

Reinterpreting Girl's Drop- Out in the Context of Challenges in Women Empowerment

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Abstract

The recent free compulsory education and Right to Education Bill passed by the Parliament allows the children from six to fourteen years of age to go to school which is the fundamental right of every child. There are many programmes launched by the Government of India to ensure the girl child to school like Early Childhood Education and Care, National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), Mahila Samkhya, Total Literacy Campaign, etc. These were launched with a notion to attract and accommodate girl child to school.

There are some aspects of the current human development index which were observed in relation to girl child as captured by Ministry of Human Resource Development. In the year 2004-05, the rate of female literacy was 45% as against a 64% rate of male literacy in rural India. The gross drop-out rate among girls says that 51.28% drop-out by the time they reach class VIII in the year 2004-05. The voluntary organizations and the non-governmental organizations have tried their level best to institutionalize the free education for girls in schools, which has focused on the development programme by the government to increase the retention in school. The alarming concern which has emerged in spite of all these programmes and initiatives is the increasing drop-out rate of girls.

The present paper focuses on the socio-economic, psychological and demographic causes responsible for this increasing rate of drop-out from schools among girls. Empowerment is the one key factor in determining the success and development in the status and position of women in the society. Empowering women must be a united approach, a cause that requires continued attention and stewardship by all. We need to augment our efforts for empowering women and enhance their progress. It is our moral, social and constitutional responsibility to ensure their progress by conducting database researches, innovation and surveys at appropriate levels by the national, state and district level agencies with effective and functional linkages.

With the notion to bridge the social, regional and gender gap regarding Education for All the Government of India has launched many holistic and convergent programmes. The alarming concern which has emerged in spite of all these programmes and initiatives is the increasing drop-out rate of girls. There are innumerable reasons behind it. The present paper throws light on the worthiness of education in the process of women empowerment and the causes behind the premature discontinuation of education among girls.

Key words- *Obstacles, Women Empowerment & Drop-out.*

The concept of empowerment signifies greater access to knowledge and fiscal resources on one hand and greater autonomy in personal matters and sharing of power at the domestic and

political level on the other. It implies greater control over the circumstances that influences one's life and greater freedom from the shackles of customs, faiths, beliefs and traditions.

The objective of empowering women is to promote group solidarity and build self confidence. Since women have been oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walks of life. There cannot be any piecemeal approach to women's empowerment. Nor can this issue be settled once for all. Women have to strive hard on a constant basis to find their due places in a learning society on a lifelong basis. *The parameters of women empowerment* have been identified as:

- Enhancing self -esteem and self confidence of women;
- Building a positive image of women by recognizing their contribution to the society, polity and the economy;
- Developing ability to think critically;
- Fostering decision making and action through collective processes;
- Enabling women to make informal choices in areas like education, employment and health, specially reproductive health,
- Ensuring equal participation in developmental processes;
- Providing information, knowledge and skill for economic independence; &
- Enhancing access to legal literacy and information relating to their rights and entitlements in society with a view to enhance their participation on an equal footing in all areas.

Education has been argued as one of the indicators of empowerment. Indeed, many of the variables that have traditionally been used as proxies for empowerment such as education and employment are better described as "enabling factors" or "source of empowerment". Education is considered to be critical in the individual life of women in their fight against oppression and in their empowerment. It helps a female child in transformation from 'girlhood' to 'womanhood' and from 'womanhood' to 'personhood'. *The education of women contributes significantly towards:*

- Improved status of family through an increase in one participation of women in the labour force, which leads to greater household earnings, thus towards higher levels of economic well being of the families.
- Demographic improvement by reducing fertility and improving the use of better methods of population control.
- Lower infant mortality and better child nutrition and health of all family members.
- Higher levels of participation of children in education by rising mother's awareness of the potential benefits of education and enhancing pre-school abilities of their children.
- Higher levels of participation of women in civic and political spheres of development.

Education is the basic requirement and the Fundamental Right of the citizens of a nation. While higher education is important in building up a Quality Human Resource Base for the nation, the basic or elementary education system holds much more significance. In fact, since the inputs of the higher education systems are nothing but the outputs of the elementary education system, the later serves as the base over which the Super-structure of the whole education system is built up. Attainment of basic education is important both due to its impact on the living standards of the women as also in augmenting their capabilities.

Since post independence, condition of Indian women has improved but male dominated treatment and gender biasness is followed still. People there feel that woman should give their

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attention in domestic life only. It is necessary to aware them about women empowerment. There are some aspects of the current human development index which were observed in relation to girl child. The literacy rates and enrolment in education in India continues to be very low in case of female. According to Census 2001, the rate of female literacy is 54% as against a 76% rate of male literacy. The gross enrolment ratio of girls at elementary level is 81% against 88% for boys in the year 2003-04. The gross drop-out rates among girls says that 53% drop-out by the time they reach class VIII in the year 2003-04.

In this era of globalization, we are still finding the wide disparities and growing cleavages among girls and boys. This disparity, particularly in the rural areas, reflects the social attitudes to the girl child. On one hand, due to poverty the family is not in a position to bear the direct costs of girls schooling, as well as social and cultural traditions deriving from low status, early marriage, poor nutrition, poor health, household work and future job market discrimination, and on the other side, the insufficient school places for girls, distantly located schools, inflexible timings, irrelevant and gender insensitive curricula, lack of female teachers, etc, which play important role in non-enrolment and drop-out of girls from schools.

According to the **National Survey Report** on education (2000-01), the *main reasons behind the non-enrolment of girls in schools or pre-mature discontinuation of education are-*

- Lack of equal access to educational opportunities and supportive infrastructural facilities.
- Early assumption of domestic responsibilities in order to release the mother for productive work.
- Conservative cultural values and fears for security which result in the withdrawal of girls from educational institutions.
- Early marriage which puts an end to education.
- Unwillingness of parents to send their daughters to co-educational schools where there are no female teachers.
- Long distance of schools.
- Belief of parents that education is of little value to a girl whose life will be devoted to caring for family.
- Demand for dowry because of which money is not spent on education of girl child.
- Perception that curriculum of educational institution do not enhance the production capacity of girls.

The *other barriers of girl's education* which the **Committee on Status of Women Report** (2000-01) pointed out are-

- Involvement of girls in labour within and outside the family.
- Poverty of the family.
- Absence of school transport and hostel facilities.
- Ill equipped schools without blackboards, reading and learning material &
- Lack of facilities such as toilets and drinking water.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of protective discrimination in favor of women. Empowerment is the one key factor in determining the success and development in the status and position of women in the society. We put a special focus on empowering women and girls, because we believe they hold the key to long lasting

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social change in communities. Empowering women must be a united approach, a cause that requires continued attention and stewardship by all. We need to augment our efforts for empowering women and enhance their progress. It is our moral, social and constitutional responsibility to ensure their progress by providing them with equal rights and opportunities. Today, women with their smartness, grace and elegance have conquered the whole world. They with their hard work and sincerity have excelled in each and every profession.

Concomitantly, for developing women into a complete personality having health, wealth and awareness requires strong support of database researches, innovation and surveys to be conducted at appropriate levels by the national, state and district level agencies with effective and functional linkages.

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