SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal

ISSUES & CHALLENGES OF GIRLS' EDUCATION IN 21ST CENTURY INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

Anisha Sinha
Student, University of Kalyani, Kalyani, Nadia, West Bengal, 741235

ABSTRACT
Modern India is rapidly emerging as a global power; however, a significant portion of its population, especially girls, continues to struggle for a life of dignity. Educating girls is one of the most valuable investments for families, communities, and the nation as a whole. It is widely recognized that girls' education can initiate a positive cycle of social and economic development. Over the past 20–25 years, notable progress has been made in promoting girls' education in India as well as globally. Despite these advancements, research indicates that certain regions still lack access to quality education for girls. In India, gender-based discrimination persists, and girls, regardless of their class, caste, or educational background, often face insecurity in society. Historically, they have been subjected to various forms of exploitation—social, psychological, physical, and economic. While many instances of sexual and moral abuse are reported in the media, numerous cases remain hidden and unaddressed. Inequality and vulnerability among girls continue across multiple sectors, including education, healthcare, nutrition, legal rights, and social status. Girls frequently become victims of crimes such as rape, kidnapping, sexual harassment, eve-teasing, and domestic violence. Due to fear of social stigma, humiliation, and retaliation, many victims choose not to report such incidents. Empowering women is important for building a strong and progressive nation. Education plays a crucial role in this process, as it equips them to face challenges, question traditional roles, and transform their lives. Therefore, the importance of education in achieving girls' empowerment cannot be overlooked. Girls' education and empowerment are deeply interconnected, with education acting as a key driver of prosperity, development, and overall well-being. This paper attempts to examine the current status of girls' education in India by highlighting the major issues and challenges related to empowerment. It concludes that, despite various government initiatives, girls in India continue to remain relatively disadvantaged and hold a lower social status compared to boys.

KEY WORDS: *Girls' Education, Empowerment, Issues & Challenges.*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Mukhtar et al. (2011), the concept of a 'girl-child' used to describe a female individual who falls within the age range of 6 to 18 years. Offorma (2009) defines it as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. Girl-child education has then become a major issue of concern in most developing countries of the world today, and India is one of them. Education is considered as potent instrument through which processes modernization and social change come to existence. In the past centuries girls were not treated equal to boys in many ways. They were not allowed to own property, they did not have a Share in the property of their parents, they had no voting rights, and they had no freedom to choose their work or job and so on.

Through education we promote values and good habits and awareness towards corruption. Education helps to continue communication with known and unknown persons through technology and mass media. Education gives strength to the person. Through education we inculcate values in the students and readers. Girl's education in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated girls can play a very important role in the development of the country. India is poised to emerge as one of the most developed nations by 2020, more literate, knowledgeable and economically at the forefront. In India this is yet to meet the requirements despite reforms. Little has been achieved in the area of girls' empowerment, but for this to happen, this sector must experience a chain of reforms.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There was a time when people thought that it was not necessary to educate girls. Now we have begun to realize that girls' education is essential. They are trying to compete with men in all sphere of life. There are many people who oppose girl's education. So, they argue that the money spent on girl's education is wasted. This view is wrong, because girl's education can bring about a silent resolution in the society. Low enrolment of the girls in school is widening the educational and economic gap between the men and the women folks in India. Addressing the problems and challenges of girls education in India has become necessary in view of not only the ignorance of rural dwellers on the importance of education, but also the dehumanizing practice of keeping the girl-child out of school.

SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To identify the major problems of girl-child education in schools.
- To know the needs and importance of girls education in 21st century India.
- To study the initiatives undertaken by the Govt. of India for empowering girls.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on status of girl's education and its remedial measures by keeping in mind the research objective of the study, historical method has been chosen to collect the data. Hence the researcher studied different books, journals and census reports of India to collect relevant documents for the study.

5. BARRIERS AND PROBLEMS OF GIRLS EDUCATION

Despite notable individual successes and gradual improvements in their overall status, many girls and women in India continue to belong to a significantly underprivileged section of society. They face distinctive problems that call for special attention. The Backward Classes Commission set up by the Government of India in 1953 classified women of India as a backward group requiring special attention.

- The differences between the positions of men and women in the society will not lessen; leave alone disappear, as long as there are differences between the education levels of boys and girls. The low literacy among girls and women brings down the national literacy. This gap which exists between the literacy rates of the two sexes also exists between the enrolment of girls and boys at all levels of education. Right from the primary school to the university, we find that the number of girl students is considerably lower than boys. According to Article 45 of the Constitution, universal compulsory and free education until the age of 14 was to be achieved by the year 1960. Looking at the present condition of primary education in villages, it is doubtful whether we can achieve 100% enrolment of girls.
- It is unfortunately true of our society that children are sent to school not according to their intelligence or aptitude but according to their sex. The reasons for not sending girls to school are both economic and social. In rural areas, girls are required to help in household work.
- Resources of the rural poor are so limited that they do not have anything to spare for children's education. If resources are available, it is the boy who is sent to school first. Since they cannot see any direct relationship between education and economic betterment, they have very little motivation to send their children to school..

5.1 Some reasons why girls are pulled out of school

The first reason why girls are pulled out of school is because of family responsibilities. Girls provide free labor at home for the family. Home is also where they learn to be a better housewife. Many girls are kept at home because it is a better payoff than going to school.

The second reason why girls are kept from receiving a primary education is because they are pulled out early to protect family honor**.** This also can affect the dowry when the girl is married. If the dowry cannot be paid, the bride runs the risk of being ruined, or worse, being killed**.**

The third reason for inequality during primary education is because girls can't attend school due to inadequate facilities**.** Schools are unable to provide safe and sanitary facilities for young girls to attend, and with the population increasing at a rapid speed the priority for new facilities is given to boys.

The fourth reason is the shortage of female teachers, which discourages girls from attending school**.** The problem can be solved, but it starts with first educating girls so they can aspire to be teachers. The government, however, does not see this as a problem and continues to deny that there is gender inequality within the education sector.
In addition, some relevant challenges of girl's education in India are:

- Child marriage.
- Negative Parental attitudes.
- Lack of proper social attitude.
- Economic backwardness.
- Lack of separate sanitary Facilities. Etc.

6. PRESENT POSITION OF GIRLS EDUCATION IN INDIA

`In spite of the forceful intervention by a bastion of female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programs over the last 70 years and above. The United Nation's enormous pressure with regard to the uplift of the plight of girls and women in terms education is still in the state

SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal

of an enigma in India for several reasons. As per 2011 census, the literacy rate among women in India was 65.46%, which falls notably short of the national average of 74.04%, indicating a persistent gender gap in education. The growth of girls and women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, the weak, backward and exploited. Moreover education is also not available to all equally. Gender inequality is reinforced in education which is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 65.46% against 82.14% of men as per 2011 Census.

Annual Average Dropout rate of Girls in school education level in 2024-2025

Table - 1

Primary (I-V)	Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	Secondary (IX-XII)
3.5%	5.2%	8.2%

Source: DISE and U-DISE data, 2024-2025

The data presented in Table 1 reveals a concerning upward trend in the dropout rates of girls as they progress through different stages of education. While the dropout rate at the Primary level is relatively low at 3.5%, it nearly doubles to 8.2% by the Secondary level (IX-XII).

This indicates that the transition from middle school to high school is the most vulnerable period for female students. The increasing percentages suggest that as girls grow older, external factors—such as socioeconomic pressures, household responsibilities, or lack of accessible higher education—begin to outweigh their academic journey. To achieve the goals of universal education, it is clear that targeted interventions are most urgently needed at the Secondary level to ensure that girls not only enroll in school but also successfully complete their higher education.

The rate of school drop outs is also found to be comparatively higher in case of girls. This higher rate of illiteracy of girls is undoubtedly attributing for women dependence on men and to play a subordinate role. Only literacy can help girls to understand the Indian's constitutional and legislative provisions that are made to strengthen them.

7. IMPORTANCE OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

There are several advantages of girls' education. Grown up educated girls can play an important role in the development of any country.

- They can share the burden of men in the different walk of life. When girls are well-educated, not forced to marry during childhood, they will be able serve the society as writers, educators, teachers, lawyers, doctors, administrators, politicians, scientists, and much more. They can work at banks, hospitals, government offices and large businesses. They can play an important role during war.
- Education is a boon to girls in this age of economic crisis. Gone are the days of plenty and prosperity. Now-a-days it is difficult for the people of the middle class to make both ends meet. After marriage, educated girls can add to the income of their husbands. If a woman is educated, she can earn a living after the death of her husband.
- Girls' education is necessary for making the homes a happy place. A man's life blossom he is blessed with well-educated women as wife and mother. Educated girls can brighten the future of their country by the good upbringing of their children. Education gives a woman freedom of thought. It broadens her outlook and makes her aware of her duties and responsibilities.
- Educations empower a grown up girl to become economically independent. They will be able to stand up for their rights. Girls have all the rights to get educated. Empowerment of girls and women is necessary to fight against the problem of gender-inequality.
- Education of rural girls is equally important. The rural girls are not getting ample opportunity for education. Education of these girls would have positive impact on both economy and society.

8. STEPS UNDERTAKEN IN INDIA FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

- **Constitutional Foundations of Gender Justice**

The architects of the Indian Constitution were acutely cognizant of the historical and social marginalization of women. To address this, they integrated the Principle of Gender Equality as a core value within the Preamble, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles of State Policy. Beyond providing a legal guarantee of equality, the Constitution empowers the State to implement "Positive Discrimination" measures. This allows for specific legal and social provisions designed to uplift girls and women, ensuring they are not just equal in theory but also in practice.

- **Historical Trajectory and Economic Initiatives**

The movement for women's empowerment gained substantial momentum under the leadership of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, notably with the launch of the Indira Mahila Yojana. During this era, global influence also played a role as the UNDP prioritized

SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal

women's upliftment as a core development objective. Subsequently, several economic interventions were introduced to foster self-reliance, such as:

- ✓ Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK): To provide micro-finance facilities.
- ✓ Mahila Samridhi Yojana: To encourage financial independence and savings.
- ✓ Self-Help Groups (SHGs): Empowering women at the grassroots (Panchayat) level through community mobilization.

- **Institutional Mechanisms and the 2001 National Policy**

A pivotal juncture in India's journey was the establishment of the National and State Commissions for Women, which created a dedicated institutional platform for safeguarding women's rights. This was further strengthened by the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001). This landmark policy aimed at:

- ✓ **Holistic Development:** Creating an environment where women can realize their full potential through inclusive social and economic policies.
- ✓ **Equitable Access:** Ensuring women have equal opportunities in healthcare, quality education, and participation in the nation's political and economic decision-making processes.
- ✓ **Legal Reform**: Strengthening the judicial framework to eradicate gender-based discrimination and fostering strong partnerships with Civil Society and women's organizations**.**

- **Current Educational Status: A Critical Reflection (2024-25)**

While policy frameworks have been robust, the real-world impact is visible through current educational retention data. According to the DISE and UDISE data (2024-2025), there is a clear correlation between empowerment policies and school retention, although challenges remain at higher levels.

9. SUGGESTIONS

Many people say that girls should not go in for degrees. They are wrong, because girls have already proved their worth in all walks of life. There is no reason why girls should not get the same kind of education as men. But they should not neglect their duties at the home. So, girls must have knowledge of domestic science and child psychology.

Suggestions for improving access to girls' education in India:

- Helping girls to overcome health barriers
- Making schools affordable for girls
- Improving school quality
- Increasing community engagement
- Reducing the time and distance to get to school.

10. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE GIRLS EDUCATION IN INDIA

To bridge the gender gap in literacy and ensure inclusive growth, the government of India has launched several landmark initiatives. These schemes focus on financial support, infrastructural development, and social mindset changes;

- Beti bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)
- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)
- Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY)
- Single Girl Child Merit Scholarship (CBSE)
- Pragati Scholarship Scheme
- Digital India & DIKSHA
- National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)
- Mission Shakti
- PM SHRI Schools
- Vigyan Jyoti Scheme
- NIPUN Bharat Scheme
- Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF)

11. CONCLUSION

According to reports published by the Government of India, girl's education is considered one of the most effective means of bringing about social transformation. It plays a crucial role in reducing inequalities and enhancing the position of girls and women within both the family and society. In an effort to promote female education and minimize gender disparities in access to knowledge, the government has established a wide network of schools, colleges, and universities, including institutions exclusively for women. To ensure greater participation of girls particularly those from economically weaker and marginalized backgrounds (BPL families)-various support measures have been introduced. These include the provision of free textbooks, uniforms, scholarships, residential facilities, mid-day

SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal

meals, and other incentives. Such governmental efforts play a significant role in expanding educational opportunities for girls across the country. These programmes have contributed positively to improving female education in India. Since the development of a nation is closely linked to the education and empowerment of its girls, it is essential to continue encouraging and strengthening girls' education.

REFERENCES

1. *Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (2000): Human Development in South Asia 2000: The Gender Question, Oxford University Press, Oxford.*
2. *Mahanta, A. (ed.) (2011): Human Rights and Women of North East India, Centre for Women's Studies, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh.*
3. *Parasar, S. (2004): "A Multidimensional Approach to Women's Empowerment and its Links to the Nutritional Status and Immunization of Children in India".*
4. *G.O.I. (2011): Census Report, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, New Delhi*
5. *IFUW (2001): "Empowering Women", http://www.ifuw.org/saap2017/ empowerment.htm. Visited on 20th September 2018 at 10 a.m.*
6. *Seth, Meera (2004): "Women and Development- The Indian Experience", Sage Publication, New Delhi.*
7. *Ada, N.A. (2012). The Paradox of Equality of Education Opportunities for All Citizens in Nigeria and Challenges of Rural Transformation. Journal of the Arts and Humanities.*
8. *Rao, R.K. (2001). Girls and Education, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi.*

Websites

- *www.rbi.org.in*
- *www.icfaijournals.com*
- *www.girlsedu.com*