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**EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY ON THE PARENTS' ATTITUDES****DEEPAJ CHAKRABARTY****LECTURER****BBA DEPARTMENT****GC COLLEGE****SILCHAR****DEBOSMITA NATH****STUDENT****BBA DEPARTMENT****GC COLLEGE****SILCHAR****DR. D. GHOSE****ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR****MBA DEPARTMENT****ASSAM UNIVERSITY****SILCHAR****ABSTRACT**

*The role of female education has for long been recognized as a means for empowering women and encouraging equality in our country. But, there have been impediments in the form of a conservative attitude of the people of our societies, lack of initiatives by the Government and educational institutes etc. But the last decade has seen the paradigm to be favorable towards the girl's education and Government offering more impetus for families to send a girl child to the schools. The study, conducted in the form of survey, unfolded a proportional relation between the provisions of the Government such as scholarships and mid-day meals and the positive outlook of the parents to send their girl child to schools in the place of Norshingpur, Barak Valley. The study also revealed that the parents seem to be apprehensive to send a growing girl child, who has attained the age of puberty if there is lack of proper and separate sanitation facilities for girls in the schools. Therefore, the study also recommends an improvement in the sanitation facilities provided in the school.*

**KEYWORDS**

female education, scholarships, mid-day meals, empowerment & equality.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The spread of formal schooling has for long been recognized as the stepping-stone for most of the society in achieving glory and success. The role of formal education especially in the rural areas in building creativity among the citizens of the society cannot be denied. India has been a country enriched with a strong culture of innovative education encouraging the students in the field of art, literature and science. The ideas of many of the social thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindra Nath Tagore and many others have been accepted in developing the model for elementary education. Free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of fourteen years is the Constitutional commitment in India.

The Government of India initiated a number of programmes and projects to attain the status of universal enrolment. Despite all these significant achievements, the goal of universal elementary education remains elusive and far. The problem behind achieving the target of UEE is the distorted and discriminative attitude of the majority of the rural population towards girl's education. They still possess the attitude of indifference when it comes to the education, financial security and development of mental faculties among the girls. Although there has been a certain shift in the paradigm over the last few years, but the complete elimination of the parasitic belief that girls are destined to be house-makers has not been possible. At a very tender age, the girls belonging from the rural population are thought of being handed over to a family where her role would only be confined to the household activities.

**II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

As mentioned in the introductory section, the indifference of most of the rural population towards girl's education had given undue dominance to the male counterpart. This has resulted in a distortion of the scope for development for a society. The scenario keeps getting worse if observed at the interior part of the country. The study, which was conducted in the NutonBajar area, also had the same hypothesis prior to its observation. The study not only realized that it is important for proper communication regarding the importance of girl's literacy for a society, but it also intended to unfold a true but pathetic condition of girl's education in the study area. Researchers suffered from the basic inquisitiveness of the reasons for the distorted perception regarding the girl's education in the rural sector. Therefore, the specific problem of the study under consideration was:

*Why are girls deprived of the opportunities of developing their mental faculties by providing elementary education to them?*

Although, the problem stated above is subject to the hypothesis that there is a negative perception among the rural population regarding the formal education to be provided to the female child in the family. The hypothesis is inculcated within the research due to the pathetic national scenario of girl's education.

**III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The education sector in our country has off late received the attention that it should receive. There have been policies adopted by the Government our country on issues related to the girls and the rural education. According to a report of CABE committee on girl's education and common schooling system, (June 2005), there should not be any discrimination made while providing education to the students in the society.

A study conducted by Kotwani (2012), where context was to study the attitude of parents towards girl education in Indian context. Comparisons on the sub sample based on the gender, location, and literacy levels of the parents were also made. According to Judith (2003) the poverty of the household level discourage parents from enrolling their children in school and withdrawal them once the demand of fees is impossible to meet. It could also be the inability of the Government to provide adequate funding for school infrastructure or for the running of schools.

The school transformed society, with an aim of promoting new way of life. Girl-child education is part of that and providing education to girls is one of the best investments in developing country (Kelly, 1999). The child without access to education will be deprived of their human rights and be prevented from improving their talent and interest in most of the basic way. (UNESCO 2003). Mercan (2010) explore whether the perception show significant difference with respect to



certain background variable. Recent schemes by government have also made girl's education possible in rural areas. A study conducted by Miller (2007) unfolded the fact that the current schemes such as midday meals and scholarships are effective forms of alleviating the added cost of sending a girl to school. The study suggested that, although government endeavors at universalizing education has resulted in creating mass awareness and positive response towards schooling of girl education, there is a lot of scope for improvements. In the same context, a study conducted by Dreze and Kingdon (2001), suggested that there is a 50% reduction in the proportion of girls due to the provisions of mid-day meals. In a rigorous literature review conducted by Unterhalter *et al* (2014), it was found that the enhancement of girls' education for a particular society depends on the following factors:

- *Extent of a climate in support for girls' schooling in the place*
- *The existence of complementary legal and regulatory framework*
- *The State capacity to implement the policy and engage the widest range of stakeholders.*

Girls in developing countries disproportionately drop out of schools, particularly when they reach the age of puberty, which some attributed to the lack of sanitation facilities for menstruating girls. (Herz & Sperling; 2004, Moojiman *et al*; 2005, Sommers; 2010). Therefore, the basic infrastructure facilities which are linked to the economic and social benefits of the girls is considered to be a factor influencing the perception of the parents in letting a girl child continue her education in such places. Investment in the health of a child can improve educational outcomes (Miguel & Kramer; 2004, Bleakley; 2007, Weil; 2007), though health needs often differ dramatically by gender and age. So, in such a case we include another parameter that is the presence of proper sanitation facilities that can increase the amount of enrollments and reduce the number of dropouts of the girl children from the schools. In the year 2000, the Indian Government began promoting Universal Primary Education through Sarba Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), and it was hypothesized that the absence of basic needs will prevent the traditionally disadvantaged children from going to schools.

#### IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives are formed for the study

1. To derive if there is any presence of traditional stigmatic belief hampering the enrollments of girl child in schools.
2. To examine the influence of the regulatory provisions in contributing to a positive perception of the parents towards educating a girl child
3. To study the perception of the guardians regarding the sanitary facilities available in the schools.

#### V. SCOPE & LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study unfolded quite a number of views on the theme. The study thoroughly concentrated on the girls' education part. The limitation of the study was basically due to location aspects and time constraints.

#### VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & DATA

The study is basically descriptive in nature as it seeks to describe the attitude of the selected units regarding the girls' education in the place. The study is limited to the area Narsingpur of Cachar District in Assam. The sources of data are primary in nature. The data collected are in the form of responses by the parents to the questions asked in the interview with the help of structured schedule. The researchers had to resort to snowball sampling. Here, the researchers got the reference of the first selected unit from a known source. The reference regarding the second unit of study was given by the first and the process went on. The type is basically non probabilistic in nature. A total of 50 (fifty) parents who send their children to the schools were selected in the sample and are studied. A structured schedule based on the objectives was developed to collect data. Interview process was also adopted for the study. The data collected were analysed and Likert Scales were used. Weighted AM is used for better understanding of the responses.

#### VII. ANALYSIS OF DATA & MAJOR FINDINGS

TABLE 1

SI No	Factors	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Boy Child importance in Education	14	12	13	5	6
2	Learning of Girl Child limited to only household	18	16	10	4	2
3	Education of Girls create social problems	13	15	10	9	3
4	Importance of Mid-day meals in Educating a Girl Child	6	10	21	8	5
5	Quality of food in Mid Day meal	0	3	13	22	12
6	Receiving Scholarship is important	2	6	21	13	8
7	Scholarship and Satus	0	0	9	25	16
8	Sanitation Facility	0	0	6	26	18

The data collected was according to the objectives framed to be achieved in the study. Therefore, the findings of the research correspond to purpose of the study which are highlighted in the following points:

- It was found that in recent times families are least discriminating regarding the gender of child in the family. There were found families that did not even have a single boy child and provide all the facilities to a girl child that includes education as considered to be the prior and most important needs among all. It was quite encouraging to find a 100% enrollment of girl child in the schools in such rural place of Narsingpur.
- The intention of the families of providing higher education to the girl child also shows that the families foresee a job career for the child rather than confining herself to the household activities of the in-laws family in the future. The parents opine that the chances that a girl has in becoming successful in the future if she obtains education is similar to a boy child. In fact, the conservative attitude of the families in degrading the intellectual capacity of a girl is found to diminish in the recent times. The acceptance of the fact that females can also contribute in building the nation with a proper intellectual upbringing is just an indication of the shift in the paradigm in the social setup.
- The fact that the parents are less hesitant regarding sending their girl child to the schools, which have children coming from diverse backgrounds, is a positive indication towards ensuring a bright future for a girl child outside the life that she spends in the family of her in-laws. The stigmatic belief a girl should be more involved in household activities is undergoing a change and therefore we can hope of a future where girls are financially independent and intellectually empowered.

*The above three points are just revealing of the fact that even in rural areas people are getting more and more aware regarding the benefits of education and therefore the traditional attitude which was negative towards educating a girl child is becoming non-existent. These findings serve the purpose of fulfilling the first objective of the study.*

- The Government provisions such as offering the midday meals and providing scholarships to students who are meritorious have encouraged poorer families to dream of good education to their girl child. Although, in the study it was found that the offering of midday meals is not such a significant factor, there is little doubt of the fact that it saves the cost of family to feed a child in the afternoon. The families were also neutral in expressing their opinion regarding the quality of food offered during the midday meals. Since, most of the families were poor, therefore they are not concerned about the quality as it is often sarcastically said that 'beggars are not choosers'
- The provision of scholarship has worked as a dose of positivism in furthering the education career of a girl child. As we find from the responses that such provision has not only reduced the financial burden of the family in meeting the cost of higher education of a girl child, but it has also ensured an enriched status for the family in the locality. The provision ensures that a potential student is not deprived of education. Availing the provisions by the potential

students is an investment by the Government and a nation building exercise which ultimately results in aggravation of the nations' welfare by utilizing skills and talents of the country.

So, it can definitely be inferred that Government has been working actively and vehemently for providing education to the members of the country, irrespective of the gender, caste, religion, affluence and place of origin. The Government provisions have left a overwhelming influence in the educational culture of the country, and is expected to add on to the intensity of the influence. The above two points serves the second objective of the study.

- There exists an intrinsic hesitation among the parents to send their girl child to a school not possessing a separate sanitation facility for the girls. A girl child reaching the age of puberty would definitely have a tendency to be apathetic to schools having a common sanitation facility. The fact was confirmed when parents were asked regarding their agreement on whether they believe that separate sanitation facilities should be provided to the girls. The schools respond to that and most of the schools in the locality set up separate sanitation facilities for the girls.
- Although the cleanliness surrounding the school still needs work to be done. The discipline and supervision of the top authority are responsible factors in ensuring clean sanitation in the schools. The polluted surrounding not only is detrimental to the health of a child but it also adds to the loss of a pristine and sacred environment to be maintained in an educational institute.

Therefore, the study shows that there is a serious need to look at the sanitation facilities available in the school. The sanitation facilities are not up to the mark and the school authority cannot afford to be reluctant about the matter. The findings correspond to the third objective of the study.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The study claims value with regard to its contribution to the regulatory bodies in implementing educational policies at a mass level. It has successfully unfolded the fact that girls are no longer destined to be confined in the household activities; rather the perspectives have been changing in the positive side of the continuum. In today's context, education is regarded as a basic need for children even for girl child dwelling in the remote place like Norshingpur. The Government has come up with provisions and regulations that are in support of the cause, and financial unfeasibility is no longer a hindrance. It is high time that schools responded in providing a support by ensuring the maintenance of a minimum quality. As from the study it was revealed that the sanitation facilities in the schools of the selected place do not meet the expectation, therefore the onus is on the shoulders of the management of the schools to deal with the issue. But the most positive and encouraging fact among the lot is the slow and gradual change in the conservative attitude of the parents and people, even in remote areas. Although it is not wise to generalize the findings to all places of the country, but is definitely a reflection on the prospects of a bright future for Barak Valley. A rich historical background characterizes India in relation to the contribution of females towards nation building. In fact, a look at the mythology would make us learn the strength and power that Goddess Durga possessed in combating against the demons. The Indian philosophy emphasizes the debating power of Gargi, who is known as the lady scholar against the learned Brahmins in the Kingdom of Janaka. The history takes us back to the sacrifices of Rani Lakshmi Bai and the intellectualism of Sorojini Naidu. In such a country, an indifferent attitude in nurturing a girl child should be far from accepted. The anatomical, emotional and other differences would exist, but that does not give a license for the male section of the society in downing the females. Rather, an attitude which incorporates the differences and promotes the co-existence of both the sections would mark development for a country.

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