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Reimagining the Girl Child in Education: Parents Collaboration and School Management Committees in India

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ABSTRACT

The Indian educational system as developed by the colonial state continues to shape educational ideologies. The nationalist imaginations, almost exclusively led by men, followed ideas inspired by western ideologies. They saw emancipation in teaching/learning the English curriculum. However, when India developed its education policies the state focused on the education of the girl child. Keeping in mind the colonial impact of education and the policies emerging thereafter Indian independence, this paper provides an assessment of this current situation in theorizing gender in school education. The paper also focus on feminist theorization in relation to the School Management Committee (SMC) to fill the gap in representing gender and giving voice to the Indian girl child.

Keywords: Education, Girl Child, Gender, Feminist Framework.

I. INTRODUCTION

At a lecture at Manipur University, I had a chance to meet some parents of school-going residing at Imphal, Northeast India. After listening to their experiences about schools within the capital, the ideas of this paper came to light. Most importantly, for the argument in this paper, I was beginning to understand how relevant theorizing gender is to better understand school structures in Manipur. As a woman, my standpoint and my gendered location allow me to smoothly conduct a gender analysis into my research writing. My experiences and understanding is farmed by my co-author, who — with his knowledge in feminist studies — helped me frame and theorize my writings.

Going back to a brief history of education in India, the education of girls sits in contradiction to the traditional stereotypical role of women in a patriarchal society. Educational practices could often always be seen as pulling women away from the domestic. One central starting premise of this study arose from a lack of literature, also practical experiences, with feminist

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theorization of schools in India. Here, the effective and active feminist analyst is a pre-requirement for improving school conditions. While establishing gender equality in every government-funded schools have been mandated by governmental bodies, investigations within and among the schools are a necessity. This is because – and as previous research has already shown — feminist analysis in education is functionally connected with school development. However, various challenges have come to the fore in the inability of the *girl child* to participate in schools.

Listening to experiences around School Management Committee (SMC) in India also led me to write this paper. While the guidelines of establishing SMC in every government-funded schools have been mandated by the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act 2019), zooming in on the parents' participation within and among the SMC's are a necessity. This is because – and as previous research has already shown -- parental involvement is functionally connected with students learning outcomes and school development. Importantly, they remain a powerful voice for the *girl child*.

RTE Act 2009 defines the term 'parent' as either the natural/step/adoptive father/mother of a child. The RTE Act 2009 -- in Chapter 4, 'Responsibilities of Schools and Teachers', Section 21 – does not merely see 'parent' as inactive elected representatives of SMCs. It positively lays down the guideline that three-fourth (75%) of SMC members should be parents. Here the guideline ensures proportionate representation within parents', whether belonging to a disadvantage group or a weaker section. The RTE Act 2009 encourages active parental involvement. To further unpack the involvement of the parents, the functionally is categorically seen as decision-makers. Importantly, parents' involvement as decisions makers can potentially and effectively highlight the processes of transparency, accountability and citizen engagement in the working of the school, utilization of grants and recommendation of School Development Plan (SDM). Furthermore, parental involvement as decision-makers can make teachers more accountable for education delivery, thus affecting the learning outcomes of the *girl child*.

However, various challenges have come to the fore in the inability of parents to participate in SMCs. Other research studies have also shown the lack of awareness and information among parents with regards to SMC, lack of participation of women, etc. For example, it has been observed that meetings of the SMC are often not held, or held without sufficient representation, or with no influence on the matters of the school (RTE 2019). Parents actively participate in school governance does not trickle down to ground realities. By centralising parents as key elected representatives of the SMC's and as local school stakeholders – through survey,

interviews and observations – parents participation as decision-makers for the *girl child* is examined.

In various developing countries, the management of schools committees consists of teachers, parents, and community members (Mbiti 2016). In our lived context, the need for accountability in management systems of schools has been examined by Indian educationists; the research finds the predictable: that parent's involvement improves accountability (Mbiti 2016). Here, one key aspect in improving SMC's -- making it more accountable for education delivery -- must be active parent involvement. While it is the case that parents (as our primary research object in our fieldwork) may have limited avenues, our key entry point is that parents can utilize their voices -- experiences, grievances, struggles, narratives of their child's aspirations -- in creating dialogues with teachers. The result of this engagement would mean that their voices could help teachers be more accountable for educational delivery, overall affecting learning outcomes and academic performance of the student.

Parent's collaboration within the SMC's is fundamental for them to raise their concern, highlighting problems through their voice, regardless of their (or their child's) class, caste, sexual orientation and gender identity. Parental involvement through dialogue and conversations remains essential for brining marginal problems to the centre. Here, a key aspect of effective communication is vulnerability. For the parents' voices to be heard, they have to be encouraged and supported to speak honestly and authentically about their concerns.

In assembling my primary ideas, experiential voices through questioners, survey, focus interviews and participations remains the focal starting point. In employing this methodology we understand existing gaps and perceived basis. In other words, there will always be a struggle to translate parents' experiences and frame them into understandable action-oriented results. So on the one hand; we acknowledge the limitations of taking experiential interviews as a category of analysis in our data collection. But on the other hand, we hold on tight to the knowledge that parents' experiential voices as a site of inquiring open up: multiple frameworks including new data and findings which further enhances the exploration of SMC's and their internal workings. Employing fieldwork and data survey, this section will highlight how parental involvement in SMC's could actualize accountability for education delivery for the *girl child*.

The study signpost parents as a central stakeholder in school management. The parents' voices, along with the school management and staffs are collectively responsible for the *girl child* performance and learning outcomes. Furthermore, parents' involvement will encourage the

teachers to work together. The elaboration on the parents' involvement will reveal important relational information about the *girl child's* concerns, and the variations of students' academic performance/learning outcomes within and among schools.

II. GENDER FRAMEWORK AND THE GIRL CHILD

In this trajectory, one can rethink parental attitudes towards girls education. Here the educational background of the parents, ranging from their occupation, culture and religion come into play. Many studies in the past, in the discourse of education, have studied the figure of the girl child as a statistical figure. While one can frame 'girls education' in the manner of human rights and as a compulsion, the representation of the *girl child* only as a figure in statistics is not enough. Here a systemic gender theorization should be put into place for studying the effects and patterns of the *girl child* in the discourse of education.

III. CONCLUSION

In India, because of a strong patriarchal culture, elements of sexism are always the undertones in studying the *girl child*. Hence it is still difficult for the *girl child* to cross boundaries of pre-written discourse of gender and education. The Indian *girl child* is still absent as an emotional category in the education discourse. A lot needs to be done in terms of incorporation the *girl child* taking into serious account her dreams and aspiration. Special opportunities for the *girl child* to meet the changing gender stereotype needs to be implemented within a global outlook. The needs and interests of the *girl child* needs to be foregrounded in our theorizations of gender and education.

In conclusion, the interaction between the parents participation in SMCs, speaking *for* the *girl child* is an important step. However, the *girl child* needs to be re-imagined, not simply as a figure to add to national statics record, but as a human with specific needs and aspirations. We need, as educators, to learn how to speak *with* the *girl child* rather than *for* her.

IV. REFERENCE

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