

Gender concern in education

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Education is a lifelong process. Educated people are learned people. They can adopt the essential skills and technique which are very useful for their day to day life. Therefore, in order to make a country developed, each and every member of that country should be educationally competent and efficient. Education is vital to make people empowered socially, economically, politically and culturally. Thus, education is a prerequisite for the acquisition of knowledge, enhancement of skills, development of attitudes and values, etc. As human beings, we need education because it provides us with knowledge and skills to lead a meaningful life. By acknowledging this fact, in India as well as in Assam, various educational systems and policies have been implemented from time to time.

There is a changing trend in focusing on primary, secondary and higher education from the colonial period to the present time. But after independence, India being a democratic country, a good deal of attention and importance was given to all forms of education for promoting the welfare of the citizens of the country. Since that time, there has been a realization of an urgent need to make

education accessible to all the citizens of the country. Keeping this importance and value of education in mind, the Government of India has made education a fundamental right, and thus, it has become a birth right for everyone living in the country.

But unfortunately, the fruits of the opportunity are not equal for all. There is a big gender gap in all stages of education, gender differentiation in terms of educational literacy, a big gender gap in the enrolment of Science and Arts subjects, poor enrolment of girls in higher educational level, etc. If one looks at the reading materials used in the school classrooms, traditional male and female stereotypes have long been a feature. For example, words like actress, heroine, etc., are frequently used in place of actor and hero. Boys are generally expected to read and learn new skills, show initiative and be successful in the stories of the textbooks and the school curriculum. The mothers in the stories are invariably shown as exclusively concerned with domestic activity. The use of generic 'he' and 'his' is still widespread. This may be objected to because of its tendency to marginalize girls or make them less visible. In the pattern of question setting for the examination which is

used for assessment, the gender bias is a serious concern.

The educational publishers today in general are much more sensitive to these matters, not necessarily because of any commitment to equal opportunities, but because in a changing social climate, the buyers of books and other materials, and other local educational authorities do make such formal commitments to equal opportunities and policies. So, it is a long way to go for achieving the equal treatment of the two genders in the textbooks and the curriculum.

Apart from having gender bias in curriculum and self-learning materials, appointment in certain positions in a school and in the school committees has also been a serious matter of concern which exposes rampant gender differences. In some higher positions, such as the principal of a school, the president of a school committee, etc., it is generally the male members and not their female counterparts who are appointed. Experience also tells that women have to stay in the positions of assistants mainly because of the consideration that a man is well-acquainted with sufficient skills and managing capacities compared to those of a woman.

If we look at the literacy rate among the male and the female in India, it seems that the literacy rate among

women has increased far more than among men. Even though the literacy rate among women is still quite a bit lower than among men, it increased from 75.85% to 82.14%, with a rise of 6.29%. In the same frame, the literacy rate among women increased from 54.16% to 65.46%, with a rise of 11.3%. However, till 2011, women were still significantly less likely to be literate than men. In the Census of 2011, the literacy rate of men is 82.14% and of women, it is 65.46% with the gap of 16.68%. Even in terms of the GER, Assam has the lowest numbers of GER, i.e., 8.3% compared to the other states of the North-east, followed by Nagaland (12.6%). Besides these, there are less numbers of girls GER compared to boys in India and other states of the North-east except Meghalaya. In India, the GER for girls is 11.3% which is comparatively less than the boys (16.1%).

There are rampant gender differences in all stages of education though we have the various laws and the constitutional provisions for ensuring the equality of educational opportunity to all. India as a developing country ranks 132nd out of 147 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GII), better only than Afghanistan. This posed a challenge to the country for taking immediate action for bringing the equal opportunities

of education in order to enable the economic mobility in the country.

Education is universally acknowledged to benefit individuals and promote national development. Educating both the female and the male members of a society increases their earnings and expands future opportunities and choices for both boys and girls. However, educating girls produces many additional socio-economic gains that benefit the entire society. These benefits include increased economic productivity, higher family incomes, reduced fertility rates and improved health and survival rates for infants and children. Education is the only way that will help in making a welfare state in the true sense by creating the consciousness among the citizens of the state.

In a democratic country, distributive justice and decentralization of power are to be maintained for all while getting and allocating the rights and opportunities to all the citizens of the state. For a better and welfare society, it is a need to have the inclusive growth where the basic motto is to bring the equal opportunity to all irrespective of any kind of discrimination. Therefore, it is the urgent need to reduce the gender inequality in every stages of education that will help the society to grow at large.