

Educating the girl child

Despite the growth in enrolment, drop-out rate among girls still remains high

Girls' education is the foundation for social equality. Any attempt to strengthen economies, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of people can yield results with increased attention to girls' education. Millennium Development Goal-3 emphasises on elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education to 'Promote gender equality and empower women'.

In last few decades, participation of girls at all stages of education has been increasing steadily over the years. Since 1950-51, girls' participation has increased many fold in Primary, Middle, Sec./Hr.Sec stages from 28.1 per cent to 46 per cent, from 16.1 per cent to 44.1 per cent, from 13.3 per cent to 41.1 per cent respectively. However, the girls' participation is still below 50 per cent at all stages of education. The drop-out rate for girls decreased from 70.9 per cent in 1960-61 to 28.57 per cent in 2003-2004 in primary classes. The rate of dropouts which was 85 per cent in 1960-61, has come down to 52.92 per cent in 2003-04 in the upper primary classes, similarly the drop-out rate which was 86.6 per cent in 1980-81, fell to 64.92 per cent in 2003-04 in secondary school. Despite the growth of girl's enrolment, drop-out rate among girls at secondary school stage is still high in India especially in rural areas, where large proportion of girls lives.

Gender equality in education is an important aspect of development. Gender inequality in education in rural India is the biggest hindrance to India's human development. In Dongargaon Block of Rajnandgaon district of Chattisgarh, girls' enrolment at primary level was 6,826 and 6,854 for boys, at upper primary level girls' enrolment was 2,933 and 3,475 for boys, at secondary level girls' enrolment shown much decrease i.e. 498 and boys' enrolment was 992, and at higher



**RUJUTA
DESHMUKH**

secondary only 120 girls enrolled in 108 villages of Dongargaon block in 2002. Girls' enrolment in other parts of rural India is also low at the secondary level. Girls' participation which is equal or sometimes higher than boys at primary level, gets reduced to less than half at the secondary level.

According to NFHS-3 fact Sheet for Chattisgarh, in the age group of 15-49, 50 per cent women have no education. Only 12 per cent of women complete standard eight or nine levels. The figure is the same for women having completed class 10 and above. The number of rural women to get married by the age of 24 stands at 60.3 per cent. But with increased level of education, chances of early marriages get reduced. Fact sheet shows that 77.8 per cent women, who get married before the age of 18, have no education.

Same thing is observed in family planning issues. In the age group of 15-49, 48 per cent women with no education don't use any contraceptive for family planning. But more women, i.e. 64 per cent women in the same age group who have completed class 10 use contraceptives and bring down fertility rate.

Women with less education neglect their health and also cannot take proper care of their children between 12-23 months. Anaemia is prevalent among more than 50 per cent women who have less than 8 years of education, and more than 40 per cent women, who have less than 8 year of education never heard

about HIV/AIDS

Less education is a great hindrance to the economic, social and political empowerment of the women. According to the fact sheet, more than 50 per cent women, who have less than 8 years of education, do not make household decisions, and also experience more domestic violence.

The above study of Chhattisgarh Fact Sheet proves that lack of secondary education among girls hinder the progress of a state and the nation. Unless we have education for girls, economic and social upliftment will not occur.

The situation of secondary education in Chattisgarh rural area prevails in most part of rural India. The seriousness of this issue can be studied through two important factors i.e. supply and demand. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986), as revised in 1992, was a landmark in the field of policy on women's education. It recognised that "the empowerment of women is possibly the most critical pre-condition for participation of girls and women in the education process".

Gender disparity is prevalent all over rural India and because of it demand for secondary education and higher secondary education in rural area is affected. But how much is the supply? Do our girls have enough access to secondary schools in rural areas? There are 108 villages in Dongargaon Block of Rajnandgaon district, and for these villages there are only 5 secondary schools and 6 higher secondary schools. In Gujan block of Tinsukia district of Assam, there are 61 villages. Out of them 55 have primary schools, 15 have upper primary and 11 have secondary schools. Just 3 have higher secondary schools. Less access to secondary school has really hampered the participation of rural girls in secondary education.

(The writer is a researcher at the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi)