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GRT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK POLICY INITIATIVES AND CONSTRAINTS FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION

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Abstract:-Girl's education is one of the challenges in India. Since independence government is trying to make sustained efforts for improving educational level of girl child. The anticipated result has not been achieved. Though there is an increasing trend in educational level the gap persists from 1951 and is still continued. Various schemes and programmes are being planned and being implemented for girls education. However there is major gap in what is anticipated and what is actually achieved. In 12th Five year plan the concept of Inclusive growth and sustainable development has been incorporated in various policies of different ministries. In this view the present paper highlights the trend of enrollment of the girls, various facilities that are available in schools, various committees and their recommendations, national perspective plan for women empowerment, these are the aspects which are dealt in detail. In last part of the paper the details about barriers to girls education is explained.

Keywords: Constitutional provisions, barriers to girls education, constraints, elementary education, women empowerment, gender equality, policy initiative.

INTRODUCTION:

Education of women is an important aspect for boosting the social and economic development of the country. Promotion of Girls Education particularly at Elementary Level is to bring certain benefits for the Society in the form of social development and reconstruction. Promotion of Education of Girls needs to be in the form of content and quality of schooling, teachers, materials, enrolments, retentions, acquisition of basic literacy and numeric skills. The purpose behind it is to bring social development across variety of sectors, increasing economic productivity, political participation, health and sanitation, delayed marriage and making effective investment for future generation. Though there are many other possible ways and methods to achieve this national goal, but education of girls is an effective way which has simultaneous impact on all aspects. Significantly, India is the second largest educational system in the world (after China) with a total enrolment of 114.6 million at primary and 41.3 million at upper primary levels; out of which 47.52 million and 18.72 million are girls at primary and upper primary levels respectively. As one of the major goals of SSA is to promote social justice, all gender and social category gaps are expected at primary level by 2007 and at elementary level by 2010. In view of elementary education being a fundamental right of all the children in the age group of 06-14 years as per the Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002. Universalization of Elementary Education is the target set by Govt. of India to be achieved by

Education of girls in India, particularly in rural areas is one of the major concerns of the educationists, administrators and policy makers. Out of the total children who are not attending the schools, more than two-third of them are girls. Education of girls is the prime focus of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) for achieving the goals of Universalization of Elementary Education. Hence, it is considered that there is a need to visualize the status of education of girls at elementary level and the problems that usually hamper their education.. Government of India exhibits a wider range of commitment on accelerating education of girls especially the ones belonging to SC/STs and rural areas. Despite this, much need to be done to improve the educational status of girl children particularly in rural India. During 2002-03, the enrolment of girls at primary level was 38.09 million, at upper primary level 24.31 million, and at secondary/higher secondary level it was 28.59 million. At all levels enrolment status of girl children is lower than that of boys and this difference goes on increasing as we move towards higher level. Though participation of girls at all stages of education has been increasing steadily since 1951 to 2003 (primary level from 28.1 per cent to 46.8 per cent, middle level from 16.1 percent to 43.9 percent and secondary/higher secondary level from 13.3 percent to 41.3 percent) yet the girls' participation is still below 50 percent at all stages of education. It is also reported that

drop out rates among girls are at higher side than that of their boy counterparts.

Female Literacy Status

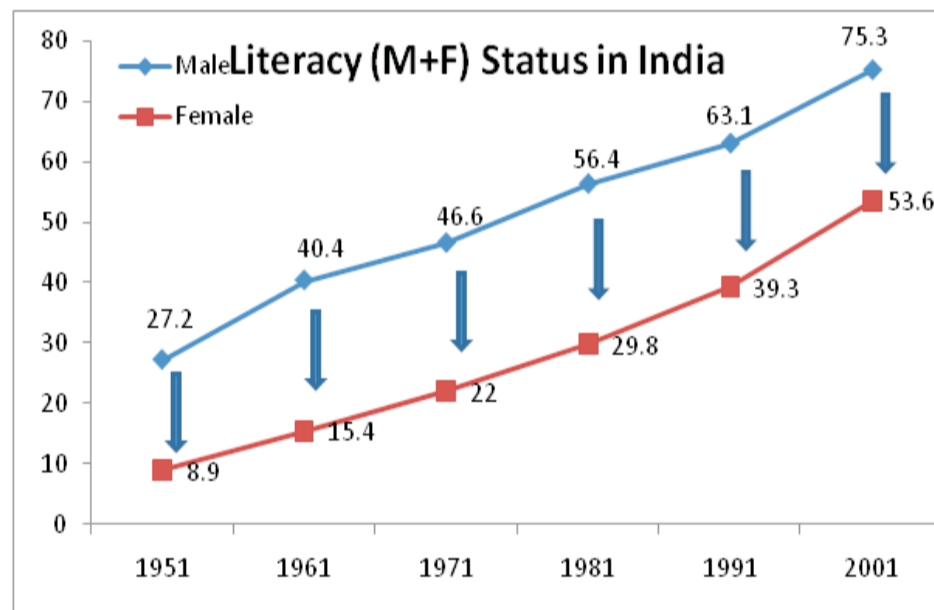
Table1: Literacy Status in India

YEAR	Total Literacy (in million)	Rate of Literacy			Male- Female Difference
		Male	Female	Total	
1951	60.1	27.2	8.9	16.7	18.3
1961	105.5	40.4	15.4	24.0	25.0
1971	161.5	46.6	22.0	29.5	24.0
1981	241.0	56.4	29.8	36.2	27.4
1991	362.2	63.1	39.3	43.3	23.8
2001	666.94	75.3	53.6	64.84	21.7

*Exclude J&K

Source: Selected Educational statistics 2002-03, MHRD, Govt. of India.

Figure 1 Female Literacy Status



As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, there has been a considerable increase in the rate of literacy of female in last two decades. It was noticed that during 1951-2001, the rate of female literacy has been increased by 6 times where as in case of male, it is 2.8 times (MHRD 2002-03). Again it was observed that since 1981, the male-female difference is getting closer which is a positive indication on the part of the education of women in our country. However, it is noticed that the rate of female literacy is 53.6 per cent as against the male literacy which is of 75.3 per cent. This shows that still the per cent of literacy among female is 21.7 per cent less than that of male. Hence, it is imperative to take a special intervention for enhancing the education of female in our country even today.

Enrolment of Girls

Table 2: Enrolment of Girls by School Category (in million)

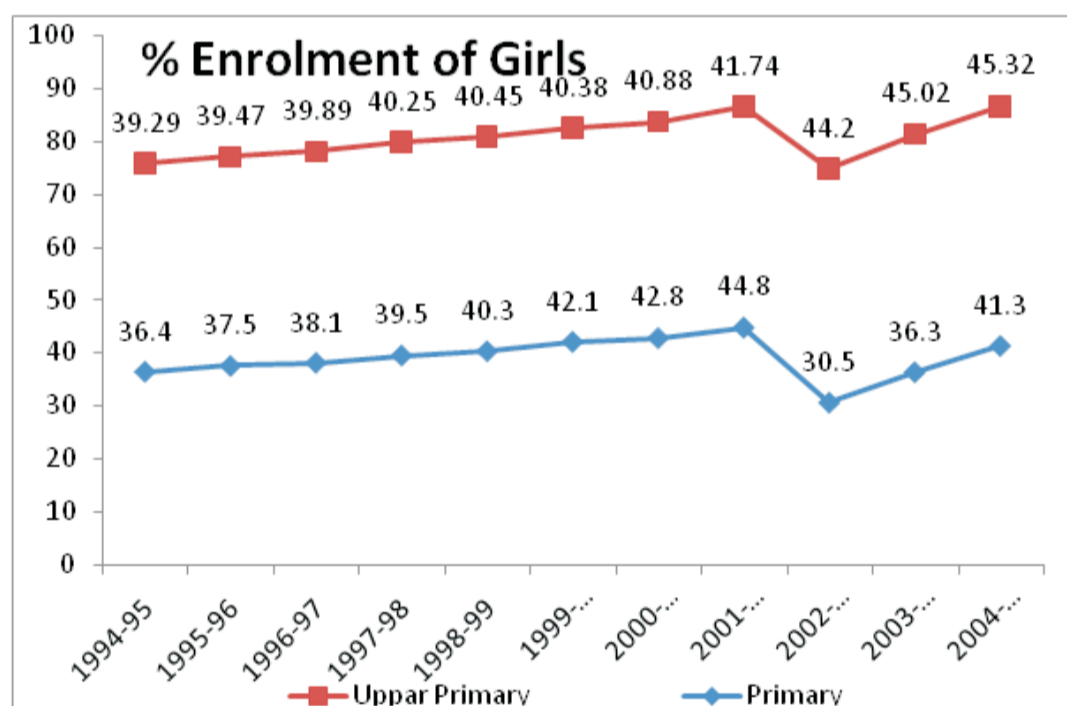
YEAR	PRIMARY			UPPER PRIMARY		
	Total	Girls	% of Girls	Total	Girls	% of Girls
1994-95	105.1	45.1	36.4	14.3	14.3	39.29
1995-96	107.1	46.2	37.5	14.8	14.8	39.47
1996-97	108.2	46.8	38.1	15.2	15.2	39.89
1997-98	110.3	48.0	39.5	15.9	15.9	40.25
1998-99	110.9	48.2	40.3	16.3	16.3	40.45
1999-2000	113.6	49.5	42.1	17.0	17.0	40.38
2000-2001	113.8	49.8	42.8	17.5	17.5	40.88
2001-2002	113.9	50.3	44.8	18.7	18.7	41.74
2002-2003	93.4	44.1	30.5	13.48	13.48	44.20
2003-2004	108.02	51.27	36.3	16.29	16.29	45.02
2004-2005	114.6	54.52	41.3	18.72	18.72	45.32

*Provisional

Source: i) Selected Educational Statistics 2002-03, MHRD, Govt. of India.

ii) Elementary Education in India, Analytical Report 2004-05, NIEPA

Figure 2 % Enrolment of Girls



Enrolment of Girls is an important aspect for the Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) and Education For All (EFA) as well. Data from Table 2 and Figure 2 reveals that the number of Girls' enrolment has increased from 45.1 million (36.4 per cent) in 1994-95 to 54.52 million (41.3 per cent) in 2005-06. In case of Upper Primary Level, there is an increase in the number of Girls from 14.3 million (39.29 per cent) in 1994-95 to 18.72 million (45.32 per cent) in 2004-05.

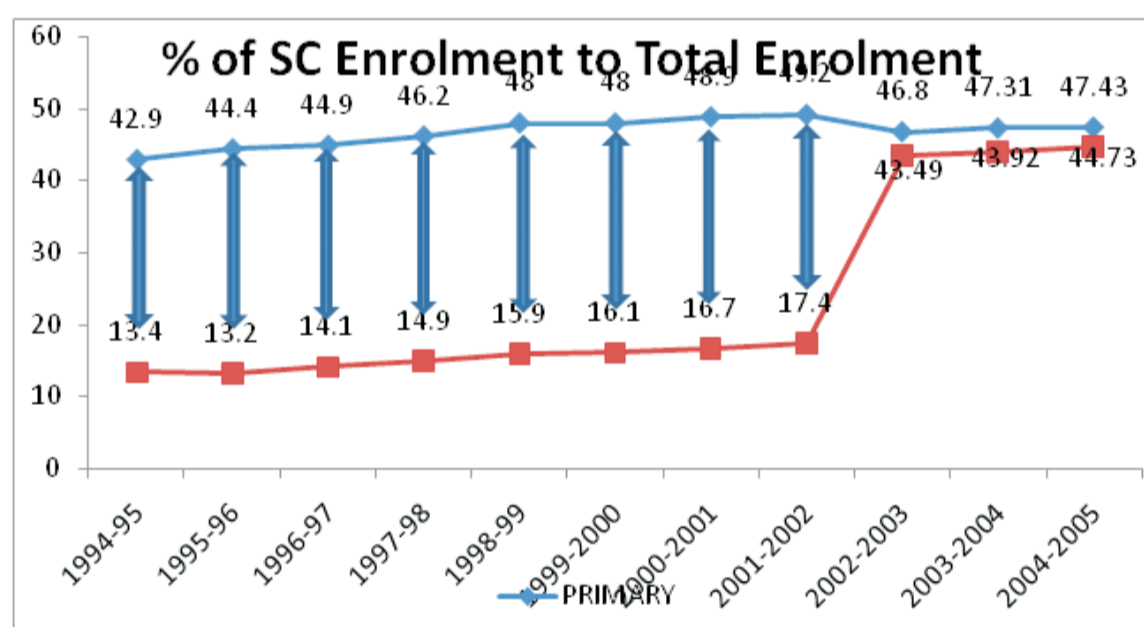
Enrolment of Scheduled Caste (SC) Girls

Table 3: Percent of SC Enrolment to Total Enrolment and Percent of SC Girls Enrolment to Total SC Enrolment

YEAR	PRIMARY		UPPER PRIMARY	
	% of SC to total enrolled	% of SC Girls to total SC enrolled	% of SC to total enrolled	% of SC Girls to total SC enrolled
1994-95	17.5	42.9	14.2	13.4
1995-96	17.8	44.4	14.4	13.2
1996-97	18.6	44.9	14.9	14.1
1997-98	18.6	46.2	15.4	14.9
1998-99	17.5	48.0	15.1	15.9
1999-2000	17.9	48.0	14.9	16.1
2000-2001	18.6	48.9	15.6	16.7
2001-2002	18.9	49.2	16.7	17.4
2002-2003	19.5	46.8	18.20	43.49
2003-2004	21.30	47.31	19.33	43.92
2004-2005	20.73	47.43	20.10	44.73

Source: i) Selected Educational Statistics 2002-03, MHRD, Govt. of India
 ii) Elementary Education in India, Analytical Report 2004-05, NIEPA

Fig 3 - Percent of SC Enrolment to Total Enrolment



With regard to the enrolment of minority (SC and SC girls) it is revealed from Table 3 and Figure 3 that 17.5 percent of children were SC out of total enrolled in 1994-95 at primary level where as it was only 14.2 percent at upper primary level. There were 42.9 percent SC girls at primary level and 13.4 percent at upper primary level. The number of SC girls increased from 42.9 percent during 1994-95 to 47.43 percent during 2004-05 at primary level. There is no appreciable improvement in enrolment of SC girls at primary level. Similar is the situation at upper primary level as well. This reflects that inspite of various measures undertaken at both national and state levels, the situation with regard to education of girls still need a lot of improvement.

Enrolment of Scheduled Tribes (ST) Girls

Table 4: Percent of ST Enrolment to Total Enrolment and percent of ST Girls Enrolment to Total ST Enrolment

YEAR	PRIMARY		UPPER PRIMARY	
	% of ST to total enrolment	% of ST Girls enrolment to total ST enrolment	% of ST to total enrolment	% of ST Girls enrolment to total ST enrolment
1994-95	8.6	41.86	6.0	15.0
1995-96	8.8	43.18	6.1	13.8
1996-97	9.1	45.05	6.2	14.4
1997-98	8.7	45.9	6.3	14.9
1998-99	8.3	46.9	6.5	14.8
1999-2000	9.3	44.08	6.9	15.9
2000-2001	9.5	49.47	7.2	16.7
2001-2002	10.2	49.0	8.0	16.3
2002-2003	11.78	45.97	8.55	39.80
2003-2004	10.20	46.61	8.08	42.02
2004-2005	10.69	46.76	8.59	42.58

Source: i) Selected Educational Statistics 2002-03, MHRD, Govt. of India
 ii) Elementary Education in India, Analytical Report 2004-05, NIEPA

As shown in Table 4, the total enrolment of SC children to total enrolment at primary and upper primary levels in 1994-95 is 8.6 per cent and 6.0 per cent respectively. Hence, there is a gradual decrease in percentage of enrolment of ST children from primary to upper primary level. This shows the drop out rate of ST children from lower level to higher level. It is also revealed from the table that the situation is not improved even in 2004-05 as during this period, the enrolment of ST girls at primary level was 11.78 per cent and at Upper Primary Level, it remained as 8.55 per cent. Though from 1994-95 to 2004-05, there is a slight improvement with regard to the enrolment of ST girls, but at the primary and upper primary levels, it remained very low in comparison to the SC girls. That is to say that the rate of enrolment of ST girls is at the lower side than that of SC girls both at primary and upper primary level.

Drop out of Girls
Table 5: Dropout Rates of Girls to Total Drop Outs

CATEGORY	GENERAL		SC STUDENTS		ST STUDENTS	
	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls
1995-96	42.1	43.0	45.7	48.5	56.6	58.9
1996-97	40.2	40.9	42.7	45.2	56.5	60.0
1997-98	39.2	41.5	44.7	46.6	55.1	58.1
1998-99	42.4	44.7	44.3	46.6	44.3	46.6
1999-2000	40.3	42.3	-	-	-	-
2000-2001	40.7	41.9	-	-	-	-
2001-2002	39.0	39.9	45.2	47.1	52.3	54.1
2002-2003	34.9	33.7	41.5	58.2	51.4	52.1

Source: i) Selected Educational Statistics 2002-03, MHRD, Govt. of India
 ii) Elementary Education in India, Analytical Report 2004-05, NIEPA

As observed from the above Table 5, the rate of drop out Girls has decreased from 43.0 percent (in 1995-96) to 33.7 percent (in 2002-03) at primary level. In case of SC girls, the rate of drop out has been fluctuating from 1995-96 to (48.5 percent) to 2004-05 (58.2 percent). Similar is the situation with regard to drop out rate of ST girls which fluctuate from 58.9 per cent in 1995-96 to 51.4 per cent in 2002-03 (MHRD, 2002-03) 1.2.6 Female Teacher

Table 6: Distribution of Female Teachers by School Category, 1994-2005 (in million)

YEAR	PRIMARY			UPPER PRIMARY		
	TOTAL	FEMALE	% OF FEMALE	TOTAL	FEMALE	% OF FEMALE
1994-95	1.69	0.53	31.36	1.16	0.41	35.35
1995-96	1.74	0.56	32.18	1.18	0.42	35.59
1996-97	1.75	0.56	32.00	1.20	0.43	35.83
1997-98	1.82	0.59	32.42	1.23	0.59	47.96
1998-99	1.91	0.66	34.55	1.27	0.46	36.22
1999-2000	1.93	0.69	35.75	1.30	0.47	36.15
2000-2001	1.90	0.68	35.79	1.33	0.51	38.35
2001-2002	1.93	0.72	37.31	1.47	0.55	37.41
2002-2003	1.92	0.75	39.06	1.59	0.65	40.88
2003-2004	1.59	0.55	34.59	2.20	0.52	23.64
2004-2005	1.67	0.60	35.93	2.62	0.64	24.43
2005-2006	1.90	0.71	37.37	2.81	0.72	25.62

Source: i) Selected Educational Statistics 2002-03, MHRD, Govt. of India.
ii) Elementary Education in India, Analytical Report 2004-05, NIEPA.

It is revealed from Table 6 that there is an increase in the recruitment and deployment of female teachers during 1994-2005. Since the special campaign of in-service training there is a steady increase in the trend with regard to percent of female teachers undergoing in-service training at upper primary level than at primary level. (NIEPA, 2004-05).

In-service Training of Female Teacher

Table 7: Percent of Female Teachers provided In-service Training.

YEAR	No. of Female Primary School Teachers			No. of Female Upper Primary School Teachers		
	Total (in million)	Undergone Training (in million)	%	Total (in million)	Undergone Training (in million)	%
2002-03	0.75	0.37	49.90	1.59	0.19	12.20
2003-04	0.55	0.23	41.98	2.20	0.29	13.32
2004-05	0.60	0.26	43.48	2.62	0.54	20.80

Source: Elementary Education in India, Analytical Report 2004-05 (NIEPA)

There are various categories of elementary school teachers who need to be trained and empowered in one or more areas; namely (i) untrained teachers; (ii) new entrant teachers; (ii) working teachers (trained); and (iv) para teachers. The total number of female teachers in primary schools increased from 0.53 million 1994-95 to 0.71 million in 2005, approximately 1.4 times. The number of female teachers in upper primary schools has increased from 0.41 million in 1994-95 to 0.72 million in 2005-06, nearly 1.8 times (NIEPA, 2004-05 and MHRD, 2002-03). 43.48 percent of primary school female teachers have undergone in-service training during 2004-05 in comparison to 41.98 percent in 2003-04. As noticed from Table 7, 20.80 percent of upper primary school female teachers underwent in-service training during 2004-05 whereas it was 13.32 during 2003-04 (NIEPA 2003-04). Data reveals that though more percent of female teachers from the primary school underwent in-service teacher education, the rate of enrolment and retention of girls at primary level has not been improved considerably. Girls' education has been perceived as one of the key issues in bringing quality education and hence is considered as one of the important aspects of national development and reconstruction. Progress of a nation thus depends on the quality in education of the women who need to be empowered through effective and innovative strategies.

Girls' Toilet (Basic Facility)

Table: 8: Percent of Schools Having Toilet

Year	Common Toilet					
	Primary School			Upper Primary School		
	All areas	Urban	Rural	All areas	Urban	Rural
2003	29.06			39.18		
2004	36.16			44.25		
2005	41.43	56.83	39.97	48.52	64.02	47.02

Year	Girls Toilet					
	Primary School			Upper Primary School		
	All areas	Urban	Rural	All areas	Urban	Rural
2003	15.64			28.14		
2004	20.61	18.63	18.91	32.91	53.31	30.87
2005	24.27	43.74	22.38	36.91	54.79	35.19

Source: i) Selected Educational Statistics 2002-03, MHRD, Govt. of India
 ii) Elementary Education in India, Analytical Report 2004-05, NIEPA

From the above Table 8, it is revealed that Percentage of schools having common as well as separate toilets for girls has been increased from 2003 to 2005. In 2005, 41.43 percent schools were equipped with common toilet facility at primary level and 48.52 percent at upper primary level. With regard to availability of separate toilet for girls, the numbers of schools were 24.27 at primary level and 36.91 percent at upper primary level. There are more schools with common as well as Girls' toilets in Urban areas than the rural ones. In case of privately managed schools, 69.23 percent schools were equipped with such facilities where as it was only 42.82 percent in Govt. managed schools. Similar is the situation with regard to schools with girls' toilet. In case of Chhattisgarh only 9.15 percent schools have common toilet and 3.43 percent have girls' toilet where as in Kerala 78.37 percent primary schools have common toilets whereas 57.17 percent schools have separate toilet for girls. Not a single state has been observed providing both common and separate toilets for girls to all of its schools. From this we can easily infer the present status of Girls' education and our preparation for quality education at elementary level in the 21st century. This gives us the answer where do we stand?

Policy initiatives for girls education at elementary level

At the time of Independence, we inherited an educational system which was not only small but suffered with inequalities of castes, gender and regimes. The educational status of women/ girls was very low as compared to that of men/boys. We have made concerted efforts to improve the access, enrolment, retention and participation of girls in school education, higher education and technical, vocational education. Special efforts and provisions are being made to improve educational status of girls belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other disadvantaged sections of our society. The present chapter/unit highlights some of the efforts made by our governments to improve educational status of girls/women.

Constitutional provisions

The constitution of India not only grants equality to all citizens including girls/women and forbids any discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth but also empowers the state to practice Protective Discrimination in favour of girls/women, children and any socially and educationally backward classes or the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Under the protective discrimination clause, the State (our country) has passed several legislations and initiated special programmes and schemes for the protection, welfare and development of girls/women and children. As per the Directive Principles of state policy, the Article 45 of our Constitution enjoins that the State shall endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution, compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. This constitutional directive was interpreted by our policy planners as eight years of elementary education (five years of primary and three years of upper primary education) for all children in the age group 6-14 years as a programme of Universal Elementary Education (UEE).

Important committees and commissions on girls' education

The Secondary Education Commission (1952-1953) upheld opening of every type of education to women open to men. Report of the Durgabai Deshmukh Committee or National Committee on Women's Education (1958-59) recommended:

Appointments of school mothers in all the schools where there is no woman teachers;
Separate lavatory arrangement in every co- educational school;
Help in cash or kind such as covering the cost of books and stationery; school uniform or clothing and other educational equipments to all girls upto middle level, whose parents are below certain level of income;
Creches for sibilings;
Schemes for awarding prizes to the villages which show the largest proportional enrolment and average attendance of girls;
Two three prizes in the form of useful articles for regular attendance;
Attendance scholarships in the form of useful articles to poor girls;
Creation of a strong public opinion for girls' education;
Provisions of suitable conditions in schools rather than passing of compulsory legislation so that parents can't be encouraged to send their daughters to schools;
Women heads in coeducation schools;
Free and subsidised transport in order to bring middle and secondary schools, within easy reach; and
Suitable hostel facilities. The day boarding and lodging arrangements in these hostels should be cheap, and payment in kind should be permitted

Towards Equality:

Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1962-63) suggested incentives to prevent dropouts among girls. The Committee to Look into the Causes for Lack of Public Support Particularly in Rural Areas, for Girls' Education and to Enlist Public Cooperation, 1963 and Committee on Differentiation of Curricula for Boys and Girls, 1964 focussed on appointment of women teachers; appointment of women teachers on staff should be obligatory where girls do attend a middle school ordinarily meant for boys, and grant of free books, writing materials and clothing to girls. The Education Commission (1964-66) fully endorsed the recommendations of National Committee on the Education of Women; The Commission emphasized on the following points:

- a) Educating public opinion to overcome traditional prejudices against girls' education;
- b) Appointing women teachers;
- c) Popularising mixed primary schools; and opening separate schools for girls at the higher primary stage, wherever possible and demanded;
- d) Providing free books and writing materials and if needed clothing also..

Towards an Enlightened and Humane Society NPE, 1986 - A Review Committee for Review of National Policy on Education, 1986 in 1990 upheld the need for adequate support services (water, fuel, fodder and child care) to the promotion of girls' education and more provisions of schooling facilities like atleast one primary school in each habitation with a population of 300 or more and atleast one middle school in each habitation with a population of 500 or more.

The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) recommended for women's education on the top priority basis so that women can't attain a comparable level of education by 2000. The plan suggested that:

Educational programmes need to be restructured and school curricula to be modified to eliminate gender bias. Awareness needs to be generated among the masses regarding the necessity of educating girls. The media and various forms of communication have to be geared and a fruitful rapport has to be established between the community at large and the educational personnel. Fifty percent posts in elementary schools should be reserved for women teachers. In every school, at least one woman teacher should be there. School timings should be flexible and schools must be available within a walking distance Hence, a substantial increase is required in the number of schools for girls. The recommended distance of 3 km. for a middle school is a handicap for many girls, It is therefore, necessary to provide hostel facilities over there .

Five - year plans and girls' education

Girls'/women's education has assumed special significance in the context of our country's planned development. The First Five Year Plan advocated the need for adopting special measures to improve girls' education and provide equal opportunities to women/girls as men/ boys here in respect of education and job. The second Five Year Plan proposed special

efforts at educating parents and make education more closely related to the needs of girls. The report of the National Committee on women's Education (1959) made a strong impact on the Third Five Year Plan. The schemes launched included condensed school courses for adult women, Bal Savika Training and child care programmes. Subsequent plans supported these measures and also provided incentives such as free text books and scholarships for girls. Although there was a large scale expansion of activities for education upto the Fourth Plan, vast disparities existed in the relative utilization of available facilities by boys and girls at various stages of education. Efforts were being made to implement recommendations of the Education, Commission (1964-66) and the National Policy on Education (1968) regarding promotion of girls education. The major thrust in the Fifth Plan was to offer equal opportunities to both boys and girls and for improving the quality of education imparted. Incentives like free text books, mid day meal, uniforms and attendance scholarships were to be given to promote enrolment and retention of girls in backward areas and among underprivileged sections of society. Efforts were being made to improve the number of female teachers. The Sixth Plan gave special focus to initiate larger measure for equalization of educational opportunities. Major emphasis was on universalisation of elementary education, attachment of Balwadi-cum creches, appointment of women teachers in rural areas, improving girls' participation in science and mathematics courses and increasing the number of hostels for girls of backward communities.

The effort during the Seventh Plan period was an outcome of National Policy on Education (1986). It gave overriding priority to the removal of women's illiteracy, obstacles inhibiting their access to and retention in elementary and higher education. The Eighth Five Year Plan promises to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors do not by pass women. During this plan period, the focus was on ensure that women were equal partners and participants in the developmental process. This approach of the Eighth Plan marked a definite shift from 'development' to 'empowerment' of women. The Ninth Five Year Plan was the most crucial investment in women's development by improving the quality of life through investments in core sectors like health, hygiene, demographic profile and economic productivity. Education of girls and women's empowerment received significant attention as an index of human development. Since girls find it difficult to cover a long distance to attend schools, it is necessary to have schools in the vicinity of the villages. The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2007) is committed to universalizing elementary education (UEE), has, therefore, fixed following goals :

Universal Access
Universal enrolment
Universal retention
Universal Achievement
Equity

Targets fixed in the Tenth Plan:

Bridge all gender gaps in enrolment, retention and learning achievement in the primary stage by 2007 and reduce the gap to 5% in the upper primary stage by 2007. Use special interventions and strategies to include girls.

Suggested Programmes for achieving UEE for girls:

The Tenth Plan focused on some women-centric programmes such as the existing Mahila Samakhya, and two new schemes, the Kasturba Gandhi Swatantra Vidyalaya (KGSV) and the National Programme for the Education of Girls at the Elementary Level (NPEGEL). The KGSV and the NPEGEL are proposed to be taken up during the Tenth Plan with the following features:

Focus on educationally backward areas in girls' education.
Focus on girls from the disadvantaged sections like those belonging to SC/ST, minorities, etc.
Tackling gender-specific issues that prevent girls and women from having access to education.
Providing women and adolescent girls with the necessary support structure, and an informal learning environment to create opportunities for education;
Helping girls to overcome socio-cultural and economic factors inhibiting their access to elementary education.

The policy perspective

The National Policy on Education, 1968 emphasized on "Equalization of Education Opportunity." It has been highlighted that strenuous efforts should be made to equalize educational opportunity. The education of girls should receive emphasis, not only on grounds of social justice, but also because it accelerates social transformation. The National Policy on Education (1986 and revised in 1992) brought out a marked shift in the policy perspective towards girls' education. While the National Policy on Education, 1968 emphasized on equalization of educational opportunities, the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 (revised in 1992) emphasized on education for women's equality and stressed on ending all kinds of social evils and practices derogatory to women. The NPE (1986) clearly states " The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women" The NPE and its Programme of Action (POA), 1992 laid major

emphasis on increasing women's participation in vocational, technical and professional education at different levels along with school education. It further states that the policy of non-discrimination is recommended to eliminate sex stereotyping in vocational and professional courses and to promote women's participation in non-traditional occupations, as well as in existing and emergent technologies. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 also focuses on equal access to women quality education at all levels and reducing the gender gaps in secondary and higher education. The Empowerment of Women has found a special mention in the National Policy, 2001.

Major programmes and initiatives to enhance participation of girls at elementary levels

The commitment to UEE has been reiterated in each five year plans. The Education Commission (1964-66), the NPE (1968) and the NPE (1986) and its POA (1992) have all emphasised the need to implement the programme of UEE at the earliest. There have been a number of educational initiatives from the central and the state governments alongwith NGOs to achieve the goals of UEE especially after the recommendations of NPE 1986. Some of these initiatives are Bihar Education Project (BEP), UP Basic Education Project, Lok Jumbish, Shiksha karmi Project in Rajasthan and District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). All these programmes and projects have special gender focus. For example, one of the criteria for selecting districts to initiate DPEP was low female literacy. The government of India has launched a new scheme known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to incorporate all the existing schemes and programmes related to elementary education. The SSA aims to provide the quality elementary education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years by 2010 with special focus on girls and children belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged groups and of children with special needs. Some of the initiatives for girls under SSA are as follows: National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), The NPEGEL, was launched in September 2003 as an integral but separate gender component of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. This programme provides additional components for enhancing the education of under privileged/disadvantaged girls at the elementary level through more intense community mobilisation and development of Model Cluster schools. Gender sensitisation, learning materials, and provision of need-based incentives like escorts, stationery, work books and uniforms are some of the endeavours under this programme.

Opening of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)
Special provisions under SSA for elementary education of girls
Free textbooks
Separate toilets for girls
Recruitment of 50% women teachers
Early Childhood Care and Education centres in/near schools
Teachers' sensitisation programmes to promote equitable learning opportunities
Back to school camps for out-of-school girls
Bridge courses for older girls
Gender-sensitive teaching learning materials
Intensive community mobilisation efforts
Special fund for innovative need-based interventions for girls' attendance and

The Government of India has launched a new scheme called Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) for setting up upto 750 residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level for girls belonging predominantly to the SC, ST, OBC and minorities in difficult areas. Out of a total 750 KGBVs, the Government of India has proposed to set up 117 KGBVs in blocks having predominance of Muslim population in which at least three-fourths of the seats will be for girls from marginalised or minority communities while the rest may be made available to girls from families below the poverty line.

Girls education: constraints and barriers

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is an effort to universalize elementary education by community ownership of the school system. It is a response to the demand for quality basic education all over the country. The SSA programme is also an attempt to provide an opportunity for improving human capabilities to all children, through provision of community owned quality education in a mission mode. The objective of this massive programme is to provide useful and relevant elementary education for all children in the age group by 2010. One of the principle concerns in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is to provide basic education to the girls especially those belonging to the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and minorities. Efforts will be made to mainstream gender concerns in all the activities under SSA programme. The programme recognizes the need for special efforts to bring all out-of-school girls including girls belonging to the SC/ST minority communities to school. This would require a proper identification of out-of-school girls and children from disadvantaged sections of society.

Barriers to girls' education

The education of girls is lagging behind than boys at all levels of school education. Their enrolment rate is low and

drop out rate is higher than boys at all levels of education. Many girls leave schools even without completing elementary education. There are many socio-cultural, economic and educational barriers, which hinder their participation in education. Some of these barriers are discussed below:

Poverty: The rate of illiteracy is closely linked to poverty. Due to the poverty or low family income, if parents are not in a position to send both boys and girls to school, they usually send boys to schools and retain girls at home to do house-hold work. If education is free-up to primary stage, there is possibility to increase the participation of girls and it will not put any kind of financial burden on the parents all the same.

Number of children: In poor families generally, there are many children. According to the priority list of parents, girls' education is not compulsory and boys get a high chance of receiving education.

Child Marriage: Many girls in many states of India still get married at an early age, which affect their education to a great extent. (e.g. girls in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, etc.)

Customs and cultural practices: Many customs and cultural practices hinder higher education of girls. For examples many parents of a certain community do not send their daughters to schools when they attain puberty. Purdan system is also affecting education of girls.

Female teachers in schools: Girls are more interested in going to schools if female teachers are there in the schools. They are more comfortable and more vocal with female, thus actively focusing and participating in the learning processes. In rural areas also, parents are interested in sending their girl children to school if female teachers are present. If qualified female teachers are teaching in the school they feel more secured towards their girl children. They may be hesitating to send their girl children in male environment based school. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) recommended the need for having a female teacher in every primary school. It is to promote girls towards education by raising the sense of security and providing them a role model. If female teacher is not present in school, girls may not go to school, especially at upper primary level.

Transport facility: One of the barriers for girl education may be the location of schools which are far away from their homes, particularly in rural areas. Adequate transport system is needed for girl to attend the schools. It will be more convenient for them if school buses take responsibility for pick and drop facility for the girl children. In rural areas, other modes may be tried out.

Molestation/abuse in school: Most of the parents feel insecure towards their girl children as instances of abduction, rape, sexual harassment and molestation of girl dampens the enthusiasm of parents and girl students in pursuing their education beyond a certain age.

Inappropriate school timing: In rural areas morning time is not suitable for girl education, as they are engaged in domestic work at home or in farms and field during these hours. The enrolment and retention rate may be high when educational facilities are made available during periods suitable to them when they are free from domestic chores.

Toilet facility: This may be one of the reasons of lower participation rates of girls in education especially at upper primary level. The separate toilet facilities for girls must be created in the school premises. This must also cover the security aspect for girl. At the same time, toilet facility is needed for female teachers also.

Lack of girls' schools: Many parents do not want to send their daughters to coeducational schools especially at upper primary level. There is an urgent need to open separate schools for girls especially at upper primary level as a powerful strategy for bringing to a conclusive girls' school environment. There must be strong provision of good quality schools for girls if demand is there.

Lack of hostel facilities: One of the obstacles in girls' education is that schools are away from their homes, they cannot avail themselves of this facility due to lack of hostel arrangement. The girls belonging to SC/ST category would continue their education particularly in rural areas, if they are provided with free or inexpensive residential facilities nearer to the school.

Gender Discrimination: A number of practices within educational system reinforce gender-differentiated practices and promote inequality, gender bias and gender stereotyping.

SUMMARY

All activities relating to elementary education in general and education of girls in particular need to be judged with regard to achieving the target of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Constitution of India though calls for free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years, illiteracy is the major problem of India, particularly in rural India even today. Although there are many barriers to overcome this problem, gender disparity and gender inequality need to be addressed with special efforts on an urgent basis. Significantly, there are dozens of causes which keep the children away from schools and the quantum of these causes emerges more from girls' side than that of boys. Problems of illiteracy among girl children vary from place to place and region to region and across the groups as well. Current status of girls' education in India particularly in rural India draws the attention of all stakeholders to serve for rural development and reconstruction there in one way or the other. Such an effort influences the social and economic development of the country and thus paves a way for the achievement of the goals of education under SSA.

Since the educational status of women/girls was very low at the time of independence, various measures have been taken to improve their condition as per the Constitutional provision for equality to all citizens including girls. Various committees were set up to suggest ways to promote education of girls. The Secondary Education Commission, The Education Commission, the NPE 1968 and 1986 made special recommendations for improving girls education at various levels. All five

year plans made provisions for various initiatives and schemes to accelerate girls' education and women empowerment. Major programmes of UEE have special gender focus especially the DPEP and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan special schemes/programmes are launched under SSA to equalise educational opportunities among girls especially the girls from disadvantaged groups. Most of the time gender differences are observed in home, in society, schools, at work places and in political decision-making within the democratic process itself. More specifically it is reflected in the distribution of care work, household responsibilities and the decision-making powers at home and also this discrimination is seen in the parents' behaviors and choices as well as in total school environment. In specific situations, both the socio-cultural and the physical environments continue to create barriers to girls education, social malpractices, such as child marriage, while hardly affect the education of boys, they have a prominent adverse effect on the girls' education. These factors adversely contribute to creating unattractive environments in which girls must run the gauntlet of difficulties to remain in school, as a result of which their learning is severely compromised. A discriminatory attitude builds up among teachers and other members of society resulting in girls dropping out in large numbers.

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