

Educating a girl with disability: challenge or concern

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Abstract:

Education could be used as a tool for the upward economic and social mobility of a person. It is fundamental for acquiring full human potential, developing a holistic society, and promoting national development. Providing universal access to quality education is key to India's continued ascent, and leadership on the global level in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation (NEP 2020). It has the potential to bring a desirable change in the society. Education also helps in bridging the gap between various sections of society (NCF 2005). If we talk about the marginalized section then it is like a weapon of equity and justice for them.

Here we only focused upon one out of many marginalized sections of society i.e. girls with disability. Education helps in connecting the GWDs with rest of the society. They remain marginalized for a longer period of time reason being their gender and disability. They are doubly excluded because of these two factors. Studies have shown that this dual matrix make their status more vulnerable in the society. This study also trying to explore a nuanced picture of their social, academic and emotional issues at school level by giving special reference to Haryana. It also provide some of the possible suggestions to overcome these challenges within the education system.

Key words: *Marginalization, Status, Potential, Challenges, Gender, Disability.*

Introduction :

'Education for all' is reiterated by different commissions and policy documents. This is because we know the power of education in developing human as resource. It helps us in flourishing our innate potentialities and developing an equitable society. But access to quality education is still a dream for some sections of society. Girls with disability is one of them.

Terms like disability, impairment, handicaps, physically challenged, etc. are not just attached with a stigma but they are also used to segregate PWD from the rest of the society in multiple ways. If a girl is disabled then it further complicates the matrix. Girls with disabilities are considered as one of the most marginalized groups in our society, if social norms and cultural biases are concerned (Mehrotra, 2006). Their status in educational settings further worsens if disability is also attached with them. Gender stereotypes interact with disability stereotypes to constitute a deep matrix of gender disability in every culture, develop them within specific historical contexts and affecting those contexts overtime. Girls with disabilities are at the intersection of various forms of discrimination on the basis of disability and gender in India.

Like Heisenberg's uncertainty principle we cannot measure the position and velocity of a sub-atomic particle simultaneously with accuracy, similarly, organizations and researchers who are committed to gender equity in education overlook the specific situation of GWD while agencies who are committed to a disability, they fails to provide full justice to gender variable. As a result girls with disabilities have limited researches and in turn educational opportunities.

But in this study, researcher is trying to dig deeper into these two variables. According to Mehrotra, Disability is gendered, culturally constituted and socially negotiated. There are policy and commissions which talk about women education and education of CWSN but not a single document talks specifically about GWDs. Lack of awareness, distant schools, less number of female teachers, safety and security, social and cultural biases, financial constraints and parental mindset are some of the challenges faced by

GWDs in the field of education. This traditional division of labor expects lot of unpaid work from GWD (Kapur,2018). Moreover, this work is not even considered as important.

Now if we try to situate this idea of educating a GWD in the state of Haryana then the situation become more problematic. Haryana is located in the Northern plains of India.in terms of literacy, it is among the lowest achievers. If we look into the statistics provided by the census 2011, then we found that the literacy rate of Haryana is 75.5 percent. Specifically for male it is 84.06% and for female it is 65.94%. This large gap between men and women literacy rate is the main reason for gender based inequality prevalent in the state.

The sex-ratio of the state (Haryana) is also distorted with 877 female on 1000 males as per census 2011. Parents don't want a girl child, they prefer a boy over a girl. There is a large disparity in the economic, social and schooling opportunities available to men and women in India (Sharma & Singh, 2015). Now, one can imagine the status of a girl born with any kind of disability. This distorted ratio somewhere deplete the status of women in all sectors. By virtue of their gender and disability the risk of sexual abuse, exploitation, gender based violence, maltreatment and domestic violence increases many times.

There is also a large gap between urban and rural literacy rates. As per the data, the urban literacy rate remains high as compared to rural literacy rate. The urban literacy rate of Haryana have been increased from 58.89% to 83.83%, there is an increase of around 25% in urban literacy rate of Haryana. If we talk about the rural literacy rate then it increased from 25.92% to 72.74% which is an increase of 47%. Although the rural literacy rate increased a bit faster as compared to urban literacy rate but the overall rural literacy rate is still lesser in Haryana. The value of Urban-Rural literacy differential Index is coming out to be 0.14 in Haryana. So, this further makes Haryana a desirable choice for this research to be situated in.

State government have taken many initiatives to uplift the status of girls and remove the disparities in status. Some of them are given below:

- BetiBachao, BetiPadhao: In 2015, Indian Government initiated this scheme for women empowerment and reduce gender discrimination. This scheme is to spread awareness among citizens for women welfare and women education. This scheme was initiated with a huge funding of one billion (100 crores).
- SukanyaSamridhiYojana: This is a sub-scheme under BetiBachao, BetiPadhao scheme and launched in the same year. This scheme become a popular one in Haryana because it caters the educational and marriage expenses of a girl child.
- AapkiBeti,HumariBeti: this scheme is exclusively initiated by Haryana state government in which a sum amount of Rs. 21000/- was invested with life insurance of first girls child belongs to SC/ BPL families and second child belongs to any caste.
- The Ladli Scheme: The birth of a girl child is never celebrated and this is more obvious in the state of Haryana. So, government of Haryana sponsored this Ladli scheme which aims to change the present mindset of people towards female infanticide and ensure their education for successful future.
- Dhanlakshmi scheme : This is also for reducing the female infanticides in India by providing an insurance coverage to the girl child. It also helps in female education and discourage early marriage by providing enticing insurance plans.
- ApniBetiApnaDhan scheme : This scheme provides a financial assistance of Rs. 500/- to mothers for fulfilling their nutritional demands. It also invests Rs. 2500 in the account of the new born baby which becomes Rs. 25000/- when she turns to 18 years of age.

As we have seen, these are some of the schemes and provisions to improve the present status of girl child in the state of Haryana but still there is a need to have more provisions towards their education and rehabilitation specifically towards GWD. This study is also trying to explore a nuanced picture of their social, academic and psychological challenges at school level. It also provide some of the preventive measures to overcome these challenges within the education setting.

Research questions :

- 1) What are the issues faced by Girls with Disability studied in different educational institutions of Haryana state?
- 2) What are the possible ways to strengthen the educational opportunities for Girls with Disability in the Haryana state ?

Methodology of the study:

Methodology includes systematic and theoretical analysis of the method applied to the research. It talks about the complete framework and systematic plan of the research. This study is based upon qualitative approach for data collection and interpretation. Detailed thematic analysis was done after collection of data and completing its transcription. This type of study aims at gaining a deep understanding of specific organizations or events rather than superficial description of data.

Tools used: Semi-structured interview schedule for Girls with disability was used as a tool for the present study. The similar set of questions were asked to all the other stakeholders to triangulate the data collected from the subjects. To further bring authenticity to the collected data ,

Analysis and result:

In spite having many policies and commissions on education, girls with disability is still an ignored part of the society and they are still lacking behind when compared to their abled counterpart. We still looking up for reforms that promote the full and intersectional socio-psychological inclusion of girls with disabilities at different educational settings. Inadequate legal frameworks to incorporate the rights of girls with disabilities (Chakraborti, 2017 ; Singh, 2016). As a researcher this is our prime duty to elicit out the possible reasons of this gap and also find out the challenges faced by them in getting basic education.

In this section of the study we will discuss some of the issues faced by them in the path of their education. These issues are further divided into two categories, first catered the issues faced by them at home and second is for issues faced by them at school.

Home based issues :

Parental attitude towards girls education is an important factor and it acts as a hindrance towards girls education. If parents are not aware enough and they don't know the importance of education in their upward mobility within the society then they are less interested in providing education to them. They prefer their boy to get education over a girl. And if this is a GWD then their academic expectations from her become negligible. Increase in violence, abduction, molestation and sexual abuse of girls with disabilities changes the attitude of parents towards their Education. These instances not only dampens the enthusiasm of parents but the girl student also wanted to remain bound to their home responsibilities (Kumar and Sangeeta,2013; Sahoo,2016). These hardships in the path of education left them with household responsibilities.

Another important issue is an assumption that well educated girls don't find a suitable groom for them. If brides are more educated than grooms then it also becomes a severe problem in rural areas of Haryana. These well educated brides are considered to be more dominating and controlling in nature thus they somewhere challenges deep rooted patriarchy in the state. So, parents are not willing to send their girls for higher education.

When asked about the reasons for not sending their girl child to school parents also often complain against the safety of girls with disabilities at school or while going to school. Parents and caretakers can't be with their child every time to protect them from sexual or physical assault. Any child of any race, cast, creed, gender, religion and culture could be targeted. But GWD are more prone to these type of violence because they are considered as fragile and weak. Specially, GWDs are more susceptible to sexual assault not only at school but at home also. Many parents of GWDs won't allow their daughters to continue schooling because of this kind ideology. They prefer to marry them over providing education. By doing so their burden get transferred to others shoulders. But this is not the real picture for all the parents. Exception are always there. One mother responded when asked about the marriage of her 19

years daughter (with down syndrome) that she wanted to be with her daughter till her last breathe. Whatever would be the challenges she has to face, she'll face for her betterment.

As she said, *“jab bhagwan ne hi isseaisabanakarhumediyahaitohisko hum dusro par kyudaale. Jab tak humkarsaktehai tab tak hum iskisevakarengae. Iskishadikarkekisi or ke gale nahibandhenge”*.

Gender stereotypes interact with disability stereotypes to constitute a deep matrix of gender disability in every culture. The social and cultural norms specify the gender roles performed by girls and boys in our society. Girls are expected to take care of the young ones, need to help household chores with their mothers, in economy and agricultural activities as per their strengths. Girls are expected to stay home for taking care of their younger siblings and helping their mothers in household chores. This traditional division of labor expects lot of unpaid work from GWD (Kapur,2018). According to Gilligan, girls are considered to be more emotionally invested in the family and relations. So, they remain involved in their household responsibilities thus their educational status compromised a lot in such a scenario. While boys are meant for education and bread winning duties for house. This type of discrimination further curbs their educational opportunities.

School based issues :

Safety of girls in the school premises is a major concern today. This is one of the reason behind less number of girls as compared to boys in educational institutions. To ensure the safety of girls from home to school and back, all stakeholders (parents, school management, teachers and community members) have to show complete collaboration. Safety issues like sexual harassment, stalking, physical violence, fear of bad touch etc. negatively influences the school attendance and finally leads to dropouts of girls with disability from school. Apart from their academic loss, girls also face severe psychological imbalances like post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, STD's, unwanted pregnancies, dissociation eating disorder, sleep disorders and suicide (WHO 2017).

Lack of disabled friendly infrastructure is also one of the important factor in the education of GWD. Good infrastructure of a school would provide better physical accessibility for persons with disabilities. Lack of proper ramps (with correct dimensions), stairs with railings, braille boards, lifts, tactile resources make the education more troublesome for them.

Unhygienic and uncleansed toilets brings many vaginal and skin infections. When asked about the cleanliness of toilets , girls of a special school replied, *“Ma'am, ye toilets hum kabhi use nahikarte. Subheapneghar se karkeatehai, sham kogharjagar hi karte hai. Agar kisiko koi emergency bhi ho toh hum koshishkartheaikichuttitakrokkarrakhe. In toilets me barish k paani se keedepaidaho jatehaikyukipeeche hi kudagharhai. Hum agar inko use kartheaitohbimar hone kakhatrarehtahai”*.

Lack of sanitation facilities especially during their periods results in early dropouts. Girls with disability are forcefully stopped from going to school because proper facilities are not available. . Maintaining personnel hygiene is very important for menstruating girls. Otherwise this leads to many diseases and in some cases deaths also. As per the data, lack of proper sanitary facilities in the schools is one of the reason for early dropouts of GWD.

In educational material and curricula, we can see stereotypical and under - representation of Girls with disabilities. This lack of positive representation and role models also prevents girls from education (Aikman,2007 ; Suleman, 2015).As per studies, there is a huge impact of role models in the academic life of a student. They somewhere motivates the students to overcome their challenges and achieve what they aim for. Less number of female role models or improper representation of females in the school curriculum hampers the educational achievements of GWDs. There is a light of hope in some districts of Haryana. Here, education department of these districts planned a 'role model' programme to instil confidence in young girls and also improves their academic levels of achievement. As per the programme guidelines every school headmaster has to call one well achieved girl from the local community to come and share her experiences with her younger generation learners. She acts as a role model to them and deliver an hour-long lecture on her journey. This helps the girls to appreciate her experiences and learn from them .

Girls that too with disability is attached with social taboos and discrimination. Because of their disability and gender they are doubly marginalized and excluded. At schools also they are not accepted as equal partners. Inclusive model helps us in learning to be with them but how to treat them equally is again a task. We either become too soft and sympathetic with them or become too harsh and rude towards them. We don't know how to follow the balanced way of empathy. School based violence, teasing, bullying leads to lowering of self-confidence and motivation to further pursue her studies. This is also one of the threat in their education.

Possible suggestions needs to be incorporated :

Sensitization and awareness programs for stakeholders should be started by the government of India. Extensive sensitization of families, children with special needs, communities, school staff and local government officials needs to be done (Habib,1997 ; Chigodra,O. 2017). Most important part needs to play by teachers and parents of GWDs because they spent their maximum time with them. Teachers are still in a better position but parents they need to be more aware about their child's rights. They should know how to avail the best possible resources for their Girls child education. Their negligence can cause an adverse effect on their daughter future.

When an old father was asked about the future plans for his 34 years old girl (suffering from Mental Retardation) he replied in deep sorrow, “meribetiko koi rakhnanahichahta , uskesibblingsbhiapniapnizindagi me khushhai. Sochtahoonki mere baadiskakyahoga. Konrakhegaisse ,kahajayegi ye. Bas bojhbannjayegi sab par”.

When asked, whether he was aware about any government institution for his daughters rehabilitation and for accommodation facilities, he replied that he don't know about any of such facilities.

In India, girls with disabilities are not identified at an early stage of infancy. They were identified when their disability symptoms become more apparent and visible. Thus, their treatment get delayed. Early identification of disability show some hopes of cure.

These is a mother of one girl who shared that she knows about her daughter's disability when her second baby was born i.e. after 2.5 years later. That too because she started comparing their growth and development levels. Then she arrive at the conclusion that our daughter is not normally growing. Then she visited a neighborhood doctor and avails the fact that she is a child with MR.

“ humetohpta hi nahithakihumaribeti me koi kami hai. Hume laga ye thodi physically kamjoorhai. Khatibhibahutkamthi. Bas chup chap baithirehtithi. Dusrebachookitarah active nahithi. Jab uskachotabhaihua 2.5 saalbaad tab mujhelagavotohabtakchalnabhinahiseekhi. Ye dheeredheere sab seekhrahahai. Or bachhokitarah sab samjhtabhihai, active bhihai. Par betimerikuchnahikarti. Tab mujhepahlibaarlagaki use koi problem hai”.

The health and hygiene of the child should also be taken care of. Neat and clean toilets and infrastructure should be provided by the government and maintained by the school authorities.

Sanitary towels, pads and other raw materials should be provided to the girls during periods and they should be well informed about this natural process. Most of the girls with disability don't even know how to react during periods. This is bit more serious in case of girls with MR. They should be taught properly with patience how to use sanitary pads , how to clean their genitals and how to dispose of the waste. These things are personal and should not be done in public this should also be delivered.

Like, one mother shared her experience when her daughter (with MR) first experienced her periods and cramps, she started crying and said, “ mummacheechee ho gayi. Mujhehot lag gayi. Dardbhi ho rahahai. Mummamumma.....crying”.

This is not only the responsibility of a mother and a teacher only but fathers should be equally responsible towards educating their girl child and familiarize them with these natural processes. Girls with disabilities should know the importance of menstruation in a girl's life. Girls should know how to deal with this issue mentally and physically. Importance of personal hygiene should also be taught to them.

To cater gender based violence and bullying, documentation on gender sensitive issues, documentaries, anecdotal records, and manuals on how to interact with GWD should be provided to the other children and teachers to make their schools more inclusive for them. Awareness in the GWD should also a pivotal part because they themselves should know how to make their life happier and less troublesome. They should know how others are supposed to deal with them. They should know about their fundamental rights of living with freedom, safety and dignity.

As per Carol Gilligan's theory of moral development, girls are more prone to care and emotions towards others. Girls with disabilities feel more comfortable and free with female teachers. Recruiting more female staff in schools changes the psychological inhibitions of GWD towards school and education.

An eagle eye should be kept on the attendance, roll calls and school registers for an early detection of dropouts. Followed by the reasons further helped us in preventing dropouts. Keeping a regular check on the system helps in its proper functioning.

There could be a scope for teacher's voice at the policy formation level. The reason being policy makers know the problems of CWSN at a superficial level while teachers who are teaching them regularly are well versed with their issues and challenges. They project a nuanced understanding of their challenges and thus proposed an apt policy or plan for them.

Adequate representations of CWSN should be included in our school curriculum. This positive representation of CWSN brings a change not only in disabled child's perspective about themselves but it also uplift their inclusiveness in the school. Gender and disability responsive pedagogy should be adapted by the teachers also. If we change it at school curriculum level then it is of less use. So, teachers at the training level should know how to transact the curriculum in sensitive manner without hurting their student's psychological and emotional constructs. We can resolve them by providing gender sensitive training to teachers. Creating a healthy and protective environment for girls with disabilities in the school premises. By empowering girls like providing them martial arts training for self-defense. To reduce school related gender based violence, we need a community based multi-dimensional approach as we sustained engagement with multiple stakeholders. Curriculum should incorporate case studies and personal narratives of PWDs to motivate CWSN. They feel accepted and included by using gender and disability sensitive curriculum and pedagogy.

Conclusion:

Education is an important tool to enlighten the path of a girl with disability. It helps them to provide an equity and respect in our society. They have to face many social, psychological, emotional and physical challenges when it comes to their education. But their irresistible will and courage help them to cross all the barriers with great confidence. By providing a healthy and inclusive environment in school we can change the attitude of parents and GWD towards education. Complete acceptance for them in the society is need of the hour. As per the aims of education mentioned in NEP 2020 education should be made more holistic, equitable and inclusive. It should cater the need of each and every child at school irrespective of any difference based on caste, creed, gender, disability so on and so forth.

There should be a provision of providing comprehensive sexuality education for girls with disability to adolescent girls. This would equip them with the basic knowledge of skills, attitudes and values used to empower them at this tender age. They could make informed and logical decision about their interpersonal relationships.

A range of policy documents and provisions are given and implemented for Girls with disability but still we are lagging behind in achieving the best for them. Now we need to think about this issue more critically and adapt the possible suggestions given by different stakeholder of this field.

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