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GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND GIRL'S EDUCATION IN INDIA: AN ASSESSMENT OF THEIR ROLE AND IMPACT.

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Abstract: Education is an essential means of developing oneself, bringing social transformation, participating economically, and promoting gender equality. Several improvements have been made in the field of education in India as far as girls' concerns are concerned; however, there still exist disparities among girls due to issues like poverty, gender discrimination, socio-cultural value system, early marriages, lack of infrastructure, insecurity, and absence of education. Acknowledging these challenges, the Government of India has introduced several programs and schemes designed to facilitate education for girls, keep them in school, reduce dropouts, and empower them in general. Such programs include Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), Samagra Shiksha, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY), and National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE). This paper examines the importance of such schemes and programs launched by the Government of India in educating girls in India. The research design is descriptive and review-based using secondary sources like government policies, scheme guidelines, reports, and literature in the analysis process. The results indicate that the government interventions have been playing an important part in improving accessibility, awareness, retention, gender-sensitive infrastructure, residential schools, and financial preparedness for education of girls. However, problems of implementation, awareness, attitude, regional differences, digital divide, and monitoring continue to affect the performance of these government schemes. In conclusion, it can be stated that the government schemes are playing a crucial role in the education of girls provided that the implementation, community participation, gender sensitivity in schools, and monitoring are good.

Keywords: Education for Girls, Government Initiatives, Gender Sensitivity, Samagra Shiksha, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, KGBV.

1. Introduction

Education plays a very critical role in the development of the country socially, economically, culturally, and politically. Education empowers people to gain knowledge, skills, self-confidence, and chances of participation in the social world. In the case of girls, education not only holds significance for their own development but is linked with their better health, economic empowerment, decision-making abilities, social participation, and intergenerational development. Thus, providing equal educational opportunities to girls is an integral part of social justice and gender equality.

In India, there has been significant progress in terms of educational opportunities for girls through constitutional provisions, educational policies, legislative actions, and government schemes. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, was a major step towards making universal elementary education possible. Various school-education schemes have been working towards increasing access, equality, retention, and quality in the field of education. One such scheme is the Samagra Shiksha scheme that covers pre-school to Class XII level school education.

However, despite the above, girls continue to face some challenges when it comes to accessing quality education. This is especially so among girls from socioeconomically and educationally disadvantaged communities as well as rural areas. Hence, apart from efforts geared toward increasing enrollments, government intervention is also needed to ensure that girls are enrolled at the right time in schools, stay in schools, get access to higher education, and have a conducive learning environment.

In this regard, various schemes have been developed by the Government of India to tackle various aspects of education of girls. Some of these schemes have directly targeted school enrollment and retention while others have tried to change attitudes towards girls' education, residence-based education, financial preparedness, and so forth. It is important to assess the impact of these schemes on the empowerment of girls through education in India.

2. Need for Government Schemes in Girls' Education

The necessity of government initiatives in educating girls is due to the fact that the inequality in education depends on various factors including economic, social, cultural, geographical and institutional elements. In many cases, especially where there is economic scarcity, financial constraints might lead to giving education preference to boys rather than girls. Moreover, girls have to perform chores at home, take care of their younger siblings, or stop their studies once they attain the age of adolescence. Social customs like early marriages and the associated gender roles can also lead to hindering education for girls. Even geographic disparities can prevent girls from studying at school due to reasons such as distance from school, poor means of transportation, lack of boarding facilities, etc.

Similarly, the significance of government schemes can be observed even at the secondary stage where the tendency of drop out of girls may increase due to various social and economic constraints. The aims and objectives of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme includes the enhancement of enrollment of girls at the secondary stage along with reducing the drop out rate of girls at secondary and higher secondary stages. Likewise, the Samagra Shiksha scheme contains special provisions for girls' education like upgradation of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas and those ensuring gender equality.

Therefore, the government schemes act as a tool through which the constitutional and policy commitment of equal treatment gets translated into concrete educational facilities for girls.

3. Objectives of the Study

The present study has been conducted with the following objectives in mind:

1. To analyse the significance of government schemes in terms of educating girls in India.
2. To discuss selected schemes/programmes implemented by the government on the issue of educating girls.
3. To understand the contribution of such schemes in the access, enrollment, and continuation of girls' education.
4. To analyze the problems associated with the implementation of such government schemes in case of girls' education.
5. To recommend ways of making government schemes more effective for educating girls.

4. Research Methodology

The current research is based on a descriptive and review type of research methodology. It uses only secondary sources of information and not primary field data. Sources of relevant information have been obtained through government documents and publications of the Government of India such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Department of School Education and Literacy, guidelines for schemes, manuals, and other government documents. Information related to important educational schemes has been analyzed and arranged thematically on the basis of their objective, target groups, major provisions and their potential impact on girls' education. Besides, academic literature and policy documents have been used to gain analytical understanding about the role of government interventions. Content analysis has been conducted for the interpretation of information gathered and identification of common themes, educational significance of various schemes, and implementation

problems associated with them. As the research is based on secondary information, its conclusions need to be treated as assessment of policies and programs and not empirical analysis based on primary data.

5. Major Government Schemes Promoting Girls' Education in India

5.1 Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) is a scheme that was introduced in the year 2015 as a major government initiative aimed at tackling the falling status of girl child and gender discrimination. The programme is conducted as a mindset and behavioral change intervention and aims at generating awareness regarding the value, protection, education and development of girls. As per the Ministry of Women and Child Development, some of the objectives of the programme include improvement in the sex ratio at birth, improvement in girls' enrollment in secondary school, reduction in dropout rate for girls in secondary and higher secondary school and generating awareness regarding menstruation hygiene management. It is important to note that BBBP is not a cash transfer program. The focus of the program is social and behavioral change and increasing awareness regarding issues related to girls.

From the point of view of education, the importance of BBBP lies in the fact that education participation does not just depend on availability of schools but also on the attitude of the family and community toward girls.

5.2 Samagra Shiksha

Samagra Shiksha is a comprehensive scheme of school education from pre-school to Class XII. This scheme has been evolved by bringing together the earlier schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, and Teacher Education. The general aim of this scheme is to enhance the effectiveness of schools by means of equal opportunities in education.

This scheme emphasizes on the issues of gender equality and female education. The activities that it carries out include improvement in the infrastructure of schools, inclusive education, teacher training, self-defense training for girls, and strengthening/upgradation of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas. Samagra Shiksha is concerned with disadvantaged sections and educationally backward regions.

The significance of Samagra Shiksha is in the comprehensiveness of the scheme. In contrast to girls' education being a separate concern, Samagra Shiksha takes into account the concern of gender equality within the framework of school education. Through improvement in school infrastructure, learning opportunities, safety, and inclusion, this scheme can help create an environment of girls' education.

5.3 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

One such residential-schooling program of great significance is Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), which forms an important part of Samagra Shiksha. The project concentrates on girls belonging to disadvantaged groups and provides them with residential and schooling facilities, especially those girls who might face problems in attending regular schools. Currently, KGBV is being taken up in an attempt to provide residential schooling facilities till Class XII, especially of the girls belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, minorities, and those below the poverty line.

This initiative assumes special importance for areas where distance from school, poverty, social restrictions, or lack of safe shelter becomes barriers to girls' education. The issue of geographic accessibility will no longer remain a problem through residential schooling. KGBV may also become a means of helping girls transition from elementary to secondary and higher secondary education.

Educational significance of KGBV is not confined only to attendance but also involves residential and schooling provisions in order to prevent girls from discontinuing their education due to distance, domestic constraints, or any social barriers.

5.4 Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana

Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana is a savings-linked program launched by the Government which focuses on the future financial well-being of the girl child. The introduction of the scheme occurred in the context of a larger policy regime concerning the welfare of girls. According to the Sukanya Samriddhi Account regulations, a girl child can have an account opened in her name by her guardian.

While Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana is not an educational program in the same sense as Samagra Shiksha and KGBV programs, it has an indirect connection with girls' education since financial planning may facilitate educational expenses in the future. In this respect, saving money may decrease the financial burden of families when their daughters reach the age of higher education.

5.5 National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education

NSIGSE scheme has been implemented to motivate girls, especially the ones who come from disadvantage groups, to pursue further education. This scheme is meant to take care of the issue of transition from elementary education to secondary education as well as to lessen the chances of dropping out of education after the elementary level. There is an official mention of the implementation of the NSIGSE scheme via the Direct Benefit Transfer scheme.

The importance of the NSIGSE scheme is that it concentrates on secondary education, which is the most important phase regarding continuing education for girls. Economic hardships, responsibilities within the family, societal pressures, and many other issues become even more important in adolescent life.

6. Comparative Assessment of Government Schemes

These schemes have been chosen as they target some aspects of girls' education that are inter-related but still distinct in nature. The scheme 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' aims at changing social attitudes, creating awareness and giving importance to the concept of girl child, including their education. 'Samagra Shiksha' scheme targets more of an institutional approach, where access to education, quality of education, inclusiveness, infrastructure, development of teachers and equality among genders is considered in the schooling system. 'Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya' scheme gives a more specific educational intervention to the girls belonging to poor backgrounds and thus helping overcome geographic and economic issues related to continuous schooling. On the other hand, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana takes care of the financial aspect of girls' education and encourages saving money for the betterment of their future education, while the scheme of 'NSIGSE' specifically encourages girls to pursue education in the secondary level through financial incentives.

7. Achievements and Contribution of Government Schemes

The government initiatives have helped in the expansion of educational opportunities for girls in a number of ways. In the first place, they have reinforced the focus on gender equality in terms of policies and made the education of girls an important aspect of the country's educational plans. Programmes such as Samagra Shiksha have included the issue of gender equality into the bigger context of school education, whereas BBBP has helped in raising awareness about the importance of the education of girls and changing behaviour in this regard.

Second, specific measures have helped in providing better educational opportunities for girls from socially disadvantaged communities. KGBV offers educational facilities to socially disadvantaged girls in terms of residential schooling.

Thirdly, government initiatives have acknowledged that access to education involves more factors than just classrooms. Factors such as safety, self-defense, sanitation, learning aids, infrastructural facilities, finance, and attitude of the community impact the experiences of girls in education. Samagra Shiksha, for instance, incorporates initiatives aimed at self-defense, inclusive education, infrastructure, and support for girls with special needs.

In light of the above discussion, the main accomplishment of these programs lies in shifting the perspective of education participation beyond enrollment.

8. Challenges in the Implementation of Government Schemes

Although there is much concern shown towards girls' education, there could still be some obstacles faced while implementing government schemes. Firstly, it can be observed that the level of awareness regarding these schemes could be unequally distributed. It is possible that families residing in economically or socially deprived areas may lack the proper knowledge regarding their eligibility, processes, and educational assistance provided under these schemes. In this way, the positive effect of the programme is likely to be restricted for all eligible girls.

Secondly, it could be mentioned that the presence of social and cultural beliefs regarding the priority of boys is still present in society. Although the government schemes could provide facilities and funding, there will be no change when the family expects girls to choose domestic responsibilities or marriage over education.

Implementation differences from one region to another also remain a relevant issue. Infrastructure differences, availability of teachers, institutional strength, geographical distance, and administration efficiency can affect the successful implementation of the scheme in a particular region. Girls from far-flung and educationally backward regions might still encounter difficulties despite having a program by the government in place.

The issue of the digital divide is yet another issue of concern. In the process of educating students using digital technology, girls who lack the required devices, internet connection, and digital assistance can lag behind. Moreover, issues such as safety at school, sanitation facilities, menstruation hygiene, transportation, and availability of teachers and counselors can play an important role in attendance and retention of girls.

9. Suggestions for Strengthening Government Schemes

Improvement in government schemes for girls' education can be achieved through an integrated and community-focused approach. Firstly, there is a need to create greater awareness about schemes among all the stakeholders such as parents, girls, teachers, community leaders, NGOs etc., regarding their aims, criteria of eligibility, and benefits associated with the schemes. The information regarding the schemes needs to be disseminated in simple local language through various sources such as schools, Gram Panchayats, Self-help groups, and community organizations.

Secondly, emphasis on implementation and monitoring is necessary. The government department needs to keep a check on whether the right beneficiaries are availing services provided by them through different schemes. This could be achieved by transparent monitoring system, record keeping in schools, participation of community members and social audit. The Ministry of Education has already prepared guidelines for conducting social audit under Samagra Shiksha scheme.

Third, there should be improvements made to the physical and social environments of the schools. Safe transport, sanitation, menstrual hygiene management, sufficient classrooms, secure accommodation, and gender-friendly school environments could make a difference in the educational career of the girl child. The teachers too should be suitably trained so as to ensure gender-friendly learning environments.

Lastly, the government schemes should link education to empowerment and future prospects. Career counseling, vocational training, computer literacy, life skills development, self-defense, and higher education counseling could help the girl child to appreciate education as a means of economic empowerment and social inclusion. Such an integrative approach would help the government schemes go beyond mere enrollment to achieving educational empowerment.

10. Conclusion

Girl child education is an important aspect of gender equality and social justice as well as national development. The Government of India has adopted various schemes to overcome the economic, social, institutional, and geographic barriers to education of the girl child. The schemes include Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme through which efforts have been made to bring about awareness and change in behavior, Samagra Shiksha Scheme as a framework for equitable schooling, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme as an effort to facilitate access and retention through residential schooling, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana Scheme for financial planning in the long run, and NSIGSE scheme as an effort to promote continuing education at the secondary level.

From the above analysis, it appears that no single intervention can help overcome all barriers to girl child education. A combination of social awareness, good schooling, financial incentives, safe infrastructure, residential education, participation of community, and monitoring are required to make a difference. Ultimately, the success of government schemes depends on more than what they do. It depends on how they are implemented at the local level.

Hence, such programs must be considered significant means of empowering students through education rather than separate welfare schemes. In case of proper implementation and adequate monitoring as well as greater community involvement, such schemes can play a crucial role in helping ensure that every girl in India is given an opportunity to attend school and continue her education up to a certain level.

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