

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

RAJYA SABHA
UN-STARRED QUESTION NO. 1110
TO BE ANSWERED ON 31.07.2024

CHILD MARRIAGE

1110. SHRI SANT BALBIR SINGH:

Will the Minister of Women and Child Development be pleased to state:

- (a) whether steps are being taken by Government to prevent the negative impact of deep-rooted cultural practices like child marriage and dowry on the lives of young girls, the details thereof;
- (b) what steps have been taken to reduce the gender gap in education, despite India's progress in education, gender-based disparities persist, if so, the detail thereof and if not, the reasons therefor; and
- (c) the steps taken to provide equal opportunities to women to advance in their careers?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
(SHRIMATI ANNPURNA DEVI)

(a) The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA) has been enacted in order to curb child marriages and to take punitive actions against those associated with child marriages. Section 16 of PCMA authorises the State Government to appoint for the whole State, or such part thereof as may be specified, an officer or officers to be known as the 'Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPO)' having jurisdiction over the area or areas specified in the notification. This section also specifies the functions to be discharged by the CMPOs, which also include advising the individuals or counsel the residents of the locality not to indulge in promoting, helping, aiding or allowing the solemnisation of child marriages; to create awareness about the ill effects of child marriages; and to sensitize the community on the issue of child marriages. Government has also enacted the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 to address the social evil of dowry. Section 8B of the Act, authorises the State Government to appoint Dowry Prohibition Officer who have to ensure effective and efficacious enforcement of law. These authorities function under the respective State Governments/ UT Administrations.

Nevertheless, the Central Government undertakes awareness drives, media campaigns and outreach programs and issues advisories to the States/ UTs from time to time to highlight evil effects of this practice. The Ministry has also written to all States/ UTs to increase the number of CMPOs. Further, the Ministry of Women and Child Development implements the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) component under the 'Mission Shakti' umbrella scheme, wherein creation of awareness on matters pertaining to gender equality and discouraging child marriage is an important focus area. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) also undertakes awareness programs and consultations with stakeholders from time to time in this regard. In addition, Government of India has introduced 'Child Helpline' with short code 1098, a 24X7 telephone emergency outreach service for children in crisis which responds with suitable interventions to call for any form of assistance which a child requires, including for prevention of child marriages in coordination with police, Child Marriage Protection Officers (CMPOs), District Child Protection Units etc.

(b) to (c): The schemes implemented by the Government like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) and Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) support women and girls to be socially secure. The objective of Samagra Shiksha scheme is to ensure bridging gender and social category gaps at all levels of school education. Further, under the scheme, there is a provision of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) which are residential schools for girls from class VI to XII from age 10-18 years belonging to disadvantaged groups such as SC, ST, OBC, Minority and Below Poverty Line (BPL), sanctioned in Educationally Backward Blocks of the country. Therefore, initiatives like Samagra Shiksha, Scholarship schemes, Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojna, Swachh Vidyalaya Mission, etc. ensure that schools are girl-friendly especially for vulnerable sections of society and have adequate facilities in place to fulfil their special requirements.

Significant strides have been achieved in shrinking the gender gap in education. The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 prioritizes gender equity and envisions ensuring equitable access to quality education to all students, with a special emphasis on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). India has achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education. As per Unified District Information System for Education plus (UDISE+), 2021-22, 97.48% Government Schools have the facilities of separate Girls' toilets and 98.2% Government Schools have the facilities of drinking water. Today girls enrolment in education is almost at par with that of boys. Further, UDISE+ 2021-22 Report, Gender Parity Index (GPI) at various levels of education which shows equitable participation of girls in school education is as under:

Year	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Higher secondary
2021-22	1.03	1.00	1.00	1.02

As per All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) Report 2021-22, out of the total enrolment, 5.72 million students are enrolled in Science Stream, with 52.1% female students out numbering male students.

Government of India has taken various schematic and legislative interventions and made enabling provisions to ensure women's participation in various professions. In order to enhance the employability of female workers, the Government is providing training to them through a network of Women Industrial Training institutes, National Vocational Training Institutes and Regional Vocational Training Institutes.

For access to quality education and holistic development of children in remote areas, Eklavya Model Residential Schools have been established to enable children belonging to Scheduled Tribes, to avail opportunities in high and professional National Fellowship and Scholarship for Higher Education of ST students and the National Overseas Scholarship Scheme for ST students for pursuing higher studies in foreign institutions. Multiple initiatives for increasing participation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) have been undertaken.
