

## **Girls' Education at Elementary Level in India: An Analysis of Progress, Challenges and Policy Impacts**

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### **Abstract**

Education serves as the cornerstone of women's empowerment and national development. Since India's independence, when the female literacy rate was a mere 8.9%, significant progress has been made, with current figures reaching approximately 71%. Education enhances women's quality of life by fostering critical thinking, creativity, and a range of cognitive and practical skills. It equips them with knowledge in hygiene, health, mathematics, languages, the arts, and sciences-empowering them to contribute meaningfully to their families and society. Girls, in particular, benefit from a multidisciplinary approach to education that nurtures confidence, independence, and decision-making abilities. These competencies are essential for overcoming everyday challenges and participating fully in public and private life. The establishments of girls' primary schools play a significant role in providing a safer learning environment, especially in contexts where educational opportunities for girls remain limited. Despite progress, numerous challenges-social, economic, and infrastructural-continue to hinder universal access to quality education for girls. This paper examines the current status and persistent barriers in girls' primary education in India, highlighting the need for inclusive strategies and sustained policy interventions.

**Keywords:** Girls' Education, Multidisciplinary Skills, Safe Learning Environment, Primary Schooling, Educational Challenges in India

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### **Introduction**

Education serves as a foundational pillar for individual empowerment and societal advancement. In Indian prospective, the education of the girl child holds a very important place not only in the development of girls' education but also taking the nation towards closer to the developed nation. Over the past few decades, the Indian government has launched multiple schemes aimed at enhancing girls' access to education, especially at the primary level. Prominent initiatives of the government such as Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP), the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), and financial support schemes like the Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana have contributed in respecting girls' education and attracting girls to join the nearby schools. Additionally, nationwide popular scheme, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has sought to guarantee free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 14.

Despite these policy interventions and the constitutional recognition of getting education as a fundamental right, gender disparities in education persist-particularly in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged regions. Traditional patriarchal norms, cultural constraints, and perceptions of gender roles often result in girls being withdrawn from school or denied access to formal education altogether. Many rural families still view girls primarily as caretakers responsible for domestic chores, thereby undermining the importance of their education.

This research aims to explore the current status of elementary girls' education in India, analyzing the effectiveness of government initiatives, and identify persistent barriers to achieving universal education for the girl child. It seeks to highlight the gap between policy and practice, with a focus on understanding why gender inequality in education continues despite significant efforts.

The study also considers the role of societal attitudes, implementation challenges, and infrastructural limitations in shaping educational outcomes for girls. By examining both the progress made and the obstacles that remain, this research endeavors to contribute to the discourse on gender and education, and to recommend strategies for creating a more inclusive and biasfree educational varieties for girls in India.

### Agencies Promoting Primary Education of Girls in India

The promotion of primary education for girls in India involves a multi-stakeholder approach including government bodies, autonomous institutions, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. These agencies play complementary roles in policy formulation, implementation, community engagement, and infrastructure development to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for girls.

#### 1. Government Agencies

- a) **MOE:** The Ministry of Education of India is the central government body which is fully responsible for framing and implementing education policies and programs across India in its schools. It plays a key role in promoting girls' education through innovative and promotional schemes such as:
  - Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan
  - Mid-Day Meal
  - Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao
- b) **Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD):** MoWCD works towards child development, gender equality, and the welfare of girls. It collaborates with the MoE and Ministry of Health to run awareness and empowerment initiatives like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) that supports girls' education.
- c) **State Education Departments:** These departments oversee the implementation of both central and state education schemes at the grassroots level. They manage government-run primary schools and are responsible for teacher deployment, infrastructure development, and enrollment monitoring.
- d) **National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT):** NCERT contributes immensely in framing the national curriculum of education which aims to ensure that girls' oriented education, especially in elementary level which attracts girls to read and go to schools. It also undertakes research, training, and innovation to improve the quality and inclusivity of education.
- e) **National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA):**

NIEPA provides policy research, capacity-building, and planning support to strengthen educational governance with a focus on gender equity. It provides opportunities to the scholars to do innovations in girls' education in India.

#### 2. Autonomous Bodies and Educational Missions

- a) **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA):** Now integrated into the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, SSA was India's flagship program aimed at universalizing elementary education. It emphasized girls' education, particularly for socially disadvantaged groups such as SC/ST and minorities.
- b) **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV):** KGBVs are residential schools for girls belonging to disadvantaged communities in educationally backward blocks. These schools provide a supportive environment for girls who are out-of-school or at risk of dropping out.

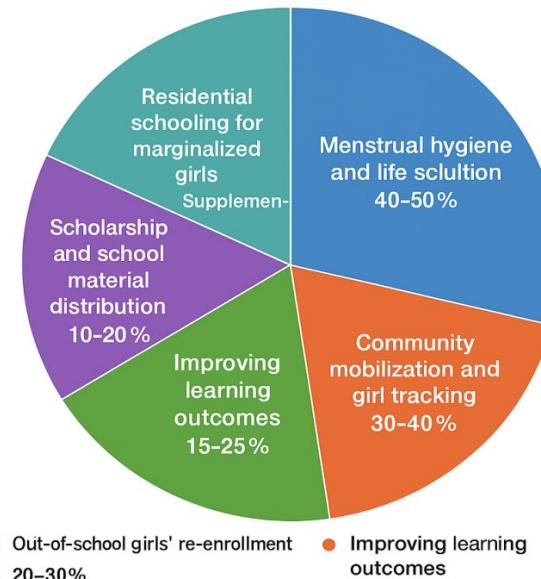
- c) **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR):** NCPCR safeguards child rights, including the right to education. It monitors the implementation of the Right to Education Act with a special focus on girls' access to quality primary education.

#### 3. International Organizations

- a) **UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund):** UNICEF works closely with national and state governments to improve access, retention, and the quality of girls' education. It also supports initiatives related to menstrual hygiene, child protection, and community engagement.
- b) **UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization):** UNESCO promotes gender equality in education through advocacy, research, and technical support. It helps implement projects that enhance girls' participation and reduce barriers to education.
- c) **World Bank and Global Partnership for Education (GPE):** These agencies provide funding and technical assistance for education sector reforms. Their support often includes gender-inclusive strategies aimed at improving access to education for girls.

#### 4. Non-Government Organization

Share of NGOs in Assisting Girls' Education in India



The pie chart highlights the important roles NGOs play in supporting girls' education in India, particularly in rural and isolated areas. Their largest shares are in menstrual hygiene and life skills education (40–50%) and community mobilization (30–40%), where they fill important gaps left by the formal education system in our country.

NGOs also play a significant role in re-enrolling out-of-school girls (20–30%), improving learning outcomes (15–25%), and providing scholarships and educational materials (10–20%). While their support for residential schooling is also notable, it improves services in tribal and far flung areas.

Overall, NGOs contribute as catalysts in improving access, retention, and quality of girls' education. Their contribution is most visible in regions where government programs unable to reach, making them indispensable partners in achieving educational opportunities for girls.

## 5. Community-Based Organizations & Panchayati Raj Institutions

- Village Education Committees (VECs) and School Management Committees (SMCs) monitor enrollment, attendance, and infrastructure.
- Gram Panchayats often play a role in spreading awareness and ensuring accountability at the local level.

### Importance

In India, it is essential to create awareness among people to understand the importance of the education of the girls in elementary level. It is unfortunate that even in this generation of modern society; many people think that sending girls to school is a waste of resource and time. Still in some sections of society, where males are dominating, dowry is prevalent and girls are merely considered to be a bride. Elementary education should be taken seriously and enrollment of girls be closely monitored by the educational bodies of nation and states. When girls join schools in early ages they feel confident and secure. They learn faster and better. Their learning also empowers their uneducated parents in the rural villages. Confidence of parents also makes these girls encouraged in every sphere of social development. Dependency on male members decreases significantly and the family gives autonomy to their girls to take even financial decisions. It is also found that mindset of the rural parents' changes significantly in terms of their early marriages. Therefore, a change in the mindset towards girl child education in India is the need of the hour. Every girl child must be treated equally with love and respect.

### Objective of the Paper

The basic objective of this research is to present a comprehensive analysis of the current status of girls' elementary education in India. The study aims to examine enrollment trends, retention rates, dropout patterns, and academic outcomes among girls at the elementary level. A key focus is to explore the regional and socio-economic disparities that influence girls' overall status to quality education, particularly in rural and marginalized societies. The research also seeks to identify and analyze the key barriers hindering girls' education, including poverty, gender bias, infrastructural deficiencies, and cultural constraints.

Another important objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of government policies and initiatives such as the Right to Education (RTE) Act, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) in promoting girls' education. Furthermore, the study advocates the effectiveness of social norms, parental attitudes, and community support systems on girls' educational participation. In addition, the research aims to assess the adequacy of school infrastructure, including the availability of gender-sensitive facilities such as girls' toilets, female teachers, and safe commutation facilities. Based on the findings, the study will provide evidence-based recommendations for improving access, equity, and learning outcomes for girls in India's primary education system.

### Current Status

Over the past few years, India has witnessed significant progress in improving access to education for girls at the primary level. One of the key indicators of this progress is the narrowing gender gap in enrollment. According to national statistics, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for girls at the primary stage has reached near parity with that of boys, reflecting the effectiveness of nationwide interventions such

as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP). These programs have not only enhanced enrollment rates but have also contributed to increasing female literacy across the country. This upward trajectory signals a growing recognition of the importance of girls' education in achieving national development goals.

Despite these improvements, critical challenges remain that continue to hinder the realization of educational equity. Although enrollment levels are high, dropout rates among girls-especially from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds-pose a major concern. Transition rates from primary to upper primary and secondary levels decline significantly for girls, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Girls from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and economically weaker sections face additional layers of disadvantage due to systemic discrimination and inadequate access to quality schooling.

Cultural norms and patriarchal values further complicate the scenario. Practices such as early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and the fear of gender-based violence lead many families to deprioritize girls' education. Moreover, inadequate school infrastructure, including the lack of separate toilets for girls, poor menstrual hygiene management facilities, and the absence of female teachers, often result in irregular attendance or complete withdrawal from school. These issues reflect a broader societal reluctance to invest in the education of girls, who are often perceived as temporary members of the family or financial burdens.

While policy frameworks have laid a strong foundation for promoting girls' education, achieving true gender parity requires a dual approach: strengthening school infrastructure and transforming societal attitudes. A shift in community mindset, coupled with targeted investment in gender-sensitive education, is essential for ensuring that every girl not only enrolls in school but is also empowered to complete her education and contribute meaningfully to society.

### Challenges

This is evident that schooling of the girls is a key component of the society to be developed and prosperous. However, still sending girls to school remains one of the challenges in many pockets of the country. There are various factors which hinders education of the girls. Negative parental attitude towards educating daughters is one of the important challenges to promote girl's education in India.

- Girls, in elementary stages find them safer among female teachers. They like to communicate and share their feelings with mother like figures. Indian education system has done tremendous improvement in preferring lady teachers in elementary classes; presently women are sharing about 48% of teachers at the Elementary level.
- Schools in India at elementary level needs safer atmosphere for the girls. Many schools still don't have basic amenities like washrooms, toilets and drinking water facilities. Girls are afraid of their safety and security. Parents also don't feel safe to send their daughters to school where they find that their girls are not safe and secure. Annual Status of Education Report (2014) agreed that due to lack of girls' basic facilities there is substantial increase in dropout rates among girls in the country.
- Girls after elementary classes wish to continue their education for which they have to cover far distances which also hinders their education. Middle & Secondary schools are mostly located in towns and a city where shifting the girls in hostel is also a challenge.

- In rural parts of India most of the parents are not ready to send their girls to schools where schools located in far areas. Safety and security remains a concern. Molestation, rapes, teasing and eloping frequently reported in rural areas. Schools basically are not fully girls' schools, mix schools of the boys and girls do not accepted by the parents.
- Elementary education has no fee as such for both boys and girls. Some schools of state government provide textbooks and uniforms free of cost, but every state do not. Mostly parents in rural areas do not have regular incomes and resources. Sending girls to school needs some extra amount every month to bear the expenditure of notebooks, uniforms, commutation expenses etc. which force the parents to keep their daughters at home rather send them to school.
- In rural parts of the country students have to travel through different landscapes. Rivers without bridges, lack of road connectivity, forest areas, abduction fear and many more distance set up of the nearest schools are some of the basic causes that keep girls out of the schools.
- Mothers of the most of the girls in rural India are uneducated. Girls are always close to their mothers. Girls have tendencies to help their mothers in household chores. Girls prefer to help their mothers rather wasting their time in going schools. Rural mothers have lack of awareness towards family planning and therefore they bear frequent children, to look after these siblings growing up girls are the best option for the mothers to take care of their smaller children.
- Girls born in large families where many children are born for the poor parents do not have enough nutritious meals to be healthy. They get frequent health related problems and most of the time gets sick. Timely medicines and lack of food also keep them out of schools.
- Many parts of the rural India early child marriages are prevalent. Girls are very prone to get marry in early age. Dowry is very deep rooted evil in many pockets of the country. The physical development of the girl is considered that they should get married. Sanitary and hygiene awareness at the developing age also plays important role in keeping the girls in schools.
- Lack of enthusiasm and interest of the officials in charge of education at different stages is another problem for promoting girls' education.
- Lack of awareness among implementing different agencies and community members to implement different schemes and provisions of girls' education at grass root level.

### Suggestions to Overcome the Problems

The education of girls is an integral part of national development. We can help girls get the education they deserve by supporting the following:

1. **Equal Access to Education:** There must be an equal access to both girls and boys in education so that there should be no difference between them and they can continue their education simultaneously. Gender biased chorus hinders girls to join schools; therefore, boys also should be involved in traditional works meant to girls only. Schools teachers should frequently take courses on gender sensitivity so that they also make the parents aware on girls' education.

2. **Free from Gender Biasness:** Gender biasness has become old practice and now gradually reforms are taking place. World is changing, however, still much reforms are awaited. Discrimination at homes and schools shall be avoided.
3. **Incentives:** There are many incentives in promoting girls' presence in elementary schools. Scholarships, free uniforms, midday meals, excursions and other schemes are in practice. Awareness in society and advertisement of such schemes run by some of the state government or central government can be promoted.
4. **Equality:** Raising awareness at family and in society will promote positive attitudes towards girls' education. Parents should be regularly involved in positive dialogues regarding wellbeing of the girls' future, importance of education and treating girls equally valuable with male genders.
5. **Privilege in Schools:** Girls students should be provided special privilege in schools looking after their overall well-being. Their safety and security should be taken care. Discrimination and violence in any forms against them should be prevented. Girls should be fully confident and stress free in their schooling atmosphere.
6. **Flexibility:** where girls are bound to help their mothers at homes and domestic duties are much more important for them then going schools, in such situations, girls should be given flexibility to choose their available time to go to schools. This will minimize the dropout rates of the girls in elementary classes. System of opening schools at fixed hours and leaving only after eight hours don not generally suits the girls of rural areas. They have many house hold duties to do. Looking after their siblings, kitchen work, fields and helping mothers and fathers do not permit them to stay in schools for longer hours. Therefore, girls should be provided flexible hours to go for studies in schools. No push out policies of the school should be applicable to the girls' scholars.

### Conclusion

Education of girls should remain an important task of every government. It is pathetic to note that even today; in some of the pockets of India, education of the girl child is discouraged. Education is the key factor for girls' empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Discrimination of girl right from the womb is well known. There is continued inequality and vulnerability of girls in all important domains of society. Girls oppressed in all sections of life, they need to be empowered in all walks of life. In order to fight against the socially constructed gender biases, girls & women have to fly against the wind that requires more strength. Such strength comes from the equality and equality will come from the education. India is going to be developed socially and economically very soon. Educated girls' are the assets who yield positive impact on the Indian society through their contribution at home and professional fields.

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