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Reservations For Boys

Discrimination Against Girls In The Primary School Scholarship System, Orissa

MY personal experience led me to investigate the condition of women's education in Orissa. My daughter, who is now in class five, was debarred from competing for a scholarship because of her sex. Boys who had scored much lower marks than she in the qualifying examination, were allowed to compete for the scholarship. My sister too was denied a scholarship in college although boys who had secured 100 marks less than she, were awarded a scholarship. I fought for justice but officials quoted the Orissa Education Code which discriminates against women.

Before independence, there were no girls' primary schools in Orissa, except for a few in exfeudal states and a few at district headquarters. The Female Education Committee, 1914, suggested that a primary school for girls be established whenever the

number of girls in a coeducational school reached 20. The Committee also recommended that a quarter of the total number of lower primary scholarships and a certain number of upper primary scholarships be reserved for girls. It was noted that early marriage and unwillingness of parents to send girls to coeducational schools was retarding women's education. Before independence, there were only a few secondary schools for girls, at district headquarters, and only one women's college, at Cuttack.

After independence, government decided to set up one girls' high school in each subdivisional headquarters and one women's college in each district headquarters. But as late as 1985, there were only 320 girls' high schools in Orissa, as compared to 3,104 boys' high schools.

Many other forms of

discrimination are also visible in the education system in Orissa. Educational activities are regulated through the Orissa Education Code, 1965, which was a collection of executive instructions issued by government from time to time. Action taken under this code has been declared nonstatutory as the Code is not a law. Yet it continues to be in operation.

One discriminatory principle was the offering of domestic science as an option to girls instead of mathematics. Boys were not offered this option. This option hampered girls in developing careers and gave them the idea that education was meant to make them good wives and mothers, nothing more. However, government has recently declared mathematics compulsory for both boys and girls up to high school.

The scholarship system under the Code, however, still continues to operate. Article 742 of the Code reads:

(a) There are four first grade junior college scholarships of Rs 20 each. Three of them are reserved for boys and one for girls. These scholarships are awarded on provincial basis and on merit alone.

(b) There are 10 second grade junior college scholarships of Rs 15 each. Six of them are reserved for boys and three for girls and one should be available for both boys and girls.

(c) There are 49 third grade junior college scholarships of Rs 10 each. Thirty five of them are reserved for boys and 14 for girls.

(d) There are 250 junior college merit cum poverty scholarships of Rs 25 each. They are awarded to both boys and girls on considerations of merit alone."

Article 747 of the Code says:

(a) There are six senior college scholarships of the first grade of the value of Rs 25 each. The award is made on the principle that out of six, four will be for boys and two for girls.

(b) There are 16 senior college scholarships of the second grade of the value of Rs 20 each. Of the 16, 12 are for boys and four for girls."

It is clear that apart from the merit cum poverty scholarship, there is a great deal of discrimination in favour of boys. The use of the term "merit" is a mockery as separate merit lists for boys and girls are drawn up. It is significant that in the joint merit lists of various examinations in Orissa, girls very often outnumber boys.

The Code also lays down in Article 741 (c) that a scholarship reserved for girls may go to a boy if no girl from the area qualifies for it. However, it does not specify that if boys do not qualify, girls may get the scholarships reserved for boys. Thus, the boy girl ratio of 3 : 1 or 2 : 1 is further widened. Girls of other areas



are not allowed to compete for the scholarship even if girls from the area are not available. Instead, the scholarship can go to a boy of the particular area.

The fact that this discrimination is deliberate is further proved by government correspondence that ensued when the procedure for granting primary level scholarships was changed in 1967. Before 1967, all students of class five who wanted to

five in order of merit, to the upper primary scholarship examination."

From this letter, it appeared that the basis for selection of children to compete for scholarships was merit, not sex. But the spirit changed in the letter to the district inspector of schools at Sambalpur dated February 8, 1982 : "You are requested to submit the descriptive rolls of the candidates to appear at the upper primary scholarship examination, 1982. The

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compete for scholarships had to appear at an annual examination conducted by a board.

Scholarships were given on the basis of the results of this examination. But in a letter of November 9, 1967, from the deputy secretary of the education department, government of Orissa, to the director of public instruction, the system was ordered to be changed: "Instead of giving the option to parents to send their children to sit for the examination each school should send five students of class

selection for the scholarship examination is on the ratio of three boys and two girls of each section of school as the case may be, on the basis of a preliminary selection test to be conducted by headmaster..."

According to this system, even if the five most meritorious students are girls, three of them are not entitled to compete for a scholarship. Once the students selected from schools on a boy-girl ratio of 3 : 2 sit for the examination, the distribution of scholarships is again on the same 3 : 2 ratio. Thus, for example, Sambalpur

educational district has 35 upper primary scholarships. Of these, 21 are reserved for boys and 14 for girls. Even if there are more than 14 girls among the 35 most meritorious students, only 14 of these girls will be awarded a scholarship.

Thus, the quota of girls is further decreased due to a double elimination process. One elimination takes place at the time of selection of students to compete for the scholarship, and a second elimination at the time of distribution of scholarships. Therefore, the chance of a meritorious girl losing a scholarship is much

higher than that of a meritorious boy losing it.

In rural areas, it is often difficult for families to send their daughters for the scholarship examination because it is usually held at the subdivisional headquarters. So the quota reserved for rural girls often goes to boys. On the other hand, urban girls who are often able to sit for the examination, are eliminated because of the discriminatory policies. Here, even if enough meritorious boys are not available to sit for the examination, there is no provision to allot part of the boys' quota to girls.

Thus, girls suffer in all areas.

I suggest that while there should be a minimum reservation for girls to encourage their education there should not be a quota for them. If the number of meritorious girls exceeds the reservation, they should be sent up on the basis of merit. There is no justification for reservation of a large number of scholarships for boys and this principle should be abolished.

Readers are requested to find out whether similar discrimination in scholarship allocation is prevalent in states other than Orissa and to send Manushi this information

Report From Punjab

Whenever police are given unbridled powers to deal with any problem, repression of innocent people is the natural consequence. Such is the case in Punjab these days. From among many, one case of torture of women and children of a poor peasant family has come to our notice.

On September 8, 1986, one Megha Singh of village Bhalaiana, district Faridkot, was poisoned to death by someone of the same village. Chemical reports confirmed death by poisoning.

Megha Singh's family members went to the local police station at Kotbai but the police there refused to register a case. On November 1, the family met SSP Rajan Gupta who ordered an enquiry by two police officers into the death. Their reports also confirmed death by poison. The SSP then ordered the DSP of Muktsar to register a murder case but he failed to do so.

Megha's family alleges that the suspected murderer sold a piece of his land and bribed the local police.

The family then went to Chandigarh to meet the inspector general of police who scrutinised the file and, on May 14, 1987, ordered the Muktsar police to register a case. But the DSP still did not register a case.

Instead, he grew so enraged at the persistence of the family that he sent armed policemen to the village to teach them a lesson. When the police reached, only women and children were at home. The police surrounded the house and beat up all those present. Surjit Kaur, Megha Singh's young daughter-in-law, who was pregnant, was kicked by the policemen. She started bleeding and succumbed to her injuries on June 3 in hospital. She was the mother of three small children.

Harpal Kaur, wife of Megha's cousin, Gurtej Singh, was taken to the

police station and tortured there. When she fainted, the police took her to the house of some of her relatives at Kotbai and left her there.

When villagers had gathered to condole Surjit's death, the police returned to the village. But when the enraged villagers confronted them, they retreated.

Gurtej Singh has sent representations to the director general of police. He says that he has been threatened that he will be branded a terrorist and killed in a false encounter by the police.

The Punjab Human Rights Committee has taken up the case and written to the governor and director general of police, demanding immediate suspension of guilty police officers and registration of a case against the person accused of Megha's murder.

Finally, the DSP who had earlier refused to register a case, has done so, about eight months after the murder. But no enquiry has yet been ordered into the death of Surjit Kaur. We have written to the prime minister, demanding a CBI enquiry into her death, without delay.

—Ved Parkash Gupta, secretary, Punjab Human Rights Committee