

Educate and empower: Because when you educate a girl, you educate a nation

It is said when you educate a girl child, you educate an entire family. Let us all work together for the educational empowerment of all our girls and work towards making a New India.



As Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said on the launch of the expanded Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (March 8, 2018): 'Daughters are not a burden but the pride of the whole family.'

Since times immemorial, women in India have been regarded with the utmost respect and accorded prestige. For a nation to progress, it is essential to empower women. I am glad that India has been blessed with women pioneers who have broken the shackles of gender stereotypes in every field.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on the launch of the expanded Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (March 8, 2018): "Daughters are not a burden but the pride of the whole family. We realise the power of our daughters when we see a woman fighter pilot. The country feels proud whenever our daughters bag gold medals, or for that matter any medal, in the Olympics."

As a father of three daughters, I understand the struggle our daughters face in fighting gender stereotypes and biases. But with their determination they are able to sail on the ship of success. I feel proud to cheer my daughters' triumphs towards equality. Arushi, my eldest daughter, has defied all odds and is now an Indian classical dancer, entrepreneur and film producer. I couldn't have been more proud when Shreyasi continued the military tradition of Uttarakhand and joined the Army Medical Corps. Vidushi, the youngest of the three, wants to bring a change in society and is a gold medalist in law.

Allied to the march towards equality with our sisters and daughters of the country, let us understand the theme of

Women's Day: "I am Generation Equality: Realising Women's Rights." The year 2020 has been earmarked as a crucial year by UN Women to assess progress made globally to achieve gender equality and human rights for all women and girls since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action.

On this occasion, it is important for me to reflect on how successful the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) under the leadership of PM Modi has been in providing equal opportunities. It is heartening that due to the Swachh Bharat Mission, 14,67,679 schools now have a functioning girls toilet, an increase of 4.17 percentage points in comparison to 2013-14. The impact of the mission has resulted in an increase in enrolment of girls by 25 percentage points in 2018-19 from 2013-14.

In her budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman applauded the results of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao: "Gross enrolment ratio of girls across all levels of education is now higher than boys. At the elementary level it is 94.32 per cent as against 89.28 per cent for boys, at the secondary level it is 81.32 per cent as compared to 78 per cent and at the higher secondary level girls have achieved a level of 59.7 per cent compared to only 57.54 per cent."

To increase equality of access and opportunity for girls, the MHRD has sanctioned 5,930 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, which are residential schools for girls and have an enrolment of 6.18 lakh girls. An incentive amount of Rs 8.56 crore to the 28,547 beneficiaries has been sanctioned under the National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education. The scheme provides Rs 3,000 which is deposited in the name of eligible unmarried girls below 16 years of age and entitles them to withdraw it along with interest on reaching 18 years of age and after passing Class X.

Apart from an increase in the gross enrollment rate of the girl child in schools, the educational outcomes and achievements have also improved. I must also express my happiness and pride that girls have performed better than boys in the CBSE Class XII examinations in 2018-19.

To increase the participation of women in STEM education, supernumerary seats have been created in the IITs and NITs. As a result, the number of girls in NITs has

grown from 14.11 per cent in 2017-18 to 17.53 per cent in 2019-20 and in IITs from 8 per cent of the total student body in 2016 to 18 per cent in 2019-20 for B.Tech programmes.

In conjunction with the celebration of progress obtained by India in improving gender equality in the education system, there is a need for a much larger collective effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of eliminating “gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations”.

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This article first appeared in the print edition on March 4, 2020 under the title ‘Educate and empower’. The writer is Union minister of Human Resource Development.