

Giving Girls a Chance

Naheeda Begum

When your heart is oozing with joy, the thunder of claps echoes in your heart too.

Wherever you look you see the dance of mirth around you.

This round of applause was for that little girl and also for me.

The child's firm conviction had compelled everyone to be proud of the status of a teacher.

She couldn't say it often enough: "When I grow up I want to be like Ms Naheed. Because she isn't just my teacher but also my father's teacher. She taught him that I need an education as much as my brothers do. "

It all began when I used to teach in an area where sending children to school was not a part of local tradition. I would send messages to people's home everyday to please send their children to school. By and by I had a group of 20 children.

One day in my school, in class 2, I saw that bright little Nazir was writing on his *takhti* while his brother Shabbir was sitting idle. His sister had damaged his *takhti*, he said. Because she too wanted to read and write but was not being sent to school. Their father didn't want her to attend school because she was a girl, he told me.

I didn't sleep well that night. I said my morning prayer and prayed to God for guidance. In the morning I asked Bashir to go fetch his father to come see me. The father refused, as he did not like to meet women.

I wasn't about to give up. I sent the school watchman to get him. Then I requested a local shopkeeper to convey my message.

Finally Nazir and Shabbir's father came to see me. He was beside himself with anger.' How can you sit and talk to men!' he said disapprovingly. I silently prayed to God for support as I saw his attitude.

I told him how education was important for his daughter too, not just for his sons. True, she may not have to work ever but she can shape society if she is educated. The father was now getting interested in what I had to say and in what education had to offer. "How can she shape society?" he asked. I told him how an educated girl will influence her in-laws and raise her own children intelligently. "I am sure you would like to hear people say that your daughter is an enlightened, organized and educated daughter-in-law."

My prayer had been answered. The father had seen the point I was trying to make. "I promise you in front of these children that I will bring my little girl to your school."

And he did

The whole hall resonated as the sound of clapping rose higher.

The author is a Primary School Teacher at Government Girls Primary School Sanghral, Balakot, Mansehra.