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Barriers in Women Education in Rural India: Gender Inequality in Perspective Biplab Kumar Das

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Abstract

“If you educate a man, you educate an individual. However, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered”

-Pt. Jawaharlal Neheru

Education is one of the most dependable parameter of the development of a nation and so, education for all is regarded as the main indicator of Human Resource Development. But the gender discrimination in the field of education is found in most of the countries. Even in India Girls do not get the equal treatment from most of the families and Govt. authorities also. As a result women education in India has been facing difficulties and it has already been affected. Although all of us agree with Swami Vivekananda –

“There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no education of women, where they live in sadness. For this reason, they have to be raised first”.

But the women education as well as women freedom is neglected in the most parts of the World. This inequality is found everywhere in our society. It is very sad to say that after the freedom of almost 70 yrs, women education is categorized as a neglected part of our society. To uplift the condition both Govt. and Private efforts must be welcomed.

Now in this paper the major barriers of Women Education in India have been detected. One of those barriers is the Gender Bias in Secondary Education i.e., in curriculum, content and text book etc. Here it has been critically analyzed. And some steps taken by the Govt. to solve the said barriers as well as some of the necessary steps which should have been taken earlier are highlighted.

Key Words - Women Education, Gender discrimination, Inequality, Gender Bias

Introduction: According to Napoleon that – “Nation’s progress is impossible without trained and educated mothers, if the women of my country is not educated, about half of people will be ignorant”. Theoretically and legally women are the half portion of our

society and considered as equal to men. So the education of a nation depends on both male and female obviously. But due to many unattended reasons the women do not get their proper honour and rights. A discrimination between male and female creates more barriers to women education. It is the fact that a major percentage of women in India are not educated and among the educated women a great number do not get higher education in spite of their own wish. They are not allowed by our patriarchal society. It is a biased attitude. In the book 'The second sex' – (1949) Simone de Beauvoir states that – 'Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female. Wherever she behaves as a human being, she is said to imitate male'. It is a patriarchal outlook. Now in India women education particularly higher education needs special attention. The great of women educationist honorable Rokeya Begam once said – 'We constitute one half of the society and if we are left behind, how can the society progress? If a person's one leg is tied how far can he go?' So Women Education in India deserves more social attention. There are so many barriers some of which are extrinsic and the major are intrinsic. One intrinsic barrier is gender discrimination. It creates a huge resistance to women education.

But we are fortunate that the said barriers are addressed by the great educationists of our country and both by the Govt. and Private authorities. Almost all of us in our society have realized that society runs on two wheels which must be equally strong to run smoothly. Therefore to spread the hope of women education and to improve all over the country national propaganda and awareness programmes are very essential. In the pre and post Independent era the great and famous personalities – Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Pt Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rokeya Begam and others paid their special care to uplift the condition of women education of our country. We should continue their incomplete job to create a balanced and developed society.

Women Education in Ancient India: In ancient India women were in the most respectable position. The matriarchal period of Sindhu Civilization would be called as the 'Golden Time' for Indian Women Education. In the Vedic age women had the right to education and so they had a honour in their society. Our Arya Saints felt that both the practical life and spiritual life offered to women equal rights like men. In Earlier Vedic age women read Vedas and they participated in religious sacrifice actively. Like their male part they used to observe Brahmacharyee and study the Vedas, Vedanga and Upanishada and usually they had no right to marry before the ending of their education. According to Jajuarveda – 'Brahmacharjena Kanya Yubanang Bindate Patim'

In that age even women were the creator of mantras - Viswawara, Ghosha, Lopamudra, Apala, Indrani, Romasha and others were famous in this regard.

The equal and liberal outlook towards women education in Earlier Vedic Age was partly diminished in later Vedic age. From the time of Jajurveda the attitude of our society had been changed and the right to education of women had been curtailed gradually. Yet the women along with their husbands took part in the religious rituals and achieved spiritual knowledge from it. Besides they were efficient in singing, dancing, fine- arts etc. In that

period Gargi, Maitreyee and others were famous in this regard. From many written documents we get the inscriptions of it.

After the Vedic age, in the Brahamanya Education the practices of religious were flourished as the most important part of education. As a result the liberal outlook of education was mostly diminished and women were pushed into inside the room. The women education was partly collapsed by the extreme prejudices and oppression of religion. In Oiteriya Brahamana, Shatpatha Brahamana and even in Manu Sanghita women were socially addressed as 'curse', 'liar', 'misfortune of father' etc, which were disgraceful to women. Later in Manu Sanghita the social picture of women were manifested as 'In childhood women are under the father, in adolescence under the husband and after the absence of their husband they are under their sons. Women are never free on their own'

In the earlier age of Bouddha Education women did not enjoy the equal rights. In the Sangha, the centre of Bouddha Education, women were not allowed. Yet later on in request of Goutami and Ananda, Buddhadev allowed the women to enter the Bouddha Sangha as Buddha nuns. But there were hard and fast rules for women.

As a whole in Ancient India the spreading of women education was satisfactory. Then women had the right to education in the almost all educational centres - Tapaban Ashrama, Gurukul, Tole, Chatushpathi, Pathshala etc. Not only that but also for higher education they studied in Nalanda, Takshashila and Vikramashila University. It was a great aspect in the field of Indian women education.

The major Barriers of women education in modern India – It is undoubtedly said that the women education in ancient India was rich in respect of modern India in all dimensions. In pre & post Independent era due to social structural and other contemporary issues the women education has become disorder. As a result women empowerment has been facing so many barriers. The major barriers of women education are as follows. -

- **Female Foeticide** - USG, the great invention of science helps the cruel custom of our society - Female Foeticide. It is a social curse. By the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act - 1994 and its amendment - 2003, it is prohibited to determine the gender of embryos. But it is true that this illegal work is running secretly. 'Mothers from both high and low – income groups express preference for a male child as they perceive sons as 'old-age insurance'. Social awareness is very much essential in this regard. According to census - 2011, the sex ratio (the no of boys of (0-1) yrs per 100 Girls of the same) was 109.9 in India and 105.0 in West Bengal. But it was very dissimilar in Uttarakhand (114.1), Jammu & Kashmir (128.4), Hariyana (119.7) even in capital Delhi (114.2). In case of (0-6) yrs children, the concerned sex ratio was 108.8 in India and in case of adult it was 106.04 in India in general. It is clear that the incident of Female Foeticide are happening silently and with more cruelty. These practices affect the women education directly.

● **Poverty** - India have great diversity in its economical system. Due to over population and unequal distribution of resources create a major portion of population BPL (Below Poverty Level). As a result the economical situation of the families are unbalanced and so the education of much cuddled son, the fourth child after the three Girls, get highly appreciation and the Girls have the family works. Here the education of Girls- child is unwanted expenditure. This general social conception encourage the dishonest Private Bank or Private Financial Organization to create such of Advertisement that – ‘Take loan for the marriage of your girls and for the higher education for your son according to low rate of Interest’. And as a result child marriage happens in our society. It affects the higher education of Girls. Therefore poverty is one of the major barrier of women education in India.

● **Gender Stereotyping and patriarchy** - Generally in our society the Female part of our family are confined in home and they are attached with cooking, cleaning, nursing of children etc. On the other hand male are engaged outside of the home to earn or attain political agenda, marketing etc. They are outward. But it surprised to think that the leadership of a family is the right of man. This is the Gender Stereotyping which affects the children of our families in this condition. They adopt it and grow up. By this way patriarchy spreads slowly throughout our society. It affects women freedom and women education.

Our General conception is that - ‘Women are the good nurses for our child, guests, relatives and others’. It is a positive appreciation for Girls but not for all from all dimensions. In ancient age there was Matriarchal System in our society. According to Mahabharata in the state Monipur there were Matriarchal System, the society of Eskimo was also Matriarchal. But there were so much honour to men. Men were not deprived of at that time. In Brahmadesh (now in Myanmar) there was a tradition that women were engaged to perform business, marketing etc as well as home making. And simultaneously, there was no deficiency in male-nursing which is unbelievable regarding our patriarchal system. The misconceptions about Gender Stereotyping has been publishing through religions, philosophy and literatures from the beginning are as follows –

- ‘A man will say what he knows, a woman says what will please’. – J.J. Rousseau
- ‘Woman is more compassionate than man and has greater propensity to tears... But male... is more disposed to give assistance in danger, and is more courageous than female’. – Aristotle etc.

● **Lack of social consciousness & superstitions** – Due to lack of social consciousness the women education does not get proper mobility. ‘My son will hold my flag of achievements only’ – a conception of social unconsciousness. Which causes the over population in rural India specially and the whole civilization in general. Besides this, we have a lot of social negligence and superstitions towards women education such as

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- ‘The higher education of a girl causes the early death of her husband’.

- ‘Women should not expose herself before a man outside her home’.
- ‘At the 12.00 noon girls should not stay at outside the home’.
- ‘Satipratha, Dowry System, Early marriage, polygamy etc.

These type of superstitions forces the girls to leave the school and enter the home forever. For these reasons women education in remote areas ends in the primary standard. Most of the time religious hindrances encourage these superstitions. As a result the mobility of a girl depends on ritualistic day-time and practices. It creates a great barriers towards women education. Besides these there are a lot of social pressure to keep the maiden young girl at homes. So, the family members are forced to marry them early and it hinders the higher education of that girls.

But it is glad to say that social awareness is growing up and now we have some examples in the field of higher education. Awareness of whole civilization are necessary in this respect. Every Govt. and Non-Govt. organizations have to take some efforts to create a superstition - free future generation, who can spread education among all truly.

- **Inequality in Physiological Aspects** - Due to presence of different Hormones by birth both male & Female are different in Physiological aspects in almost all dimensions. We know that the 21st pair of chromosomes of 23 pair are sexual. In the case of Male the pattern of that 21st pair of chromosome is XY (unlike pair), whereas in the case of Female it is XX (like pair). So it is clear that the Female have no extra credit to give birth a boy child. But in most of the cases female are victimized in this regard. In India the number of such deprived young wives are a headache to woman education.

Besides this at adolescence, Girl becomes lady and boy becomes man. At that time a great Physiological changes happen. Female faces many questions, anxieties regarding many physiological practices. During that period a significant communication between the curious girl and her family or society helps her to overcome the situation. Lack of concerned communication affects her education.

Generally at the starting of menstrual period almost every girl faces an unknown trouble regarding sexual or non-sexual practices. Due to lack of scientific knowledge and proper sanitation, over sensation of girl or her family and different kinds of superstitions etc, the girls are bound to leave school. Even lack of proper sanitation may cause danger for her. Therefore adolescent changes in Girls’ life directly affect her education. As a whole perspective women education in our nation faces resistances due to God made diversity.

- **Malnutrition** - Malnutrition of Girl-students is one of the constrains in their student life. Due to indigent condition of family, over population, superstitions, ritualistic practices and bindings a rural girl can’t take her nutrition completely. Generally in a rural family female takes meal after the male. So, they do not take meal fully. Besides they are not able to cook scientifically and nutritiously. As a result lack of proper and enough nutrition hinders the educational life of a girl. To meet up these problems mid-

day meal programme has been running. But it is not sufficient. Govt. should attain the root of the problems.

- **Gender inequality in curriculum and text book at secondary level** - We have the unwanted discrimination between male and female in the practical life of students at secondary level as well as in their educational materials also. In the every stage of their students life boys and girls are classified clearly. Almost every practice in school life has a message to Girls that they are different and this tradition has been running from childhood to higher stage of education. Curriculum, languages, mode of teaching, text books, institutional management, school activities, almost every events of educational system are biased by the unwanted inequality and these are the most important and unattended barriers of women education in rural India especially.

Inequality in Institution's Infrastructure - Except Primary schools, secondary Level and college level, the Girls' Institutions are in different shapes and equipped by different facilities. There is higher boundary wall, small but protected land for games and sports, classrooms with smaller windows, hidden toilets and drinking water facilities etc. Everywhere there is a different type of arrangements to show that it is a girls' Institution. In uniform the design, colour etc is also the example of gender biasness.

Curriculum and gender inequality – The modern curriculum is child oriented. Education by doing and previous knowledge of a student gets priority in modern educational system. To develop a curriculum, the selection and orientation of content, project works, evaluation system, co-curricular activities etc, should be in attention. Everywhere the Gender Biasness is found. According to curriculum the selection and arrangement of contents are the most important tasks. If there is any deficiency in suitable content, the educational objectives will be hampered. So, selection of content is very much essential and it should be children oriented. So without any touch of gender issues it is impossible to create a proper curriculum. Sometimes the gender discrimination becomes the main component of a content, e.g., in story, linguistic study, novel etc. The conflicts between male-female, or their love, sadness, every ups and down in their relationships become the basic idea. So, it is clear that in every types of content, i.e., social, philosophical, economical or political there will be a great presence of gender discrimination. In almost every subject of secondary level i.e., History, Geography, Sciences, Bengali etc have a great example of gender inequality. Some of them are absolute gender biased, which indicate women differently. E.g., In arithmetic the mathematical problems start with the income and expenditure of Sushil Babu or Amar Babu or others male characters but there is no female representation in anywhere. As it indicates that the earning member of a family is only male. It is also an example of gender biasness. Except pure mathematical and scientific theories the secondary curriculum are full of unequal approaches towards women.

Co-curricular activities - In the co-curricular activities in school great biasness is present everywhere. In co-educational institution the instructed activities for girls and boys are different and categorical. In annual sports there are different types of events for girls and

boys. In case of girls the events would be spoon race, balance race, musical chair, passing the ball etc, there are no scope to run-400 or 800 mts, long jump, high jump, hurdle race, shot-put etc. Those are announced for boys. The indication clearly says that you are girls - more running or jumping are not so good for you. But we also know the achievements of P.V. Sindhu, Dipa Karmakar, Sakshi or Saina. It is a biased outlook which has to be swiped out for the betterment of our society.

Even in the Hidden Curriculum in school, girls are addressed differently. Usually in case of girls our general conceptions are that they are weaker, polite, obedient and much faithful and we want to see all of them in this perspective. A little deviation from it arise a great discrimination towards them.

Text Book - From the childhood the poet tries to show the uneven practices of girls and boys consciously. These basic-ideas make a pressure on child's mind and even in later they would not be free from it. It creates a mental retrogression.

Visuals - In nursery rhyme a boy called Khoka will go to fish and every one insist him to take rice with milk. But on the other hand a girl character namely Khuki is waiting for Khoka after finishing her cooking Ilish fish. In books the pictures of Khoka and Khuki should be observed. Make up, dresses, tasks every single dot of ink show gender inequality. The dangerous job starts from the beginning. We are habituated to see it in the text books, that Sanjoy and Rahim play football on the other page Mala & Fatema are cooking or engaged to wreathe. Is it not a biased attitude?

Content - From the content of visuals or texts the ideas grow up that one male would be Doctor, Police, Soldier, Pilot etc and female would be a good house wife, nurses, cook, airhostess etc. In the content the topic related to the contributions of our great and famous personalities, female representative is negligible.

Examples of any text items in the whole book the male characters are preferred female are neglected. It insists to gender discrimination.

Language - In almost every language the male and female addressing words are different. e.g. in English. He – She, King – Queen, Tiger-Tigress etc. To complete a book the two type of words are not used. Only He, Man, Tiger etc are used for representation. It is a silent operation.

In Bengali the words for female representation are not used usually. e.g, Doctor, Savapati, Shikshak, Krishak, Ukil etc. Here Ram, Shyam, Jadu, and Madhu are used to address the common people. Where are the women representation? Our National language Hindi is not an exception. Door is big, so, 'Dorwaja Kholta Hai' and window is small, so 'Khidki Khulti Hai'. Think about the forms of discrimination. And it has been carrying from year to year. These unattended barriers make a great deviation to women education from its ideal shape gradually.

● **Political aloofness and Lack of administrative Supervision-** Lets see the Report by World Economic Forum (WEF)-2014. Out of 142 countries the position of India is 114 regarding Gender Gap Index (GGI). And in case of the concerned parameters to create this index the position of India are as follows - in

- Economic Participation and Opportunity -134th
- Health and Life Expectancy -141st
- Educational Achievement - 126th
- Political Empowerment - 15th only

In case of Political Empowerment Indian women create a great job i.e., 15th position in all over the world. It is really great. But at the same time gender disparity in every corners of our society make us ashamed. Political aloofness and lack of supervisions indulge the unequal perceptions.

In rural India the administrators do not take the accusation of Sexual Harassment and abuse and there is no arrangement to punish the criminals in general. Due to child marriage, Dowry System and Sexual Abuse etc the women freedom are thoroughly subdued. These affect Women Education negatively.

● **Steps are taken by Govt. Authorities** – Due to perverted shaped of women education the educational system of a nation differs from its ideal position aggregately. So it is a burning problem to us. To solve the situation many fruitful steps have been taken by the both Central and State Govt. authorities. Some of these are as follows -

- Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and prevention of Misuse) Act-1994 and amendment -2003 to prohibit the gender determination of embryos.
- Sati Prevention Act - 1987
- Dowry Prohibition Act - 1961
- Child Marriage Prohibition Act – 2006
- Protection of children from sexual offences Act – 2012
- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya - up to 2013-2014, almost 3602 schools has been started in where reservation for SC, ST, OBC, Minority Girls is 75% and rest 25% for BPL Girls. At present almost 3.48 lakh girls are studying there.
- Reservation of seats for single girl child in Kandriya Vidyalaya – For class (I-V) – two seats per section and for class (VI-XII) – two seats per class.
- In school stage some of student oriented schemes have been started – eg, mid-day meal, scholarship for girls, free distribution for required medicines, text books, school uniform etc upto class VIII.
- Beti Banchao Beti Padoo Yojana by Central Govt.
- Kanyashree Prokalpo – in West Bengal to spread women education and to stop child marriage specially Kanyashree Prokalpo, Sabuj Sathi Prokalpo etc have been taken by the State Govt. It should be appreciated by all.
- Sarba Shiksha Avijan, Rastriya Shiksha Mission etc.

● **Some Necessary steps, which should have been taken to improve the situation of women Education in India -**

- Firstly any type of Gender discrimination should be removed from every stages of education i.e., from primary to higher level of education. Everywhere i.e., in curriculum, content, textbook etc and equal honor as well as liberal outlook should be given to women.
- To stop the over population the national and state level agenda should be taken by Govt. newly and by proper supervisions Govt. should try to get success aggregately.
- The concerned Govt. should assure the normal people of minimum economic mobility in practical. They should introduce more effective projects like as “100 days’ work” In this regard honesty and efficient political efforts are necessary.
- Govt. have to tight its administration to give the social protection to women in all dimensions. Any types of inequality, inequity or sexual harassment and child abuse should be registered at administrator level and the proper justice should be arranged for the victimized women.
- At school level the practical problems and its remedies at menstrual time of a girl should be introduced in curriculum and it should be practiced by the experts in school.
- The awareness programmes to stop any types of social prejudices should be arranged by Govt. as well as Non Govt. Organization regularly in remote areas and Girls should be encouraged to higher education by arranging different kinds of practices.
- General treatment facilities should be assured and monitored at central level. To stop child death, female foeticide, death of pregnant mother etc the Hospital’s nursing should be assured at 100% level.
- Govt. should take some effective projects centrally as Mid-day-meal to stop the Malnutrition, Anemia etc of Girls Students.
- A mass communication and awareness programmes have to be taken by media and social networking sites as their duties to society in this regard.
- At any working place women should be encouraged to join and the procedures of selection should be right.
- The interest and needs of Girl - child should be satisfied by curriculum and self protection should also be learned practically.
- The number of women representation in politics and administration should be raised, not by giving reservation or undue advantages, the outlook should be changed at every stages.
- Every efforts in this regard by NGOs in rural area must be welcomed. Govt. and NGO. Partnership model should be highly appreciated.
- The UGC or other concerned authority should arrange the special Bridge Courses equivalent to General UG, PG etc level of education for aged women.
- In remote areas the escorts for Girls should be appointed for inaccessible path to schools and in case of higher education area wise coaching classes and Girls’ Hostel should be arranged.

- In Financial and General Budget the planned amount for women education and development must be raised.
- In national level Additional Help Line for legal, educational, career counseling for girls' have to arranged in block wise. Experts in those fields should be appointed as full timers.
- In whole India an equal curriculum and Academic session have to directed by the concerned authorities etc,

● **Conclusion** – Gender Discrimination is the most powerful impediment to spread women education as well as human resource development. Even according to Brihadaranyak Upanishada – there were only sole before any creation of Earth and then to maintain his wish, he created Jaya -

“Atmavedanagna Asideka Eba
Sohakamayata Jaya me Syat”

According to United Nation Development Programme - UNDP in GII i.e., Gender Inequality Index the position of India is 127 out of 152. Which is only the upper position of Afghanistan among the SAARC attached countries. On the other hand according to WEF i.e., World Economic Forum in GGI - Gender Gap Index the position of India is 114 out of 142. And according to a report of 2010, the Female and Male ratio of 25 Years above and having completed the secondary stage of education in India is 26.6:50.4 but in America it is 94.7:94.3 and in China it is 54.8:70.4. It is clearly stated that in respect of the other countries the position of India is at the bottom line regarding women education. The same picture has been shown in the census of 2011. Where the ratio of functional literacy rate of Female and Male (above 7 year) in India is 65.46:82.14 and in West Bengal it is better as 71.16:82.67. Almost all reports show that there is a big gap in literacy rate or higher education between male and female. This gap should be swiped out and national level agenda should be taken as soon as possible.

We have the Right to Education act 2009 by which we have achieved our fundamental rights to education. In India free and compulsory educational system has been started. According to National Educational Policy - 1986 and its amendment - 1992 the Central Govt. have taken the moral duties to uplift the Women Education as follows – “Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge of women... This will be an act of faith and social engineering... The removal of woman’s illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their services, setting time targets and effective monitoring...” We have Sarba Shiksha Mission 2000, i.e., the Education for all policy. To develop the female part of our society we have taken a great number of suggestions from different commissions, acts and policies. But the inequality between Male and Female in social perspective remains nearly unchanged. So, in every social components we can see the touch of gender discrimination. Though according to our constitution the state shall not discriminate any

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citizen on ground only of sex. [Article 15(a)]. But the gender biasness are running without care.

Swami Vivekananda said that – “It is impossible to think about the welfare of the World unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing.” So to stop the discrimination and to shape the Women Education up to the ideal we have to walk a long way. In this regard every efforts of Govt. and Non-Govt. agencies must be welcomed with proper honour.

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