The indifference of families to the education of girls is widening the gender gap in all spheres

A recent HT report found that government schools in Delhi have an enrolment ratio that is 52% female and 48% male. The same for citywide private schools is 40% female and 60% male. The report discusses case studies of families in which in spite of financial constraints, sons are sent to private schools, while daughters are sent to government schools. It is a disturbing commentary not just on society that considers the education of girls as secondary to the education of boys; but also on the condition of government schools in which the quality of education is so bad that even those who cannot afford private schools, try their utmost to not have to send their children to government ones.

The indifference to the education of girls in India is a reflection of the broader attitude that girls will grow up to be homemakers and boys will have to earn a living. Better education (which necessarily translates to education in private schools) will help boys get better (that is, better paying) jobs later on in life. Girls, it is assumed, need only be literate as opposed to educated, since they won't have careers or earning a living to worry about. This attitude deprives not just women from having successful careers but also the country from having talented professionals in every field. The government push on 'Beti bachao, beti padhao' can only be fulfilled if it translates to more than tokenism in society.

It is past time to effect change by educating parents, boys, and including gender sensitisation in the curriculum of schools. So that boys who have the advantage of such discrimination don't perpetuate it in their turn. If government schools were also as good as private ones, and had the same facilities, our girls who fail to live up to their potential would have better opportunities and be able to fill the terrible gender gap in almost every profession.

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