

## **Gender Inequality, Social Exclusion and Educational Policy: A Case Study of Khodha District in Odisha**

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*Women don't avail completely equal status and opportunities compare to male despite ensuring constitutional guarantees and gender insensitive policies. Gender inequality and discrimination is extremely persisted in society irrespective of caste, class, religion and region. Discriminatory policies in general, particularly in education sometimes reinforce gender inequalities in school in terms of unequal access to school education. Empirical results found that not alone the policies and discriminatory attitudes, but the perceptions of parents, community and school in Khordha district of Odisha considered being emergent factor for girl's exclusion in schooling system. Thus, positive attitude and change in perception among teachers, parents and community may bring girl's inclusion in schooling system.*

**[Key Words:** Gender Inequality, Educational Policy, Socio-Cultural Milieu, Attitude of Parents, Community and School]

### **Introduction**

Education of women is an important tool for enhancing the social and economic development of the country. The participation women in all sphere has got prominence and help society developed. The independence and empowerment of women could be achieved if one is better educated (Chanana 2001). Thus, education can shape one's mind through positive attitude and behavior to take right decision. It also helps to participate in the development process (ibid). Promoting education among girl children needs more attention which can be ensured through quality education in terms of better gender friendly infrastructure, trained teacher, and better equipped class room which helps girls to have easily access. It may lead for acquisition of basic literacy and numeric skills among girl children.

Gender equality and equity promotes men and women to participate in the socio-economic development process across variety of sectors. Participation

in development process through political participation might increase the economic productivity and social development. But, education has become first priority presupposed all round development including human development (Sen 2002). Better policy option in education could attract both male and female to access education.

Regardless of class, caste, place or time, the girl child faces severe discrimination from her birth to death and come across various forms of discrimination (Jha 2002). Discrimination against the girl child is increasing day-by-days. Everywhere or in every corner of the world the girl child is facing various problems like discrimination and exclusion (Kelly 2007). Across the country, girls are exclusively excluded from participation in social, economic, educationally and political life. The absence of girls in these arenas has implications not only for the young women themselves but also for society as a whole. Girls' exclusion is most evident in countries that are extremely poor and those where women have been historically marginalized (ibid). In many developing countries like India, the interaction of gender, culture, and poverty underlies female social exclusion (Kumar 2010). Recent estimates indicate that three-fourths of the 60 million girls aged 6–11 who are not in school belong to ethnic, religious, linguistic, racial, or other minorities (Selected Educational Statistics 2005). Girls who belong to these minorities suffer disproportionately relative to their male peers and to girls in the mainstream population. In some instances, obstacles raised by gender, poverty, and ethnicity are compounded by geographic exclusion being hailed from a remote community.

The exclusion of girls by the community, family and school perpetuates poverty at the individual and household levels by denying them access to education, services, and resources (Sahoo and Panda, 2013). Expectations and the experiences of exclusion and discrimination can cause feelings of powerlessness among those left out, which may in turn result in low diminished because mobility is restricted for many girls, the primary requirement for social inclusion is a safe, supportive space where they can interact with peers and mentors.

### **Context of Education Policy**

Policies within education have been formulated in the last ten years have improved the status of women in the lower castes in both urban and rural India, and provided these disadvantaged groups with access to elementary education. The number of schools and the enrolment ratio in India steadily increased over the last five decades, but some of the progress in primary education has been neutralized by population growth (Nirmala Rao et.al. 2003). India presents a very complex educational context where progress made in girl's education in past ten years is quite visible but more needs to be done to realize gender parity in several educational development indicators like literacy, school enrolment, learning outcome, retention, survival and transition to higher educational levels and attain gender equality.

Since education has been an important area of concern in post independent India, a huge amount of human and financial resource are invested in the education sector to promote the growth of education. Since independence, one of the goals has been extending education to all section of population, especially those who have traditionally been disadvantaged, girls' education, particularly on girls among SC community has been a priority in this case. While schemes and policies on promoting access, enrolment and retention of girls in the school are crucial, it is important for us to understand the nature of their experience of exclusion by the gender insensitive policies in school education.

### **Contextualizing the problem**

India is a caste ridden and heterogeneous society, each caste is having its own distinct roles, and functions and even gender roles differ from caste to caste. The tendency of achieving gender equality and inclusion of girls is empathetic and has been a cherished dream among the scheduled castes. Moreover, the perpetuation of gender disparities is strongly visible in the society (Rajgopal 2009). There has been a concern over the perpetuation of gender inequalities in school education. Low sex ratio, low literacy rate and less participation rate among SC girl children are clearly evident over past one decade across the country. The similar situation of Khordha district in Odisha found to be worst.

Other than, exclusion of girls in school education among SC community has been a perennial existing problem in these areas. There are number of drop outs cases found from SC communities and even it is higher among girls. Not only literacy, forces of exclusion from enrolment has intruded every sphere of life whether it be rural or urban, literate or illiterate, poor or rich, caste or class but looking at girls exclusion in elementary education in scheduled cast regions in Odisha have been evident rampant. Henceforth, study seeks to know the behavioral practices and varieties of factors influenced from the school, community and parents has been assumed that these are main obstacles for inclusion of SC girls to access education.

### **Methods and Procedure**

The paper has been based on empirical work conducted at Khordha district of Odisha through qualitative methods and design. It intended to analyze the educational, social, cultural perspectives on exclusion among SC girl students. The in-depth investigation needed in this case necessitates a case-study approach. The case-study was carried out in two traditional SC communities in two different villages in Khordha district of Odisha, The simple random sampling methods was followed for selection of 30 SC households and 4 community opinion leaders out of two villages and 10 teachers in two schools. The tools for data collection were through primary sources like interview schedule, focused group discussion, participant observation and secondary sources like research papers, journals, periodicals and reports.

### **Enrolment and Social Exclusion of girls**

Even when national economies grow, excluded groups are left behind. Social isolation and relative economic deprivation are associated with severe mental health, especially among females, and can further reduce the ability of excluded individuals to be productive members of society. As the gap between the poor and non-poor increases, poverty becomes deeper and more intractable in Odisha.

The exclusion of girls has consequences not only at the national level but also state level. In Odisha, the enrollment of SC was 25.3 per cent at primary level, 9.1 per cent at elementary level and 5.6 per cent at secondary level where as Girls enrolment was 46.17 per cent and elementary level and 48.17 per cent at primary level out of total SC enrolment in Odisha (DISE 2005-06). It is the state having ranked 28th position in providing bad infrastructure and 34<sup>th</sup> position in Teacher Index Rank and only 32.54 per cent schools have toilets facility for girls.

Similarly, marginalized group of this district have limited access to education in especially elementary level. Members in these groups are highly affected with poverty and rural location where more than 16 per cent live in rural areas. The incidence of girl's exclusion brings a huge challenge. Now, researchers and experts opined that the tendencies of exclusion of girls is an antidote or and inclusion an effective preventive to the existing educational, social and economic problems of the world societies (Marjorie 1990). There is a high level of dropouts in primary education and it is more miserable in higher education also. Secondary data reveals that the dropout rate of female SC is higher than the SC males.

Education of girls in India, particularly in rural areas is one of the major concerns of the educationalists, administrators and policy makers. Out of the total children who are not attending the schools, two-third of them is girls. Hence, it is considered that there is a need to visualize the status of education of girls at elementary level. Government of India is committed to accelerating the education of girls especially the ones belonging to SC/STs and rural areas. Despite this, much need to be done to improve the educational status of girl children particularly in rural India. During 2002-03, the enrolment of girls at primary level was 38.09 million, at upper primary level 24.31 million, and at secondary/higher secondary level it was 28.59 million. At all levels, enrolment status of girl children is lower than that of boys and this difference goes on increasing as we move towards higher level. Though participation of girls at all stages of education has been increasing steadily since 1951 to 2003 (primary level from 28.1 per cent to 46.8 per cent, middle level from 16.1 per cent to 43.9 per cent and secondary/higher secondary level from 13.3 per cent to 41.3 per cent) yet the girls' participation is still below 50 per cent at all stages of education (Census 2001). It is also reported that dropout rates among girls are at higher side than that of their boy counterparts. Hence the issue of inequality addressed with special efforts on an urgent basis. Khordha district, as the coastal

district of Odisha, performed better in achieving in literacy. But still SC girls are out from elementary school since it has been affected due to different attitudes and tendencies by schools, family and community members.

### **Educational Policy and Enrolment of girl**

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) is a significant programme to achieve Universal Elementary Education (UEE) by bridging the social and gender gap in schooling education system in India. In view of accessing education being a fundamental right of all the children in the age group of 06-14 years as per the Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, UEE emerged as leading schemes by Govt. of India. Different strategies were pursued to universalize primary education (UPE) and bridge the gender gap, availability of schooling in close proximity to residences, participatory school mapping, emphasizing the female teacher's recruitment, gender sensitivity curriculum and school infrastructure i.e. girls' toilet, hostel etc through the different schemes. Right to Education, enacted in 2009 took a major step in recent past to bridge the gender gap.

Odisha government similarly followed and implemented significant measures and schemes like SSA, NPEGEL and KGBV to reap better results towards achieving gender equality. The high priority given to primary education, decentralizing educational policy-making and implementation, and awareness about the education have contributed the current state of primary education in Odisha. In order to spread the education among the backward sections of the society, the ST & SC Department has taken a number of special measures including establishment of schools both in the scheduled and non-scheduled areas, provision of scholarships to meritorious students, and supply of books, reading, writing materials, and uniforms. From the Census report it is apparent that Odisha government attained nearly 95 per cent enrollment both in primary and upper primary education particularly in Khordha district. Though this district attained nearly 100 per cent gross enrollment in primary and upper primary education but its adult literacy is very low and it is the average performing state in adult literacy with 68.20 per cent whereas the overall literacy rate of Odisha is 73.45 per cent (2011 census). Beyond implementation of several policies there exist socio-cultural ties and bias which makes the selected areas in the status of average performing district in SC female literacy in Odisha. So that the wider gap found exist between male and female education in Khordha district. To ensure cent per cent net enrollment of girls in the district, it has been an attempt and imperative to identify gaps persisting at institutional level, to raise awareness about the gender gaps, implement fruitful laws, developing strategies to minimize the flaws by putting adequate resources and necessary knowledge and lastly, proper monitoring gain advantage to be required for review the policy process.

### **Educational Performance**

Basic infrastructure, particularly for encouraging girls children in scheduled areas are required to ensure greater participation, minimal dropout, and accessing schools. To measure the educational performance, paper seeks to

examine one of the low performing districts i.e. Nabarangpur and average performing districts i.e. Khordha in state of Odisha to compare and contrast in terms of girl's participation in school education.

**Table-1 Performance Indicators of Khordha District in Odisha**

Indicators	Nabarangpur		Khordha	
	Primary	P + UP	Primary	P + UP
Enrolment in Govt. Schools	99.0	98.6	93.4	92.3
Enrolment in Single Teacher Schools	18.8	1.3	6.8	1.8
No Female Teacher Schools	48.8	46.8	20.2	14.1
Govt. Schools with Kitchen shed	53.5	74.8	20.1	28.7
ST Enrolment	61.7	51.8	7.7	5.4
ST Girls to ST enrolment	50.3	45.9	50.3	38.9
SC Enrolment	15.8	22.4	17.4	14.3
SC Girls to SC Enrolment	49.8	49.5	50.0	48.6
Girls Enrolment	49.3	48.6	49.4	49.5
Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)	33	43	29	39
Student Class Room ratio (SCR)	29	37	28	36
Schools with <= 50 Students	36.0	2.0	36.1	1.3
Female Teachers	24.3	28.4	58.1	56.2
Single Classroom Schools	8.0	3.6	7.3	1.3
Single Teacher Schools	22.2	2.5	11.2	1.7
Schools with Common Toilets	95.9	59.3	94.7	90.8
Schools with Girls Toilets	11.8	71.4	92.4	94.2
Schools with Drinking Water Facility	87.8	97.5	94.9	98.5

Source: District Information System for Education (DISE), 2009-10 N.B. The value given in the table can be read as per cent except PTR and SCR

Enrolment in government schools of Nabarangpur and Khordha shows a negligible difference particularly at the primary and upper primary level (See table-1). Enrolment in single teacher schools at upper primary level is considerably low in both the districts. Not much difference is observed in the enrolment of girls in both the districts. Per centage of SC/ST girls' enrollment at primary and upper primary level both at Khordha and Nabarangpur shows no much variation. Per centage of female teachers enrolled in primary and upper

primary schools of Khordha is relatively high. This data also supports the fact that female teachers' presence enhances the enrollment.

Enrollment rate between Nabarangpur and Khordha in single classroom schools with primary and primary with upper primary schools shows negligible difference. Similarly not much difference is observed in per centage of schools with common toilets in both districts. Whereas, in Nabarangpur, per centage of schools with girls toilets at primary level is 11.8 per cent which is considerably low when compared to Khordha. The infrastructure of government schools was provided under SSA which is clearly visible and the school infrastructure has a great impact on gender to access and participate in school education.

### **Gender Disparities and Social Exclusion**

The 83<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment recognizes education as a fundamental right of all Indian citizens, but disparities continue to be seen among various castes even after 65 years of independent India (Sahoo 2009). The scheduled castes, previously referred to as the *untouchables*, are consistently fare poorer across various indicators related to primary education. This section analyses the extent of social exclusion of scheduled caste girl children in primary education in India and argues for a comprehensive policy response which addresses the various barriers to accessing education of this disadvantaged group.

India now has a half century's experiences in dealing with sharp inequalities and disparities rooted in socio-cultural milieu. The history of human kind can be viewed as a history of unequal relations between its two halves, man and women. The two sexes have never shared the world in equality and even today where women are handicapped (Shukla 1968). Division of labour and ascription of social status in relation to sex seen as basic to all societies and gender discrimination is more ancient and wide spread than any forms of social differentiation (Holter 1970). Rural societies ascribe different attitudes and activities to men and women. Though different attitude and culture is always changing, most cultural behavior patterns for example gender roles of their members show a considerable degree of persistence and continuity over long periods. Thus, the attitude and perception impinges upon the disparities among the rural community, where girls, particular belong to SC community get deprived to basic education.

There are many evidences that right since birth, even if before also the girl child receives different unequal and discriminatory treatment compared to the male children. This is happening in most sectors of their needs physical, social cultural and psychological. Access to food, health care, school education other household asset, allocation of domestic chores, participation in community or neighborhood activities etc. reflects serious gender based differences or inequalities.

### **Social Exclusion of Girls-Family, School and Community**

To understand the process of social exclusion of girls through personal discussion and shared experiences at the village level, it was seen that family,

school and community plays important role in socio-cultural set up where a female child grows and gain the adultery. Family is the basic unit of patriarchal society, where women have a subordinate status and are considered to be inferior. Being a social agent, family transmits the patriarchal values and promotes hierarchy, subordination, discrimination. Boys learn to assert and girls to submit to accept unequal treatment. The lives of girl's and women continue to be controlled by the patriarchal belief system and structures. The process of gender discrimination begins even before birth continues throughout the life of a female. Besides women and girls do more work than males but get much less attention than their legitimate share in food, health, education and training. The traditional socialization practices of a society with marked son preferences are highly discriminatory. Not only have they short changed the girl child on food, health care education and play but have also succeeded in making her believe that she is inferior and less competent than her male counterparts. Therefore, girl's access to school is denied by family and community. Gender disparity covers every sphere of our life most severely in terms of health care, sex ratio, literacy level etc. Gender inequality exists in every country but varies in its degree (Subrahmanian 2005).

School and schooling factors itself is found a hindrance for pushing the girls as evident in Khordha district, that schools established in the SC areas have also open access to all students irrespective of caste, class, gender and region, but it fails to provide gendered favour facilities like girls toilet, female teacher and gender sensitive training materials. Teachers some time do share the ideas instructed to work upon based on gender roles which creates discrimination among (Leach 1996). Lack of attention by teacher and peer members towards female in classroom creates embarrassment. School infrastructure then becomes hurdle for attracting girl's education.

Community feelings, sense of belongingness and togetherness are the common denotes among village community. Schedule caste people in Khordha district are found to live with strong community feelings. It was evident that the decision taken at village level by the community is final. Due to feelings of 'untouchability', students from other community have always conflict with SC male and female students, but female are more sufferer compare to male counterparts. The situation is abysmal in case of girls going to school at intermediate level. It is evident that number of cases like gender based comments, abuse, rape has been common and rampant by the community with school going SC girl's in the study area (M.S 1986) and it leads to poor performance in the class room even after participation. Community sensitization on gender issues demand attention moreover in this context. Lastly, not only community, awareness of parents on importance of girl's education is much essential. Similarly, teacher's attitude on gender bias could be meted out through sensitized training.

## Conclusion

Social exclusion of girls is the biggest challenge in Odisha as well in India facing today. It has become a significant social phenomenon which transcends all barriers of caste, class and community. A very strong bias is entrenched in the cultural heritage of Indian society. Discrimination among girls is carried out at the household level with households engaging in a variety of practices that reduce girls' educational status and wellbeing.

The social exclusion of girls perpetuates poverty at individual and household levels by denying them access to education, services, and resources as evident from Khordha district. Expectation and actual experiences of exclusion and discrimination can cause feeling of powerlessness among the girls, which may result in low self esteem and diminished aspiration for future.

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