Brief Analysis on the Education of Girls in India

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Abstract: "Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women" is the third goal of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (Harber, 2014). The International Plan (2018) advocates that formal, safe and high-quality education as well as lifelong learning opportunities are the rights of every child. However, there are still many girls in the world who can not receive education. According to the International Plan (2015) and the Malala Found (2018), by the end of 2015, 130 million girls around the world did not receive education; girls were 1.5 times more likely to be excluded from basic education than boys. Therefore, this paper takes the education of Indian girls as an example, analyzes the influence of early marriage on Indian girls' education from the perspective of human rights, and finally concludes that early marriage may not be the main reason for Indian girls' missing education, and that it does not only bring negative impacts on Indian girls.

1. Introduction

Indian society is characterized by the diversity of castes and religions; all citizens and religions are deep-rooted historical existences. The caste system is one of the most lasting systems, which can be traced back to 3500 years ago (Mehta, 2016). Indian society is composed of many hierarchical categories, such as Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudra and Dalit, each of which has its own set of sub levels (Mehta, 2016). The hierarchy system involves the social, economic, political and other issues of the country, and influences the civil equality, gender equality and marriage. However, the caste system is hereditary. For the society, the marriage between low caste citizens and people with higher occupation and social status is unacceptable. There is a huge social distance between the upper class and the lower class (Jain, 2005). Lower castes tend to become poorer; they often live and work at the bottom of the society (Mitra, 2007). Low caste women have to experience a certain degree of gender discrimination and poverty (Parashar, 2008). These secular traditions may have influenced girls' education.

2. The Problem of Indian Girls' Education

According to *Malala Found* in 2018, only one out of every 100 girls in India has received higher education. 38% girls do not attend secondary school. Moreover, in her survey, in 2017, 27% of Indian girls got married before the age of 18, and most of them were under 18. Reasons for girls dropping out of school include the child marriage, sexism or poverty. There are social reasons for girls dropping out of school, but there are also internal reasons. The hidden reason is that girls lack confidence in solving academic problems in mathematics and science, because it is generally believed that boys are more talented than girls in mathematics and science (Buchmann and Thomas, 2008). On the other hand, in the field of education, gender inequality is very serious in many countries with economic difficulties. Girls face more risks than boys, including sexual violence, early marriage, pregnancy, religious restrictions, poverty, poor health conditions, traditional values and disability (Harber, 2014).

Since the establishment of India's democratic system, with the promulgation of national education incentive policies, India has made some achievements in girls' education. But there are still many problems hindering the implementation of these policies (Meiyan Lv and Wenhua Lv, 2018). The girls from lowest castes are the most vulnerable (Meiyan Lv and Wenhua Lv, 2018). Some researchers believe that in India, child marriage is the most important reason that prevents

girls from receiving education. Child marriage is defined by the international community as any form of marriage before the age of 18, which is considered a violation of human rights (UNICEF, 2007).

In 2017, Prakas and other scholars conducted an education survey on girls and their parents in 80 villages in two regions (Bilaspur and Bajargoth) in northern Karnataka, India. According to the study, 6% girls are engaged or married; about 20% girls express that marriage before the age of 18 is important for them; 90% girls think that marriage before the age of 18 is very important. About 20% girls come from female headed households; 60% householders are uneducated; 10% of their parents are educated. When a family has more than one child, girls have a higher dropout rate. 27% of girls' parents or guardians do not support girls' education, but 67% of parents think it is important to marry their daughter before the age of 18. Why do these girls and their parents think it's important to get married before the age of 18?

3. The Influence of Early Marriage on Indian Girls' Education

Studies have shown that early marriage has a negative impact on girls' education as well as their physical and mental health; the impact on education is more serious (Prakash and other scholars, 2017; Bunting, 2005; Spezer and Pearson, 2011). Early marriage shortens girls' education, limits their opportunities outside marriage and childbirth, and severely limits their ability to participate in community activities in different ways (Bunting, 2005). According to statistics, the relationship between education and marriage is negative. The place with high rate of early marriage often has low school enrolment, especially in secondary school enrolment (Bunting, 2005; Prakash and other scholars, 2017). Is early marriage an important reason for Indian girls to miss education? Does early marriage have a negative impact on Indian girls' lives? Is it possible to solve the problem of Indian girls' education from the perspective of human rights?

3.1 Reasons of Early Marriage

Generally speaking, in Indian rural areas, the education level is low. Families are in bad economic conditions, and each rural family usually has several children (Prakash and other scholars, 2017; Ramanaik, 2018). In India, daughters are often regarded as the burden (Qiaoqiao Liu, 2014). In order to reduce the family's economic burden, most rural families want their daughters to get married early, because the groom will pay the bride price for the girl's family before the wedding (Qiaoqiao Liu, 2014). Indians believe that their daughters will be more respected in the husband's family when the groom have high status and can pay high bride price (Qiaoqiao Liu , 2014). Indian families usually start to save money for dowry from the day of their daughter's birth, which brings great pressure on poor families. Rural families in India want their daughter to marry early. There is another custom in India, that the earlier children get married, the less the bridegroom's wedding costs and the less the bride's dowry (Qiaoqiao Liu, 2014). Under the influence of this custom, in Indian families, especially in poor families in rural and urban areas, many girls get married before the age of 18.

Prakash and other scholars found that in rural areas of Karnataka in southern India, low caste girls have high dropout and absence rates in secondary education. Girls from poor, rural, low caste families have the highest dropout rates. Because of the poor condition, parents usually ask girls to stay at home to do housework or take care of younger children, or ask them to go out to work to increase the family's income. Some poor families even want their daughters to marry earlier in order to reduce the family burden. Girls' mobility and access to education are often limited from the date of marriage (Kulkarni, 1994). Early marriage may lead to family violence. The husband can request for his wife to drop out of school; pregnancy may also increase the frequency of dropping out of school (Spezer and Pearson, 2011; Ramanaik and other scholars, 2018). From these viewpoints, it can be found that some people believe that early marriage is the cause of girls' dropping out of school (Spezer and Pearson, 2011; Harber, 2014). But for my opinion, early marriage may only be an indirect reason; the main reason is poverty.

The reasons for early marriage can be summarized as follows: the economic development level

of the country, gender inequality, religious beliefs, legal inequality and the influence of traditional culture (Bunting, 2005; Prakash and other scholars, 2017). Countries with the lowest average age of first marriage for girls and adolescents usually have very low levels of social and economic development (Bunting, 2005). Therefore, these may indicate that poverty is the direct reason for girls to drop out of school.

The traditional family concept in India is reflected in the division of housework, which is regarded as the responsibility of women (Mehta, 2016). This often leads to the wrong idea that women can only do housework at home; they cannot work outside the house to increase family income. Therefore, many families prevent women from entering the work field. Most of the women are engaged in domestic work. The limited income leads to the serious imbalance in the remuneration of women at the grass-roots level. Moreover, in India's current legal system, there are defects in laws protecting women. For example, on the issue of child custody, various religions and laws give priority to the rights of fathers, which clearly violates the provision in Indian constitution on equality and the prohibition of any discrimination. However, when it comes to changing specific laws to promote social progress in the civil sphere, Indian governments often seem to have no choice (Chibber, 2008).

After consulting a lot of literature, it is found that most studies think that the negative effect of early marriage on Indian girls is greater than the positive effect. In my opinion, early marriage has more positive impacts on Indian girls. Although Bunting (2005) believes that early marriage shortens girls' education, limits their opportunities outside marriage and childbirth, and severely limits their ability to participate in the community. However, in my opinion, the injuries mentioned by Bunting are easy to deal with, while the physical and psychological injuries from outside world to unmarried girls caused are difficult to solve.

3.2 Positive Impacts of Early Marriage on Indian Girls

Spezer and Pearson (2011) pointed out in their study that girls who did not marry early were more likely to be humiliated and sexually assaulted than girls who married early. After wedding, the girl can be protected by her husband and his family. If a girl gets married, her husband will spend some time with her and take care of her. India parents often regard early marriage as the best way to protect their daughters from social stigma, violence and economic vulnerability, and a way to provide their daughters with a better life (ICRW, 2007). Raj (2010) also puts forward the view that parents fear that unmarried women will live in a mess or even become prostitutes. Raj (2010) believes that in some countries, unmarried women are more vulnerable to abuses, due to the missing of males' protection and other economic options. Perhaps in this case, parents choose the early marriage not only because it is important for parents, but also because it seems to be a responsible option.

In addition, due to the gender discrimination in schools, girls are often humiliated by teachers and boys for their poor performances, which can cause serious harm to girls' mental health (McCowan, 2012). So far, no research has shown that married girls cannot return to school, and no law prohibits married girls from continuing their education. As a result, those young wives still have the right to return to school, because they are still teenagers and they must receive education; they are still be protected by the education law. No one can deprive these girls' right to receive education. Although it is difficult for married girls to go back to school for further education, in reality, relevant personnel can still help these girls, telling them their rights, persuading them and informing their families of the importance of education.

4. Indian Girls' Education from the Perspective of Human Rights

The treaty committee on the monitoring of the *Woman's Convention* and the United Nations Children's Fund promote a right based approach in which early marriage is considered a behaviour violates human rights (Bunting, 2005). However, in the area of human rights, there is insufficient information to address the issue of girls' right to receive education. I have some questions about girls' education in the aspect of human rights. How to educate girls about human rights? Do girls

know what rights they have? Many girls drop out of high school. Their understanding and learning ability are limited; we cannot know their understanding on human rights. The ability of girls to enjoy their rights is limited to a great extent. Therefore, from the perspective of human rights, the education of girls in India may be a problem difficult to solve. Although the Indian government and schools put forward some methods to solve the problem of girls' education, these methods have some limitations.

For example, the United Nations Women Association (2018) has set the national education goals and formulated policies to provide free, fair, safe and high-quality primary and secondary education for girls, so as to promote education equality and eliminate all discrimination against girls, including early marriage. India also prohibits marriage under the age of 18, which is illegal. Indian schools have contributed to helping girls receive equal education. The school has a team of dedicated teachers who provide psychological guidance to girls and encourage them to speak out bravely and fulfill their right to receive education (Malala, 2018). Although the state and schools have put forward many ways to solve the problem, they are always defeated by religious beliefs and traditional culture. So it may be very difficult to help girls change all the inequalities.

Gender equality in education actually means that women should enjoy equal treatment in all economic, social and political rights of citizens at the national and global levels (Arnot, 2009). However, in the process of implementing the education system, traditional ideas, religious beliefs, hierarchy and masculinism may still oppress women. Therefore, in order to achieve the goals, international institutions and governments need to challenge the deep-rooted gender power relations which maintain the educational inequality in the country and society. It is necessary to challenge problems based on all assumptions of the national education system, which is very challenging (Arnot, 2009).

When considering contemporary human rights advocacy, it is important to recognize the resonance it needs to generate, as the global rules of this issue are based on the colonial plan (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2018). They believed that it could be recommended (CEDAW) to set up a unified marriage age of 18, establish a marriage registration authority, carry out reform on laws recommended by CRC (CEDAW) and other UN treaty monitoring bodies as well as international non-governmental organizations (Bunting, 2005). It means that on a no fault basis, we can support traditional marriage customs and rural marriage customs. Since Bunting (2005) believes that there is a large amount of evidence supporting the impact of early marriage on the health and education of young women; early marriage supporters believe that early marriage deprives women of their rights of life, health and education.

Under the *Woman's Convention*, states must guarantee the respect for human rights and individual freedom, and ensure that they have access to conditions that allow them to enjoy the rights (Tang and Tak York, 2000). The convention requires that women should be protected by the law in the same way as men in civil affairs, property management and litigation; it also guarantees woman's right to freely choose where to live, whether to marry or have children, and whether to continue to raise their own children (Tang and Tak York, 2000). In addition, the convention sets criteria for judging public policy, and protects the political space for woman to pursue those rights (Tang and Tak York, 2000).

I think the better solution is taking action, rather than making laws to protect the right of Indian girls to receive education. We can set up a girls' Mutual Aid Association in schools and communities, so that girls have the opportunity to speak out and bravely express what they want. We can also ask relevant personnel to give psychological guidance to girls. In addition, teachers should promote and educate girls to use their rights, cultivate their legal awareness, and understand that the law can be used to solve all the inequalities they suffer. Setting up study groups in schools can also help girls with learning difficulties and building confidence.

With the advancement of modernization and globalization, more and more people pay attention to topics on women, especially to the topic on woman's rights in the society and woman's education. Harber (2014) concluded that men and women are treated differently in many ways due to their physiological differences, social and economic differences, national cultural differences and the

level of economic and cultural development of the country. Harber (2014) also pointed out that gender inequality may be related to the country's formal education level, because in the poorest countries, girls may drop out of school or be difficult to enter school because of family poverty, gender prejudice, early marriage and housework.

5. Conclusion

Therefore, the issue of woman's rights can be divided into two levels. On one hand, woman's rights include equal rights or universal human rights, which are enjoyed by both men and women. On the other hand, women, as a special gender, should enjoy different rights from men. When establishing human rights and protecting the equal rights of men and women, the society should also take into account the special requirements of women and give them special care and compensation (Hua Shao, 2010). If women are required to be the same as men, we actually deny the particularity of women and their special rights. The subversive type insists on the characteristics of women and requires women to be higher than men, which is against human rights.

Perhaps people need to discuss woman's special rights on the basis of human rights. Women rights are divided into two levels. One is the basic human right; the other is the special right for women. These two levels complement each other and are the real realization of woman's rights. But human rights are the premise. On that basis, we can address woman's special rights. The latter can't go against the former. Human rights are not the highest, but the most basic and universal rules (Hua Shao, 2010). On the issue of eliminating gender discrimination, it is actually destroying the characteristics of women and integrating the social image of women with that of men. The motivation to eliminate gender differences may be that, it shows man's control and exploitation of women. We can fully establish woman's own gender rights and get out of woman's voluntary choice rights.

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