Hidden treasures

Imagine a world where education is not a fundamental right but a constant struggle for survival. Malala Yousafzai, Gauri Lankesh, and countless others were brave supporters and warriors who paid the ultimate price for fighting for women’s education, such as death, as in the case of Gauri. These women were famous for their dedication to their beliefs … but you know these women were also threatened, targeted, and even killed because they fought for women’s rights.

Malala, for instance, was shot in the head for daring to stand up for girls’ education, capturing the brutal reality faced by many women. Now, I want you to put yourself in her shoes. What would you do if you knew you were in danger for trying to pursue your basic rights? I… would not be standing on this stage... I would hide and seek help... but Malala did something different... After recovering from her injuries, she returned to studying and activism. Why? Because “When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful”. These were Malala’s words, a quote from a woman who once was a child without dreams or hope. (Blumberg, 2024)

Ladies and gentlemen, the lack of education is one of the primary reasons for women’s difficulties in life. In some countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan, education is granted to men, denying women knowledge and leaving them in a continuing cycle of poverty, violence and ignorance. This is mainly due to the belief that women are less valuable than men.

The question that might come to your mind now is, why uneducated women are that important? Michelle Obama, the Former First Lady of the United States, stated, “When girls are educated, their countries become stronger and more prosperous”. This statement clearly outlines the significant changes that uneducated women can make if they have the chance to get an education. According to researchers, educated women are more likely to earn higher wages and have better economic opportunities, positively contributing to economic growth. Studies have shown that educating girls for 12 years could generate economic benefits of between 15 and 30 trillion dollars. (international, 2023) (WorldBank, 2018) Therefore, governments must prioritise education for girls to empower them.

In addition to economic empowerment, education plays a role in poverty reduction. Windle Trust highlights this by emphasising how education provides women with the knowledge to generate income, support their families, contribute to their communities and be more likely to have smaller families, leading to lower population growth (Trust, 2023).

Furthermore, education impacts health outcomes for mothers and children. The Borgen Project research indicates that every year a mother attends school, her children's lives increase by an average of 0.32 years because educated women seek better care for themselves and their children, leading to improved health outcomes and reduced child mortality rates. (Project, 2020). So, educating girls is important because it empowers them to become agents of change, driving economic growth, poverty reduction, and improved health outcomes for themselves and future generations.

Women make up half of the population. So how can countries expect to succeed if they only educate half their citizens? The lack of education for women is a longstanding issue that has resulted in gender inequality and has held back the economic development of many countries, such as Congo and Kenya. However, the good news is that countries like Bangladesh have realised the importance of educating women and have significantly improved this direction.

Over the years, Bangladesh has made huge progress in improving women's education system. Female education has increased the number of women who can participate in the workforce, leading to higher household income. Female education has also caused a drop in fertility rates, so families with fewer children invest more in each child's education and health, leading to a more educated and productive workforce. According to the World Bank, the literacy rate for women in Bangladesh in 1991 was only 26%, while for men was 44%. However, over time, the situation has improved. In 2018, 72% of girls were enrolled in school, compared to 61% of boys, which led to the poverty rate decline from 31% in 2010 to 24% in 2016. The government's investment in education has played a big part in driving this growth and development (SOSALE, 2021) (Soma Dhar, 2023). So, If more countries focus on educating their women, they can also experience the same economic growth and development.

Giving women equal access to education is necessary for societal progress and human dignity. Malala's story and many others demonstrate the bravery and determination needed to challenge unjust systems. We have an important choice: to continue with outdated beliefs or to ensure that everyone can reach their right to education. This might require changing policies and breaking down cultural barriers. Let us heed Malala's words and refuse to be silenced in the face of injustice. Let us amplify the voices of those fighting for their right to education and let us work together to build a world where every woman and girl can thrive. By doing so, we honour the sacrifices made by those before us and build a better future for generations to come.

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