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Education For Girls with Disability

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Abstract:

Education is a tool for development and mobility in the society. Providing universal access to quality education is key to India's continued ascent, and leadership on the global stage in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation (NEP 2020). It also helps in bridging the gap between various sections of society (NCF 2005).

It helps in connecting the CWSN with rest of the society. That too for GWDs, education plays eminent role in their future building. They remain marginalized for a longer period of time because of their gender and disability. They are doubly marginalized because of these two factors. This study is also trying to explore a nuanced picture of their social, political, academic and psychological challenges at secondary school level. It also provide some of the preventive measures to overcome these challenges within the education setting.

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

Introduction:

Education is an important tool for the upward economic and social mobility. It is fundamental for acquiring full human potential, developing an equitable society, and promoting national development. Universal access to quality education is key to India's continued ascent, and leadership on the global stage in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation (NEP 2020). It also helps in bridging

the gap between various sections of society (NCF 2005, Position paper on inclusive education). When it comes to CWSN importance of education increases manifolds. This provides a proper channel and connect them with rest of the society. CWSN remain marginalized for a longer period of time and now it's high time to include them completely and education plays an eminent role in this inclusion.

As per census 2011, out of 1.21 billion population of India, about 26.8 million persons are 'Disabled' which is 2.21 percent of the total population. In an era of 'inclusive development', focused initiatives need to be taken for the sustainable development of the PWDs. Persons with disabilities remained marginalized for a longer period of time in Indian history but in the past few decades, different policies and commissions took initiatives for individuals with disabilities.

If a girl is disabled then a gender perspective further complicates the matrix. Girls with Disability are considered as the most marginalized group in our society if social norms and cultural biases are concerned (Mehrotra, 2006). According to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, we cannot measure the position and velocity of an object 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 apply a gender perspective. As a result, Girls with Disability have limited researches and educational opportunities.

In this study, researcher is trying to dig deeper into these two variables i.e. gender and disability. Motive of the researcher is to look deeper into the educational problems of Girls with Disability. Many researches have been done either on Disability or on Gender. But if we look into the intersectionality between these two variables then we have limited studies.

Challenges faced by GWDs in educational setting:

In spite of investing in the girl education, we are still lacking behind to maintain their academic level. It is a known fact that investing in girl's education is one of the wisest and most profitable investment in social and economic terms for a nation. Investing in girl's education is like investing in nation building. Girls should be provided with equal access and equal rights to education. Education of girls not only profits to the human resource development but it simultaneously hampers the other ill-practices prevalent in the Indian society. It automatically benefits the community in wider ways like it prevent child marriages, decreased rates of girl child abuse, decreased child and mother mortality rate, good for economy growth of a nation, promotes good health and provides

comparatively a stable society. Following are some of the challenges in the education of Girls with Disability:

There are inadequate legal frameworks to incorporate the rights of girls with disabilities in this area. In spite of having number of policy documents, we are still lacking behind for uplifting girls status in the educational settings. We still looking up for reforms that promote the full inclusion of Girls with Disability at different educational settings. (Chakraborti, 2017 ; Singh, 2016)

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 (Newman,2016). 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).

Parents often complain against the insecurity of Girls with Disability in school and while reaching to the school. Increase in violence, abduction, molestation and sexual abuse of Girls with Disability 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 & Sangeeta, 2013; Sahoo,2016). 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 CWSN are more prone to this type of violence. Specially, GWDs are more susceptible to sexual assault not only at home or locality but at school 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.

Cultural and social challenges for girls are also an important factor. Women regularly experiences multiple operations that operate in situational, symbolic, individual and institutional level (Hardings ,1986; Collins, 2004; Benhounk,2020). Cultural norms create and reinforce gender based hierarchies (Connell, 1987; Benhounk, 2020). Their status in educational settings further worsens if disability is also attached with them. 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). These extra burden on them reduces their physical and mental efficiency to study. We can say that the total sum of domestic and non-paid work for girls is higher than boys (woldehanna, Jones and Tefera, 2008). After contributing to such extent, the work is not even acknowledged or considered as important in our society.

Early marriages of Girls with Disability to transfer their burden to someone else is also a known fact. This mindset of parents also snatches opportunities of education for Girls with Disability (Mehrotra, 2004).

Lack of sanitation facilities especially during menstruation (Suleman, 2015). 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 government schools is one of the reason for early dropouts of GWDs.

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. Lack of female role models or improper representation of females in the school curriculum hampers the educational achievements of GWDs (D.Sarah,2016).

Girls with Disability have to witness many infrastructural challenges in educational institutions which become one of the important barriers in their education. As per the principles of inclusive education, equal access should be given to each and every child. Good infrastructure of a school would provide better physical accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Sometimes parents attitude towards Girls with Disability can be a strong barrier in their education. Parents expectations and perceptions for the child plays an important role in their overall growth and development. The social perception and stigma about gender and disability are transferred to their girl child via parents. This understanding of disability and gender moves through a cycle of shock, grief, low self-esteem, low confidence and inferiority for girls with disabilities. This belief that their children cannot be educated like non-disabled children percolates to Girls with Disability via their parents and thus providing strong hindrance in their present educational status (Limaye, 2016).

With the advancement of technology, transfer of information from one place to another becomes much easier. Government of India has come up with many schemes and policies for the betterment

of Girls with Disability but such facilities are not availed by many needy families specially who stayed in rural areas. This is due to lack of awareness about facilities like admissions, educational aids, vocational training programs, fee concessions etc. They remain vulnerable towards education (Limaye, 2016).

Suggestive measures to overcome the challenges faced by GWDs:

Above mentioned barriers have multiple and complex layers which are interrelated with one another at different points. These incorporate social norms, attitudes and value systems, political and institutional will, technical knowledge etc. The suggestive measures in addressing above mentioned barriers in the process of educating Girls with Disability are given as below:

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 either with teachers or parents. Both should be accessible and approachable to the child in need physically and emotionally because listening and believing in them itself solve many of their problems. Mind your actions and words thoroughly.

Able children of Africa employed a child to child approach in which enrolled primary school children were asked to identify children with disabilities in their neighborhood. This approach is very helpful in identification of CWD and was based on an assumption that children are not gender biased (UNGEI, 2017).

Collaboration of medical staff, specialized school staff and community leaders was also considered effective strategy in identification (Roshan, 2009). This reduces the gaps and flaws and in turn increases the connectivity among the stakeholders to improve the educational status of GWDs. For transport related issues disabled people's organizations should focus upon the specific challenges and find creative solutions for their problems. Small group should be made from different organizations which can come around the field and conduct discussions at different strata's of society to gather the actual problems faced by GWDs and try to find the suitable solutions for them. To uplift the status of GWDs in the educational setting is not a one man's task. So, every strata of society needs to come forward to achieve this global goal.

Sanitary towels, pads and other raw materials should be provided to the girls during Menstruation and they should be well informed about this natural process. Girls should know how to deal with this issue mentally and physically.

To resolve school 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 (UNGEI, 2017). Awareness in the GWDs should also an eminent part because they themselves should know how to make their life more happy and productive.

Allocation of female staff somehow changes the psychological atmosphere for GWDs and they feel free and comfortable at school as well. This somewhere increases the approachability of GWDs towards their teachers and they feel free to share their problems.

To keep a check on attendance, surprise visits, school registers, feedback from parents, roll calls on buses etc. can be done. Regular checking of attendances helped in early detection of dropouts. Followed by the reasons further helped us in preventing dropouts. So, higher authorities should ensure that provisions should be followed religiously by the government as well as privates schools. This makes the system more productive and active.

Advocacy of possible policy changes at school, local government and national level (Zuraidah, 2015). There should be a scope for teacher's voice at the policy formation level. They project a nuanced understanding of their challenges and thus proposed an apt policy or plan for them. Gender and disability responsive pedagogy should be incorporated at the teacher training level (Aikman, 2007; UNICEF, Malawi, 2003). 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 hearting their student's psychological and emotional constructs. We can resolve them by providing gender sensitive training to teachers. 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 (Behounek; 2020).

Curriculum should incorporates 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 considered to a tool for upward mobility in society. Marginalized groups especially GWDs should access this tool for uplifting their current position in the society. Due to lack of researches and government policies in this area, they remain excluded since long. But this is the high time to empower and motivate them to achieve an independent living. This could be done only by making education accessible for all. Education has the power to transform the society into great levels.

This study helps them in providing a better alternative in terms of information and appropriate resources in this area (GWDs). Also in overcoming the barriers and challenges faced by girls with

Disabilities. The proposed suggestions and ideas are significant enough in bringing a positive change in the status of GWDs education. There is a need to follow them with full faith and commitment.

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