of being ruined, or worse, being killed. Honor killings are prevalent among the poor.
- The third reason for inequality during primary education is because girls can't attend school due to inadequate facilities. Schools are unable to provide safe and sanitary facilities for young girls to attend, and with the population increasing at a rapid speed the priority for new facilities is given to boys. In many cases, though, this is exacerbated by basic infrastructural problems: roads, running water, and electricity are often scarce.
- The fourth reason girls are kept from school is because of the shortage of female teachers. The problem can be solved, but it starts with first educating girls so they can aspire to be



teachers. The government, however, does not see this as a problem and continues to deny that there is gender inequality within the education sector. There have been efforts, as listed earlier, by the government to enroll more girls but this has not been for the nation of India, but rather for international recognition and numbers.

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