

# Education in India: A Gender Perspective

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This is the famous talisman of Mahatma Gandhi “Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her].” It’s well-known that the most disadvantaged and the weakest person in the Indian society are the poor women often designated as the poorest of poor. Being in the girl’s college for three years has really helped me see the meaning of this talisman and therefore I have tried to see almost every policy or government scheme from a gender perspective.

It’s been acknowledged throughout the world that education is absolutely necessary for the development of a nation. Education results in similar increase in the earnings and expansion of opportunities in future for men and women alike but educating women has many additional socio – economic gains that benefit the entire society like increased economic productivity, higher family incomes, delayed marriages, reduced fertility rates, and improved health and survival rates for infants and children. It has a vital role in empowering women and girls and can lift economically and socially marginalized adults and children out of poverty and provide them with the means to participate fully in their communities.

Indian government has been spending a considerable part of its budget in promoting education among lower class children with a special focus on girl child. For instance, government of Jharkhand has started a scheme ‘Free Education for Girls’ in which girls are given free education up to post -graduation level. Under this all the examination fees and tuition fees are reimbursed. There are several such schemes launched at state and national level that aim at making schools an attractive place for girls. But still, girls are not attending schools and those who are drop out after primary school or secondary school. Reasons for this drop – out rate are being examined for past 65 years and in the course of time they have become quite obvious. Still, nothing is being done to do away with those circumstances because usually the origin of those problems lies partly within the system itself which has been designed by scholars, politicians and administrators.

The reasons can be divided into two categories: demand side and supply side.

Supply side reasons can be inaccessible schools. Even though the government is opening many all-girls school, they are far away from girls’ home and parents don’t feel it safe to send their daughters to school all alone. In some schools, there may not be proper sanitary facilities. Often, toilets are unusable, there may not be separate lavatories for males and females and there can be inadequate privacy. Also, at several places, the sanitary facilities may be located outside the main school compound. This puts students at the risk of bullying and sexual violence, especially female students.

On the demand side, impoverished families prioritize boys’ education and are reluctant to pay for school books and dress for the girl. Also, girls are responsible for the household chores, care for siblings in absence of their parents who are out of home earning their family a time’s meal. Early marriage and pregnancy are additional barriers. That is why, even if girls are enrolled in high numbers, dropout rate towards the end of the primary school are usually very high.

Government of India has apparently taken every possible step to improve attendance in the schools from providing scholarships to only girl child, providing free school dresses, building

new schools with all necessary facilities. The problem is that most of the work is only completed on the files and not in reality. The money never reaches people for whom it is meant but is pocketed by the 'babus' and hence no scholarships, no dresses and no attendance. Moreover the infrastructure of the schools being built in the remote areas is so bad that children have classrooms but don't have benches to sit on and once built no effort is made to repair any damage to the school property.

First of all we have to make efforts to do away with the notion "ladkiyan padh likh kar kya karenge, ghar hi to sambhalana hai" (it's no good educating girls, ultimately they will end up being home makers). Awareness campaigns not only on the part of government but NGO's, educational institution and individuals have to be organised. In the schools as well, not just a teacher but a reliable and good teacher should be appointed who also by the way of interaction ensures equitable student treatment in the classrooms. Moreover, government has to ensure a transparent mechanism of allocating funds to avoid wastages and leakages. It's well known that educating a girl means educating the whole family. After years of independence, it is high time now that we act on it. Because, "padhega India tabhi to badhega India".

**Sources:**

IASC GENDER HANDBOOK

A GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES, SARA LANG, UPPASALA UNIV, SWEDEN

