

DNA

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Empowering girl child will remove social prejudices

In the last 20 years, about 10 million girls have been killed by their parents either before or after they were born in India. Average death rate for girls under the age of one average death rate for girls under the age of one was 72 per 1000 compared to 55 per 1000 among boys. The likelihood of girls being fully vaccinated is 5% points lower than that of boys and girls are 1.7% less likely to die in a hospital than their brother. If the girl survives the first few years of neglect, she has to cope with continuous less food right through her growing years.

With such a grim scenario surrounding the girl child, it is no surprise that the proportion of girls who are able to attend school in India continues to remain low in comparison to that of boys of their age. Approximately, 70% of girls between the age of 6 and 10 attend school compared to 76% among boys. In the upper primary classes, it drops to 40% and future still in the secondary levels. Clearly, it is not considered important to have girls going to school and, therefore, it is a surprise that 54% female are literate compared to 76% of males. But that will lead to another debate on what our individual definition of literacy is.

In the last few years, the government has brought in free education for the single girl child thereby discouraging multiple child birth in search of the face-saving boy. There are schemes which give 50% free education to families with two girls and scholarships for their higher education. These schemes can help in changing the mind-set of the families but this can only happen if these schemes are well understood and explained to the people concerned.

I find many of these government schemes are well thought though, contrary to popular belief, but they fail miserably in execution. There is very little clarity of the policies among the grass root-levels executors. By the time it filters down, much of the intent and vision of the idea is lost.

When we started Parikrma Humanity Foundation, an NGO that runs four schools and one junior college for under-served children, we did not admit any boy in our school, we now have 550 girls of all age groups coming to our schools. Some girls will pass out of PUC this year and they will be the first in their families to ever go to school.

We tell them the future of the other girls in their community lie in their hands. They will have to change the expectations that people have had from girls through generations. They can do it by becoming economically independent individuals with an open mind to change. Economic empowerment is the key to change. India loses \$56 million (approximately Rs2, 565 billion) a year in potential earnings because of girls dropping out of schools. The minute we empower girls to earn more or equal to men, social prejudices will disappear.

-The writer is founder CEO of
Parikrma Humanity Foundation