

Vol III Issue VIII Feb 2014

Impact Factor : 2.2052(UIF)

ISSN No :2231-5063

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Golden Research Thoughts

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IMPACT FACTOR : 2.2052(UIF)

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2231-5063

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WOMEN'S EDUCATION: CURRENT POLICIES AND THE FUTURE COURSE

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Abstract:-Education is a tool for social transformation. An educated person thinks independently about the actions to be taken to solve the problem he/she is facing. Government interest in social development has given the substantial emphasis on developing human resources of the nations. In case of general population the educational level of women has been remained lower side as compared to males. There are several problems and challenges of women's education in India. This paper highlights the current policy and future need of women in Indian context. The current national policies and program r directed at the provisions of the quality education. The government is also making its efforts to universalize primary education to fulfill the commitment given for right to education. In this paper various action programs related to empowerment of girl child are discussed. Operation Black Board, Nutritional Support for Primary Education, Education Guarantee Scheme, District Primary Education Program, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Navoday Vidyalaya, and National Open Schools etc has been discussed along with policy the framework.

Keywords: Human Resource Development, Educational Policy, Women Education, School Dropouts, Enrollment, Intervention, Women's Role, Initiatives and Strategies.

INTRODUCTION:

The current national policies / programmes and strategies are directed at provision of quality education to all to include universal elementary education for children in the age group 6-14 years; continued special attention to children from the historically disadvantaged groups the SC, the ST , educationally backward minorities and children with special needs; vocationalization and extending secondary and higher education to all areas through the formal schools and colleges and through distance education and implementing Education for Women's Equality as a non negotiable priority area. The nation has one foot in the Information age and the other in fighting the curse of illiteracy and poverty of millions. Despite large scale expansion of the educational system, the goal of universal elementary education of eight years remains elusive on account of the rank poverty of 270 million Indians (Economic Survey,2001) and half our population surviving on \$ 1 a day. The proverbial battle has been to get the children from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, religious and linguistic minorities and other backward castes and groups into the school and to help them complete 5 to 8 years of education. It is estimated that 70 –80 % children in this age group are attending school (National Health and Family Survey, 1998-99 and the National sample Survey, 1997).

Initiatives taken by the government have resulted in significant progress in women's education. Various centrally sponsored schemes have been formulated to strengthen school education with special inputs into Science Education, Vocational Education, Culture, Values, Computer literacy and study, Educational Technology and education of children with disabilities. These schemes have benefited girl students in general. In addition there are schemes focussed on providing better facilities to girl students to enable them to pursue their education. Premier interventions made in the elementary education sector since the national Policy on Education 1986 (revised in 1992). Several schemes and programmes were launched to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). The scheme of Operation Blackboard (OB), Teacher Education reforms, National Programme for Nutritional Support for Primary Education, Non Formal Education, Mahila Samakhya, State specific projects in Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh , and Andhra Pradesh, and the District Primary Education Programme in 248 low female literacy districts of 18 states are important steps towards this among others.

Operation Blackboard besides creating minimum facilities of classrooms, teachers and teaching learning equipment, has paid special emphasis to recruit more and more women among the additional teachers being provided under the scheme. This has been done with the explicit purpose of providing women teachers for rural schools which are not only under staffed but have very low presence of female teachers. Shortage of women teachers in rural areas is seen as a negative factor for the growth of girls' education in rural communities.

The Programme of Nutritional Support for Primary education known as Mid – day Meal scheme was launched in 1995. Under the programme the scheme is to provide free of cost food grains to children at the rate of either 100 grams per school day per student in states / UTs where cooked meal is provided or three kilograms per month per child where food grains are being distributed subject to minimum 80 % of attendance. 90% of the primary schools are now covered under the programme. This programme has definitely increased enrolments among the very poor sections of our society.

The former Non Formal Education Scheme has been restructured recently as The Education Guarantee Scheme and the scheme of Alternative and Innovative Education to allow more flexibility and operationally more proactive. The Education Guarantee Scheme and the scheme of Alternative and Innovative Education would enable out of school children to return to mainstream school by bridge courses and 'back to school' camps. The revised NFE scheme allows for opening of an EGS centre in habitations not having a primary school within one kilometre and there are at least 100,000 such school less habitations.

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) is launched in 1994 as a centrally sponsored scheme providing special thrust to achieve Universalise of Primary Education (UPE). The programme is structured to provide additional inputs over and above the provisions made by the state governments for elementary education. DPEP is contextual and has a marked gender focus. The programme components include construction of classrooms and opening of new schools, opening of non – formal / Alternative schooling centres, appointment of new teachers, setting up of Block Resource Centres (BRCs), Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs), teacher training, development of teaching learning materials, research based interventions, special interventions for education of girls, Scheduled Caste children, Scheduled Tribe children, disabled children etc. The programme has proved the value of decentralised planning to a more meaningful involvement of the community. Presently 248 districts in 18 states have been covered under the programme.

DPEP has added 10,000 new formal schools and 15,000 are in the pipeline. Special care has been taken to provide toilets for girls. 53,000 Alternative Schooling Centres of various kinds and about 16,000 summer schools have been set up so far. Enrolment in primary classes increased by about 20 lakh (13 lakh in formal schools and 6.3 lakh in alternative modes between 1995-96 and 1999-2000 in phase I districts and 186.9 lakh in 1998-99 to 198.2 lakh in 1999-2000 in phase II and III districts. The overall GER in phase I districts increased from 83.9 % in 1995-96 to 95.1 % in 1999-2000. Gender gap in enrolment is closing rapidly (MoHRD 2001).

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the newest effort of the Government of India to universalise Elementary education in a mission mode. Literally meaning Education for All Campaign, the SSA aims to provide useful quality education to all children in the age group 6-14 years by the year 2010. In order to signify the nation's priority for elementary education, a National Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Mission is being established with the Prime minister as its chairperson and the MHRD Minister as its vice chair person. Conceived as a centre state partnership, the states are being requested to establish state level implementation societies with State Chief Minister in the chair. Several states have already implemented this. The SSA does not envisage any separate structures but would only try to bring convergence of all efforts. An attempt will be made to have functional decentralisation right up to the school level and to ensure community participation through the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) and the Tribal Councils in Scheduled areas, including the Gram Sabha (the Village Council). States would be encouraged to enlarge the accountability framework by involving the NGOs, teachers, activists and women's organisations and groups, among others. Under the SSA, District Elementary Educational Plans will be prepared based on community based habitation plans to ensure, community ownership, accountability and transparency. Education of girls especially those belonging to the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes, will be one of the principal concerns of the SSA.. there will be greater focus on the educational participation of children from the SC/ST groups, religious and linguistic minorities, other disadvantaged groups and children with special needs. Efforts will be made to mainstream gender concerns in all the activities. Every activity will be judged in terms of its gender focus. Besides mainstreaming, special efforts like the Mahila Samakhya type of mobilisation and organisation, back to school camps for adolescent girls, large – scale process based constitution of Mahila Samoohs, will also be attempted. The selection criteria takes into account the low female literacy among the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women.

The SSA recognises the need for special efforts to bring the out of school girls to school. This would require a proper identification of girls who are out of school in the course of micro planning / school mapping. Experiences across the States under Mahila Samakhya and the DPEP have registered the need for a clear perspective on women's issues. The provision for girls' education would have to be situated in the local contexts and interventions designed to suit the specific community needs in this regard.

The objectives of the SSA are:

All children in schools. Education Guarantee Centres, Alternative Schools, 'back to school camps by 2003.
All children complete five years of schooling by 2007.
All children complete eight years of schooling by 2010.
Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life.
Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at the elementary stage by 2010 and;
Universal retention by 2010.

Provisions for girls under SSA are :

Special mainstreaming camps for out of school girls under the Alternative and Innovative Education component;
Provision of process – based community participation with a focus on the participation of women;
Provision of context specific innovative intervention for girls' education – up to Rs. 15 lakh per intervention and up to Rs. 50 lakh in a district in a particular year;
Free textbooks for all girls up to Class VIII;
At least 50 % of the teachers to be appointed have to be women;
Community based monitoring , partnership with research and resource institutions and periodic feedback on interventions.

Specific strategies are made to cover out of school girls belonging to special groups like child labour, street children, adolescent girls, girls belonging to certain backward communities , children for migrating families etc.

The National Literacy Mission set up in 1988 has worked through a volunteer based Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) mode in which effective mobilisation formed the bed rock and majority of the learners were women. The TLC have covered 559 of the total number of 588 districts so far. The continuing education programme is going on in 292 districts and TLC are going on in 172 districts. The focus is on the promotion of literacy and awareness among the women and the SC/ST and backward classes. The dramatic social mobilisation under the TLCs had an enormous impact on other social sectors notably women's empowerment, health, environment awareness/ The TLCs have served the cause of promoting equity in society, in redefining gender relations and in questioning caste based social categories.

Scheme of Strengthening of Boarding and Hostel facilities form Girl Students of Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools

Under this scheme initiated in 1993-94, 100% assistance is given to voluntary organisations for providing boarding exclusive facilities to girls studying in high/ higher secondary schools in educationally backward districts, particularly those inhabited predominantly by the SC/ST and educationally backward communities. Till date, about 20,000 girls primarily from rural remote areas and belonging to the disadvantaged groups have benefited from the scheme. The scheme was evaluated in 1998-99 and has since been redesigned to cover girls from Class VI to Class XII and also provision is made for providing building grant to the NGOs who can provide land for building up hostels. Field work and in depth interviews with these girls showed remarkable self confidence, high educational and occupational aspirations and a sense of determination to do well in life.

Navodaya Vidyalayas : Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas(JNV), have been set up to rural areas as pace setting institutions for talented rural children, as well as to ensure greater participation of SC, ST, women and the other less well off sections. These schools have been provided the best of infrastructure and teachers at par with any good private residential school in the country. One third of the seats are reserved for girls in these schools. The percentage of girls in JNVs was 32% in 1997-98.

Kendriya Vidyalas (KV) : Kendriya Vidyalas (KV) have been set up across the country and even in several missions abroad to cater to the children of Central government employees. Thirty percent seats in these KVs are reserved for girls.

National Open School (NOS) :The National open school provides opportunities for continuing education to those who have missed opportunities to complete school though general and vocational courses from primary to higher secondary level..The NOS reaches out to a prioritised clientele which includes school drop outs and marginalised groups, such as rural youth, girls and women, SC and ST etc. Te national open school provides subsidies in the form of concessions in admission fee. During the year 1998-99, thirty one thousand one hundred and sixty eight women benefited from such concessions.

Change in Admission Procedures : As per the recommendations contained in the 99th Report of the Rajya Sabha Committee, on petitions on the matter regarding elimination of discrimination against women working in different walks of life and recognition of women as an independent entity, it has been decided to give the option to the child for giving the name of the mother or father or both in the school admission form, application forms and certificates etc.

Vocationalization of Secondary Education

Higher Education : Girls have made tremendous progress in higher education since 1950-51. The percentage share of girls amongst the students in highest education has risen from 10% to 40%. The highest percentage of girls to total in higher education is in Kerala(62.24%) and the lowest is for Bihar (18.32%). Evaluation studies of the Mahila Samakhya approach, indicate that this programme has been able to build capacities and self confidence among these women's collectives and has become a vehicle of women's empowerment. The Mahila Samakhya is currently working in 8000 villages in 53 districts of Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Assam. In several states Mahila Samakhya has been incorporated in the District Primary Education as a strategy for promoting girls' education and women's empowerment. Such empowerment has had a very positive effect on educational participation of girls. There is indication for further strengthening these linkages with basic education of girls by giving the women's groups a more active role in the management of the school by designing more flexible approaches for their participation.

The Ninth Plan sees education as the most crucial investment in human development by raising the quality of life by influencing improvement health , hygiene , demographic profile and productivity. The Prime Minister Special Action plan (SAP) identified an expansion and improvement of social infrastructure in the field of education. The National Agenda for Governance stands committed to total eradication of illiteracy , implementing the Constitutional promises of free and compulsory education for all children up to the age fourteen and further providing equal access and opportunity of educational standards at all levels by increasing the spending on education up to 6 % of the G.D.P. Education of girls and women's empowerment are seen as the drive arm of national development and an important yardstick of human development within the framework of human rights and human dignity. Special strategies have been listed under various heads in the Plan document.

Elementary Education : Providing primary education is a universal basic service , declaring it be a fundamental right for children up to the age of fourteen years , legal embargo on child labour and participation of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are seen as major strategies for UEE. Social mobilisation heightened awareness of human rights, violations in respect of women and persons from disadvantaged sections of society, implementation of the provisions of persons with disabilities of 1995 are also seen as important strategies of UEE. The large chunk of out of school children who are neither in school nor in identifiable child labour are selected for special attention. In spite of increase enrolments at the secondary stage the age specific enrolment ratio appears to be low and also there are wide disparities in educational access as between the urban and rural areas and between two sexes. The Ninth Plan further emphasised revision of curricula to relate the same to work opportunities , through pre vocational training at the secondary stage and vocationalisation of general higher secondary education. The Plan continues emphasis on reduction of regional, inter group and gender disparities.

Secondary Education : The Plan proposed to regulate expansion by creating new facilities for girls , other deprived sections and children in rural areas at the secondary levels. The National and State Open Schools will try to meet the educational needs of those who are unable to enrol in the formal system. Vocationalisation after ten years of schooling and improvement in the quality of education particularly, Science, Mathematics and Computer Literacy through with support. The potential of Open learning system would be exploited for offering a variety of courses.

In remote and tribal areas more hostel facilities would be created for girls in Secondary Schools. Additional hostel facilities will be provided to girls particularly in Tribal and Remote areas so that attendance rate of girls will improve. MHRD will co-ordinate this programme with those of the Ministry of Women Welfare.

University and Higher Education : The priority for the Ninth plan was to be on the expansion on education largely in the underserved areas with the focus on improving the coverage of women and disadvantaged groups by using financial assistance as a leverage.

Performance of the Ninth Plan

i) Institutional expansion for improvement of access

There has been large scale expansion of the educational system since independence. The number of primary schools since the First Five Year Plan have increased more than three times. However, the middle schools have multiplied fourteen times and the high / higher secondary schools have increased sixteen fold. However, considering universalisation of elementary education (UEE) is both a Constitutional given and a basic human rights of children, the number of middle schools fall far short of the requirement. In the Eighth Five Year Plan it was decided that the then existing ratio of four primary schools is to one middle school would be brought down to 3 : 1 in that Plan and subsequently 2 : 1. It is not understood that unless all the children in the age group 6-14 are enrolled in the first instance and have easy access to complete middle stage i.e. from class I – VIII, how would we ever think of UEE without universal provision. In any case the rural girls do not cross the village boundary and are, therefore, limited in their outreach. The three kilometre yardstick will finally have to go and be replaced by a full eight year school for every child.

For every 100 primary schools there are only 30 middle / upper primary schools , 13 high schools and less than 5 higher secondary schools. The situation in rural areas would be far worse. The last available rural urban statistics dating to Sept. 30th 1993 (Sixth All India Educational Survey) show that at that point on an average something like 13 % villages had no primary school, 78 % villages had no middle schools and high schools were available only in 8 % villages and only 2 % villages had a higher secondary school. It is ironical that three fourth are population live in rural areas. More that fifty percent of the higher secondary schools are located in urban areas. As would be obvious from both these tables the regional variations are extremely large. The access ratio in many states is 1 : 10 or even more. Even in state like Tamil Nadu there are only 18 middle schools for 100 primary schools.

The availability of secondary and higher secondary being so low in rural areas the shortage of women teachers in rural areas would continue as it is only after twelve years of schooling girls can enter in teacher training courses and for that matter entry into any post secondary or higher general or technical education is a remote possibility for rural girls.

In the Ninth Plan, there was a target of building seventy five thousand rooms / buildings at the elementary stage. There has been tremendous attempt to provide primary schooling through formal and alternative modes. It may perhaps be safe to presume that while access to three to five years of schooling be now available to most of our village children especially through our major EFA initiatives like Lok Jhumbish, Shiksha Karmi, DPEP, Bihar Education Projects etc., the situation of availability of middle schooling to every village child continues to be a big question mark. The Tenth Plan would have to contend with huge back logs from the unmet targets of the Ninth Plan.

And the burgeoning slum population in Metropolitan areas remains unserved by the urban authorities as far as any basic amenities concerned leave alone schooling.

ii) Enrolment and retention

A fairly strong gender focus has resulted in greater participation of girls in elementary schooling but the male female gap in enrolment ratios and share of girls in total enrolments is below par for the country as a whole and is very marked at the Middle Stage. Intra female disparities as between rural urban areas and among general populations, Scheduled Castes (SC) , Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Castes (OBC), and some Minorities are sharp. Regional disparities are immense. Against the Ninth Plan target of additional enrolment of 25 million children at the primary level and 16 million at the middle level , there is very modest increase in the enrolments at the the primary stage (500,000) and a noticeable decline at the upper primary stage. This calls for an immediate review of the strategies, if we mean to have all children in the age group in school, an Education Guarantee Centre or in a Back to School Camp by 2003 and universal elementary education for all children in the age group 6-14 years by 2010 as per the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan . Unless, the targets for reaching universal provision, universal enrolment and universal retention are realistically worked out and are adequately backed by required funds ,sound management, strong political will and desire of people themselves, we would still be chasing the goal of UEE in 2010.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, further sees quality education for girls as a non negotiable area in view of the fact girls form bulk of the non enrolled/ out of school children and their education alone can redeem the status of women and make them empowered women of the future.

In order to remove the nutritional deficiency of children from lesser well off sections of population, a National Programme of Mid Day Meal was started in August 1995. Evaluation studies have shown that the impact of this scheme has been positive in general, the impact of a hot cooked meal being more than just distribution of grains. However, there are clear indications from grain surplus states of Punjab and Haryana that this scheme is of no use to them and is a sheer waste as there are hardly any people left below the poverty line.

Besides, there are several other incentives like free books and stationery, free uniforms, stipends and even residential facilities and area specific programmes for girls and children from deprived sections to include the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes and muslim minority.

In 1996-97 there were estimated 279,000 centres with an enrolment of 7 million, their numbers having risen to 300,000 presently with an enrolment of 7.4.million.

The growth of girls participation since 1950 -51 is very heartening but the gender gaps continue to increase with every successive higher level at the school stage. It is interesting to note the percentage of girls to total in higher education is slightly higher than at the high/ higher secondary stage. As we are aware both secondary and higher education of girls started as an urban elite middle class phenomenon , it continues to be the same even today with the dies heavily loaded against rural girls. Only about 3 out of 100 rural girls have the likelihood of reaching Class XII compared to 23 urban girls. Likewise for every 100 boys in Class I in rural areas there are only 6 boys making it to class XII compared to 31 boys in urban areas.

The enrolment ratio of girls (to their age group) has shown tremendous increase since 1950 till 1999 but the progress in terms of the Eighth Plan and the Ninth Plan is indeed slow and even negative at the upper primary stage, unless this is a sign of moving towards more net figures in the last decade with better retention rates.

There is increased enrolment and improved retention The dropout rate for the primary Classes (I-V) has gone down from 62% to 39% for boys and from 71% to 41% for girls during the period 1960-61 to 1997-98. At the middle stage the dropout rate has

come down from 75% to 54% for boys and from 85% to 60% for girls during the same period. The last available figures indicate that the drop out rate for SC/ST children is substantially higher than that for general groups, the same could be true for rural girls.

Women Teachers

While urban schools are overstaffed and crowded with women teachers, the rural schools have both staff shortage and very low presence of female teachers. This factor is aggravated in low female literacy states and continues to hamper educational participation of girls especially at the post primary stages. As field studies show there is a clear demand for more women teachers at all levels especially at the post primary stages. Parents do not appear to be averse to coeducation but feel that presence of women on the teaching / administrative staff of these schools is a must. During some field visits even the all male teachers faculty of rural schools expressed that having one or more women teacher is necessary even in primary schools as girls feel shy and do not open up much and are unable to share their problems and anxieties. There was a general feeling that women teachers especially at the post pubertal stage can enhance the self confidence of girls through systematic counselling, besides being good role models. (Nayar, 1996-97)

The **National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 and its Programme of Action (revised in 1992)** which is the most revolutionary statement of its times and gives education a mandate to work for women's equality and empowerment. There is effort now not only to provide equality of educational opportunity but to transform the entire content and process of education for achieving gender equality and a realignment of gender roles to make them more equitable and harmonious. (See Para 4.2 and 4.3 of the NPE).

Education for Women's Equality

4.2 Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering. Women's studies will be promoted as a part of various courses and educational institutions encouraged to take up active programmes to further women's development.

4.3 The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in elementary education will receive overriding priority, through provision of special support services, setting of time targets, and effective monitoring. Major emphasis will be laid on women's participation in vocational technical and professional education at different levels. The policy of non discrimination will be pursued vigorously to eliminate sex stereotyping in vocational and professional courses and promote women's participation in non traditional occupations, as well as in existing and emerging technologies.

Excerpts NPE, 1986

The present study reviews the development of education of girls and women in India since 1947 with reference to the policy initiatives and planning and management strategies adopted to remove their educational and social backwardness of ages. A valiant bid was made to provide equality as a fundamental right under the Constitution of India to all citizens, prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth and also authorizing the State to make any special provision for women and children and the socially and educationally backward classes or citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled. Planned socio economic development was to be an instrument for removal of steep inequalities and disparities and for creating conditions for a reasonable quality of life through the provision of education, health and employment opportunities and allied services based on the twin planks of growth and equity. Much has happened to raise the educational and social situation of women at the level of policy and rhetoric but perhaps much more effort is needed to translate intentions into action to remove the policy performance gaps and the distance between the textual and the contextual position of women. Further we are committed to major international conventions on the rights of all humans, men, women and children in all corners and nooks of the globe.

Fifty years is a very small period in the life of a society with deeply entrenched norms and social structures of several thousands of years but perhaps a reasonable period to assess the role of planned development, the strategies employed and the processes unleashed to educate and empower the masses and to provide the back up for scientific and technological development, for modernization of agriculture, for industrial growth, for a role in the information revolution and above all to be

measured on the yardstick of human development. We need to be conscious of the fact that even today we are at the 128th rank (value 0.563) on Human Development Index (HDI); 108th rank (value) on the Gender Development Index (GDI) in 1999 and 95th rank (value 0.240) on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) in 1998; let alone the fact of missing millions among the female half of the population between each census. There are two clear axes of promotion of girls' education viz., expansion of educational facilities at all levels of education and following the accepted policy of undifferentiated curricula and reorienting the content and process of education to make it gender sensitive and a vehicle of women's equality and empowerment. The Post NPE / Jomtien efforts in the area of girls' education appear to be giving positive results, a major yardstick being sharp increase in female literacy levels and greater retention and transition of girls to successive higher levels of education.

India has two major successes to report, one, is the faster growth of girls' participation at the primary level and more importantly the redesigning of the content and the process of education for promoting gender equality and for creating a girl friendly educational and social environment.

Indicators employed for Gender Audit of education of girls are : (a) access ; growth rate of female enrolments at the elementary stage ; girls as percentage to total both in school and out of school ; enrolment ratios; dropout rates / retention ; internal efficiency ; achievement levels , and (b) measures to enhance women's empowerment and promoting gender equality through curriculum . Against the broad findings we look at the critical areas needing our attention and some suggested interventions

The Policy Framework

The Constitution of India- equality, protective discrimination, planned development- growth with justice and equity.
The International Conventions to which India is a signatory such as UN Declaration of Human Rights, (1948); CEDAW (1979); the Rights of the Child (1989); SAARC Decade of the Girl Child (1991-2000).
The National Policy on Education 1968 and the National Policy on Education (1986) and its Programme of Action revised in 1992 – Focus on removal of educational disparities: Education for Women's Equality and their empowerment, on removal of female illiteracy, on accessing education to rural girls, girls from educationally backward minorities and from the historically disadvantaged sections of population, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and children with special needs.
The National Perspective Plan on Women (1988-2000)
The National Policy on the Child (1974)

Planning Initiatives and Strategies

Setting up of commissions and committees on education and more particularly on the education of women and girls – recommendations form the basis for further policy formulation and planning and management of programmes and schemes prominent being Durga Bai Deshmukh Committee on Women's education (1958-59); Bhaktavatsalam Committee (1963); Hansa Mehta Committee (1962-64); The Committee on Status of Women in India (1971).
Education of girls and women in the Five Year Plans – the thrusts, the programmes, the processes, the schemes, the allocations, the structures.
Conceptual shifts and modification of approaches – from macro centralized to decentralized, disaggregated micro, people based planning and management ; from human capital to human resource development to human development; from gender neutral to the Girl Child focus and women's empowerment as the central organizing principle.
Policy research and research based educational planning; researches influenced by the NPE 1986 (revised in 1992) and by perspectives from women's movement and women's studies.
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Results

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Enhanced educational participation among girls, faster growth.

Reduced dropout, better retention among girls.

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A positive climate and acceptance of the need for educating girls by the parents, the communities

Better sensitized teachers, teacher educators and the bureaucracy

Adoption of a large number of pro girl child schemes and programmes by the Central and state governments.

Entry of girls into non conventional courses, how so ever, limited.

Better presentation of women's roles and contribution to society.

Mobilisation and empowerment of women.

Issues that remain

Huge literacy and skill deficits of women; female literacy has touched the 50% mark in 1997.

Poor availability of technical and professional training opportunities in rural areas.

Accessing post primary education to girls in rural remote areas and from disadvantaged groups due to continued underdevelopment of rural areas and low educational provision

Enrolment and retention of SC, ST, OBC girls and those belonging to educationally backward minorities

Education of Out of School girls in the age group (10-18 years)

Low percentage of women teachers in rural areas

Improvement of quality in state and state aided schools

Curricular reforms to make education more meaningful and relevant

Continued gender stereo typing of vocational and technical education courses.

Need for gender sensitive, gender inclusive transaction of curricula and its transaction

Further, gender inputs into pre service and in service education of teachers and teacher educators; textbook writers and textbook production boards, CBSE and State Boards of Education

Education- health – nutrition of children and adolescents- Lack of inter sectoral convergence

Lack of functional relationship of education department with the Panchayat Raj institutions.

Lack of regular inflow of rural urban statistics ; absence of data in case of educationally backward minorities.

Low participation of communities.

Policy performance gaps persist for lackadaisical partial implementation of recommendations, schemes, programmes. No worthwhile co-ordinating mechanisms for planning and monitoring of women's education.

No holistic approach, largely sectoral, segmented and truncated- lack of convergence

No organic linkages among and between levels, concerned departments and desks within departments.

Proposed Interventions

Put out a white paper on Girls' Education periodically.

Draw up a carefully designed national plan of action with clear time frame, allocation of resources and assigning definite responsibility to concerned government agencies and involving NGOs.

The revised POA recommendation for setting up of women's/ girls education cells/bureaus in MHRD/Planning Commission/ National agencies and an inter ministerial/ inter departmental steering/monitoring group has not been operationalised. We need to do this at the earliest forthwith

Standing Committee on Girls Education of MHRD has never sat so far. This should be activated.

We need a strong cell in the Department of Education, MHRD and corresponding structures in the states/UTs to look at the problems of girls from rural areas, educationally backward minorities and other disadvantaged groups.

Junior/Part/alternative schooling in small unserved habitations

Upgrade all primary schools to middle schools. Girls do not cross village boundaries ordinarily. The 3 Km radial distance for a middle school is forbidding at times due to terrain or reasons of personal safety. Moreover, we have to be practical that if all the

feeder primary schools are able to retain all entrants in Class I and nearly all of them pass out of Class V, the present serving middle school can by no means take in all primary school graduates. Further, there is enough evidence that girls continue on to higher classes wherever there are complete middle/secondary or higher secondary schools within the village.

Make all weather motorable roads to all villages as a first charge and provide free school bus service to all elementary school children(ClassesI-VIII) and to girls up to the higher secondary level. The trade off between expenditure on building additional 2 million classrooms/ motorable roads and the large array of the existing incentive schemes needs to be studied. Let us help people to dig their own wells rather than live in the hope of receiving sporadic trickles of water and what is left of a scheme at the end of the delivery route

Girls primary level boarding schools/ashramshalas are needed in extreme circumstances like scattered populations in forests, deserts, mountains, for instance. Successful experiments of Madhya Pradesh TWD blocks and Lok Zumbish need to be studied before taking any major policy decision.

Need to move to block based holistic inter sectoral approach to education and training of girls and women

However, it is of prime importance to open exclusive Balika Vidya Peeths in every block with provision for general and vocational education up to Class XII with residential facilities for girls of the villages of the blocks which do not have a middle or a high school. Vocational courses could include modern trades and among others elementary teacher's training, training as para health workers, Anganwadi workers, pre school teachers, Gram Sevikas etc.

One girls' hostel attached to a higher secondary school in each block to accommodate atleast 200 girls from Class VI onwards.

Let us not put the problem of education of Muslim girls under the mat. Census needs to give us figures about their single year age wise enrolments/participation rates for developing special strategies at par with other educationally and economically disadvantaged groups. Action Plans for blocks with heavy concentration of Muslim populations need to be developed and operationalized.

Shortage of women teachers poses a major barrier for girls schooling in rural areas. Four year residential courses for middle pass rural girls be designed to prepare women teachers for the elementary stage in all three streams(Languages,science and mathematics, social sciences) with pedagogical inputs). Some states are offering Elementary Teacher's training as part of the Vocational Courses being offered in school for general education at the higher secondary stage

Distance education potential is immense and needs to be tapped for educating girls living in difficult areas and the large out of school girl's population.

Schemes like Apni Bet Apna Dhan (Haryana), Rajyalakshmi ans Sarawati Yojana of Rajasthan and similar other attempts to secure the fundamental right to life need to be strengthened and linked to education for long term effects.

Wherever, Panchayats are even partially functional(even when lacking the teeth of funds) and have owned up their school, things have improved for children's education in general and for girls in particular. Greater cooperation and participation of PRIs is needed.

Articulation and organisation of villgae women around issues of daily survival include their concern for education of their sons and daughters.Mahila mandals / samoohs need to be strengthened and revived as a major plank of rural development and women's empowerment

Expanded programme of formal and non-formal vocational training for rural girls in health, employment etc. Transition rates for rural girls need to be improvement both at middle and secondary level.

A national programme of strengthening Science and Maths teaching in all girls school along with a scheme of meet shortage of science and maths teachers in girls school. Special focus is to improve access of girls to secondary and technical education in rural areas.

Studies are needed on impact of incentives; institutional structures/ delivery systems to include EFA projects, open learning and alternative schooling

Need for adequate MIS on women's education and training and gender sensitive planning .

The implementation of the Ninth Plan provisions for education of girls and women's empowerment need to be reviewed urgently. The Prime Minister's Special Action plan has identified expansion and improvement of educational /social infrastructure as a critical area and women's empowerment as one of the nine primary objectives of the Ninth Plan. To this effect several strategies were proposed to ensure easy and equal access to women and girls for eradication of illiteracy; to eliminate gender bias in all educational programmes; appoint additional teachers at primary and upper primary level, women to form at least 50% of these; to reduce drop out of girls and to increase their retention through incentives, improved quality of education, distance education and self study programmes; to expand and diversify existing second level vocational and technical education especially in non traditional and emerging areas;to institute plans for free education of girls up to college level, including professional courses; special package for girl child from poverty groups announced on 15 August, 1997; special attention to low female literacy pockets, SC,ST, OBC,Minorities, disabled, working children and children from deserts, hilly area,scoastal areas, deep forests, children of migratory populations; and hostels for girls at the secondary stage in remote areas, among others. It is perhaps necessary to point out that contours and implementation of free education for all girls and the special package for the girl child for instance are not very clear. We need to concentrate on the education of rural girls and women or may we say adopt a RURAL SHE APPROACH to all development. The following national programmes need to be worked out:

Rural Girls Education Fellowship Programme : a five year programme to help rural primary school girl graduates complete

ten years of general education; a two year fellowship for completing two years of general and technical Plus Two level education.

II Rural Women Teachers Fellowship programme : for primary and secondary levels.

III Strengthening of teaching of Science and Maths in Rural (Girls) schools.

IV An integrated programme for education ,training and development of the out of school girls and young women (10-35 years) includin health and legal awareness inputs.

V Balika Vidya Peeths in each block with provision for general and vocational education up to Class XII with residential facilities for at least 200 girls from villages without a middle or a high/ higher secondary school.

VI At least one rural degree college with vocational and general education courses for girls in every district; reservation of seats for rural girls in college hostels.

Planning Initiatives and Strategies

Setting up of commissions and committees on education and more particularly on the education of women and girls – recommendations form the basis for further policy formulation and planning and management of programmes and schemes prominent being Durga Bai Deshmukh Committee on Women's education (1958-59); Bhaktavatsalam Committee (1963); Hansa Mehta Committee (1962-64); The Committee on Status of Women in India (1971).

Education of girls and women in the Five Year Plans – the thrusts, the programmes, the processes, the schemes, the allocations, the structures.

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Mobilisation and empowerment of women.

Education of girls and women has been high on national agenda since independence. Several strategies were adopted to promote education of girls in independent India. The National policies are designed to reach out to girls and other disadvantaged groups in rural remote areas. A major conceptual shift is noticed in the last decade in the approach to the education of girls and women. Education of girls is seen as a basic human right and crucial to national development. Investment in female education is now being seen as a development imperative rather than a plain moral commitment, thus, lifting it from the plane of pure ethics to pure economics. Despite considerable progress towards literacy and elementary education, wide gaps persist between girls and boys in enrolments at the secondary and higher secondary stages and in higher education. Girls have tended to lag behind their counterparts especially in rural areas because of low availability of schooling facilities. Two premier concerns can be underlined regarding the importance of accessing secondary education to girls. One, secondary education would perhaps be a terminal stage for a vast majority of our young and hence needs to be extended to all groups especially girls belonging to rural areas and among them other disadvantaged groups like the Scheduled Castes (SC) and the Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Castes (OBC) and the minorities. Another, secondary education is the crucial bridge to higher general, professional and technical education and also provides teachers for the primary stage.

As the secondary school board results are showing each year, girls tend to perform better than boys both in terms of pass percentage and now even in merit positions and grades. This continued good performance of girls has adequately established the fact that given equal access and opportunities, girls do as well as boys and even better. It would be pertinent to note that the girls who get as far as the secondary and higher secondary stages belong largely to urban middle class or are from among the better off rural populations. In fact very few girls go beyond the village hedge for schooling. On account of extensive efforts in the post NPE 1986 and JOMTIEN EFA declaration (1990) period, access to five years of primary schooling, as of today, appears to be assured to all children even in the smallest of hamlets and habitations. However, only around one fourth of our villages would have a middle school. According to the Sixth All India Education Survey (1993), only about 8% villages had a secondary school and a bare 2% had the good fortune to have a higher secondary school within the village. This being the situation rural girls who are relatively less mobile compared to rural boys are unable to avail of the post primary educational facilities in any meaningful fashion and drop out of the system. The problem of girls' education does not stand alone but is inextricably linked with the status of women and the underdevelopment of rural areas.

The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 and its programme of Action (POA) and the revised policy formulations of 1992 lay special emphasis on education of girls and women and commits the entire educational system to work for women's equality and empowerment. These documents spell out the immediate long-term goals of education development and also the strategies to be adopted for the achievement of these goals. The Government of India has instituted several schemes to promote education of disadvantaged girls from rural areas, SC, ST, OBC and minorities. In the wake of the National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 and its Programme of Action (revised in 1992) which is the most revolutionary statement of its times and gives education a mandate to work for women's equality and empowerment. There is effort now not only to provide equality of educational opportunity but to transform the entire content and process of education for achieving gender equality and a realignment of gender roles to make them more equitable and harmonious. (See Para 4.2 and 4.3 of the NPE at the cover). The National Policy of Education came after the UN Development Decade for Women (1985-95) and reflected adequately the national aspirations for removal of all disparities, of caste, of sex, of region, and to carry basic education to all sections of society living in any nook or corner of the country. This was then the commitment that India carried to the World Conference for All at Jomtien in 1990 and has since then reaffirmed its commitment to attaining the goal of Education for All. This was also a period when experience showed that for raising the status of women, the interventions have to be made very early and the entire South Asian Region committed itself to work for the survival, protection and development of the girl child. As part of the SAARC Decade of the GIRL Child, all national governments including India prepared a Plan of Action to operationalize various aspects of the development of the girl child to include health and education. Substantial inputs have gone into primary education (claiming half the financial outlays and also external funding), adult literacy and women's development and empowerment during the post NPE period. Women's empowerment is increasingly seen as the drive arm for attaining the goals of Education for All and Health for All by the year 2000. It is anticipated that substantive gains in education of girls and women's empowerment would accrue.

There are two clear axes of promotion of girls education viz., expansion of educational facilities and following the accepted policy of undifferentiated curricula and reorienting the content and process of education to make it gender sensitive and a vehicle of women's equality and empowerment. Theoretically, all formal and non-formal education and training programmes are open to women. In addition provision exists for opening of separate institutions or separate wings for women/girls exclusively. Education is free for girls up to the higher secondary stage and several states have made education free for girls right up to the university level. Besides free education for all children up to the age of fourteen, there are incentive schemes like free noon meals, free books, free uniforms and attendance scholarships for girls and children from disadvantaged groups. The coverage of these schemes is, however, very low and their management is really wanting. Girls belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes receive additional benefits like stipends, residential facilities. Post matric scholarships are given to all SC and ST students for general and technical higher education and they also enjoy reservations in all higher education institutions/courses and job reservations and reservations in legislatures. As a result of the protective discrimination policies under constitutional provisions, the enrolment of the SC and ST children has considerably improved but their drop out

rates are still considerably higher than those for the non - scheduled groups in elementary education both at the primary and the middle stages, i.e., Classes I-VIII.

In the first three Five Year Plans, girls' education was given special component with earmarked allocations. This was discontinued later. In the Eighth Five Year Plan, a central scheme provided funds to the states to hire a woman teacher for all single teacher primary schools and also funds for cash awards and prizes for villages, blocks and districts doing well in female education/literacy. In view of the present paper education of girls and women has been a premier policy concern and has received considerable attention as a part of socio economic planning expected to balance growth with justice. We have taken note of the Constitutional and legal provisions for women's education and development , the efforts made by the State, the planning initiatives and the strategies which have yielded favourable results and have also taken note of the progress made during the last fifty years especially during the 1990s. Much has been achieved considering not even one in a hundred females in the population were found literate in 1901. At 2001 Census count, 52% of female population aged 7+ was literate and female literacy and girls' education grew at a faster pace compared to their male counterparts during the 19990s. Girls now form 44% of the students enrolled at the primary stage; 40% at the middle stage ; 39% at the secondary stage and 40% in higher education. In higher education, girls form 35 to 45% of the students enrolled in different streams except in engineering and technology courses.

The urban middle class girls are tough contenders for their male counterparts but a vast majority of rural girls, and those belonging to educationally backward minorities and urban sections, remain outside the fold of education due to poor access and low utilisation. Given equal opportunity, girls do as well as boys, even better. As the secondary school board results are showing each year, girls tend to perform better than boys both in terms of pass percentage and now even in merit positions and grades. This continued good performance of girls has adequately established the fact that given equal access and opportunities, girls do as well as boys and even better. It would be pertinent to note that the girls who get as far as the secondary and higher secondary stages belong largely to urban middle class or are from among the better off rural populations. Gender, caste and class appear to be the deciding factors for access and success in education. The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) puts a premium on education of girls and women's empowerment as core factors for national development and the Tenth Five Year Plan is on the anvil. Below, we briefly recount the efforts, the inputs, the results, the issues that remain and the future thrusts.

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Gender sensitization and orientation of educational personnel.

Mobilisation of women and the communities.

Gender Equality through Curriculum- Elimination of gender bias from textbooks and preparation of handbooks, resource materials and exemplar materials.

Women's Empowerment Year 2001

Outcomes

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Entry of girls into non conventional courses, how so ever, limited.

Better presentation of women's roles and contribution to society.

Mobilisation and empowerment of women and communities.

Issues that remain

Literacy and skill deficits of women

Female literacy has just crossed the half way mark. In 2001, 54% females aged 7+ were found literate compared to 76% males. The number female literates has gone up from 129.5 million in 1991 to 225 million in 2001 and the number of illiterates has come down from 200 million to 189.6 million, a decline of 10.5 million during this period. Urban female literacy rate is double of the rural female literacy rate and SC and ST women are at the bottom of the heap.

The skill deficits of rural women are huge on account of lower literacy and extremely poor access to secondary /higher secondary education. Ten to twelve years of schooling is the entry requirement for second and third level technical and professional education. There is poor availability of technical and professional training opportunities in rural areas. Rural female productivity is not only poor but often negative due to low skill formation, poor health and nutrition, unemployment and under employment Unless we wake up, rural females have little chance of surviving in the new machiavellian economic order which is more capital and technology intensive and less labour intensive. And, further, it is based on principles of ruthless competition, high lay offs, 'you prove or perish' – Social Darwinism has little space for the illiterate, the unskilled, the poor, the handicapped.

India's performance on the Human Development is not very encouraging being placed at the 128th rank (value 0.563) on Human Development Index (HDI), 108th rank on Gender Development Index (Human Development Report, 2000) and 95th rank on the Gender Empowerment Measure (Human Development Report, 1999). While Japan had 10 years of per capita education in 1950, in India, the mean years of schooling are 2.4 years for the population as a whole, the average years per capita being 3.5 years for males and 1.2 years for females (Human Development in South Asia, 1998).

Five decades away from the adoption of the Constitution, we are still unable to fulfil the Constitutional Directive of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE), Rural urban disparities grow wider with every successive higher level of education in terms of access and enrolments.

Post primary education for girls from rural/ remote areas

Accessing post primary education to girls in rural remote areas and from disadvantaged groups. There is acute shortage of middle and secondary/higher secondary schools in rural areas. Inter state disparities are very prominent. (See Appendix Table). Girls do not cross village boundaries ordinarily. The 3 Km radial distances for a middle school is forbidding at times due to terrain or reasons of personal safety. Lack of weather motorable roads to all villages.

There has been large scale expansion of the educational system since independence. The number of primary schools since the First Five Year Plan have increased more than three times. However, the middle schools have multiplied fourteen times and the high /higher secondary schools have increased sixteen fold. For every 100 primary schools there are only 30 middle / upper primary schools, 13 high schools and less than 5 higher secondary schools. The access ratio in many states is 1:10 or even more. Even in state like Tamil Nadu there are only 18 middle schools for 100 primary schools. (MHRD, 1999-2000).

The situation in rural areas would be far worse. The last available rural urban statistics show that at that point on an average something like 13 % villages had no primary school, 78 % villages had no middle schools and high schools were available only in 8 % villages and only 2 % villages had a higher secondary school. It is ironical that three fourth are population live in rural areas. Only half of the close to a million habitations had a primary school within the habitation. Further, more than fifty percent of the higher secondary schools are located in urban areas (See Appendix tables). As would be obvious from both these tables the regional variations are extremely large (Sixth All India Educational Survey Sept. 30th 1993).

Considering universalisation of elementary education (UEE) is both a Constitutional given and a basic human right of children, the number of middle schools fall far short of the requirement. In the Eighth Five Year Plan it was decided that the then existing ratio of four primary schools is to one middle school would be brought down to 3 : 1 in that Plan and subsequently to 2 :1. It is not possible to think of UEE without universal provision of Elementary schooling facilities (Classes I – VIII). In any case the rural girls do not cross the village boundary and are, therefore, have a limited outreach. The three kilometre yardstick for accessing a middle school is forbidding for rural girls especially when the terrain is unfriendly there is lack of safe and frequent bus services. Further , in the desert of Rajasthan, the forests and ravines of Central India, in the rugged north and north eastern mountain ranges , the population is often scattered over large expanse, at times just a few households at one place. The revenue village is spread over several kilometres and small habitations do not have any development infrastructure. A rural girl has a near zero chance of reaching higher technical and professional education.

The absolute numbers of boys and girls enrolled in Classes XI and XII of general education is far greater than that of their rural counterparts. Besides , majority of the second level technical education institutions and most of the higher education facilities are available largely in urban areas. Vocationalisation of general secondary education has not met with much success, being seen as the last resort for the academically low achievers and which carries some meaning in that social class does become a major determinant of academic achievement.

The availability of secondary and higher secondary being so low in rural areas the shortage of women teachers in rural areas would continue as it is only after twelve years of schooling girls can enter in teacher training courses and for that matter entry into any post secondary or higher general or technical education is a remote possibility for rural girls. Only 3 out every 100 girls in Class I in rural areas are likely to make it to Class XII compared to 23 girls having this opportunity in urban areas.

Studies and field observation indicate that the transition rates of girls are as good as that of boys in villages where there are complete middle/ secondary/ higher secondary schools. Availability of secondary schooling facilities for rural girls are extremely poor and there would be perhaps a handful of colleges or general education with limited and limiting courses, Languages, philosophy, Music, a few Arts subjects without much future avenues.

Gender Stereotyping of Curricula

The policy of undifferentiated curricula does not get translated into action on account of gender stereotypes that continue to dominate the thinking of the educators as much as the parents and the girls. The 'home science' syndrome afflicts girls' chances to go in for non traditional areas. In many states, a restrictive policy in providing vocational courses to girls is followed. Only soft options such as tailoring, dress designing, cooking, secretarial practice etc. are made available to them. More often than not, a pre-conceived technological illiteracy keeps girls away from modern, technological and scientific courses. There is general absence of adequate educational and vocational guidance services in girl's institutes. Most of the training institutions imparting skill training are located in urban areas. In rural areas there is general lack of facilities for non-traditional skill courses. There are limited jobs opportunities in rural areas. Even the attitude of public and private employers in urban areas is of not accepting female employees. Poor quality of on-the-job training; weak school industry linkage. This all results in non-achievement of targets in terms of both quality and quantity which terms vocational education as a "failed venture", especially for girls.

At the secondary level participation of girls is affected in Science and Maths courses because of lack of facilities in girl's schools for Science and Maths teaching. Shortage of science teachers also poses a big barrier. Lack of adequate foundation in Science and Mathematics also keep girls away from non traditional courses related to technology, Para-medical, business, commerce and agriculture.

Gender stereotyping of curricular offerings continues especially in technical education on account of the limited gender role perceptions of administrators and even parents and the future employers. There is, thus, still need for gender sensitisation of the educational personnel, the communities and the public at large

Participation of SC, ST, OBC girls

Enrolment of SC, ST, OBC girls at the primary level is somewhat satisfactory but their retention is not despite a large number of special schemes and programmes for them. Management of these schemes is far from satisfactory.

Education of Muslim Girls

Problem of girls belonging to educationally and economically backward minority, the Muslims, is riddled with issues of poverty, sex segregation, purdah, demand for single sex schools, teaching of Urdu regardless of the regional affiliation, be it in Kerala or Tamil Nadu or Assam or Kashmir, anywhere. Across board, our field studies show a persistent demand for teaching of urdu as an additional language and not necessarily as medium of instruction. even though functionally all children study through regional and even international languages to move on to higher general and technical education.

Education of Out of School Girls in the Age Group (10-18 years)

There is a huge mass of out of school population, majority being girls. These include drop outs and never enrolled children in the age group 6-14 years who are receiving attention under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which emphasizes accessing quality elementary education to all children in this age group by 2010. We are ignoring at our peril the out of school age group 14-18 years. Barring the NGO initiative on a limited scale, there is no concrete programme for bringing these youth back to education for them responsible and productive citizens. Even the present open learning systems are not catering to them for elementary education. Left unattended, they take recourse to nihilistic activities, be it indolence, drugs, or armed violence.

Girls form 89 % of the estimated 12.4 million out of school children in the age group 6-11 years,; and 58 % of the 28 million non enrolled children in the age group 11-14 years. Add to this several million girls in the age group 14 to 18 who have either never been to school or have incomplete schooling.

Shortage of Women Teachers in Rural areas

Shortage of women teachers in rural areas is a major barrier to girls' education in rural areas and in some communities especially at the upper primary and the secondary stages. And, this has backward linkages with low availability of post primary/secondary education facilities for rural girls who do not fulfil the essential entry requirement into teacher training courses. Only three out of hundred rural girls enrolled in Class I are likely to make it to Class XII compared to twenty three in urban areas. In several previous plans, mention is made for schemes for preparing women teachers for rural areas. In the Second Plan (1961-66), the shortage of women teachers was seen as an impediment. Towards this the emphasis was on providing housing facilities to women teachers in villages; states were given assistance for providing free accommodation for teachers in rural areas ; stipends for women for teacher training courses; stipends for high school students to take up teaching ; and for construction of hostels for secondary schools for girls. In the Third Plan special emphasis was laid on increasing the number of women teachers from rural areas who could take up teaching and inducing women from urban areas to accept posts as teachers in rural schools. In order to overcome the inadequate supply of science women teachers , it was proposed to select promising students at the post matriculation stage and assist them with scholarships and stipends through the entire period of training. Promising female students at the post secondary stage were to be assisted with scholarships and stipends to train as teachers. The Sixth Plan envisaged making vigorous efforts to appoint women teachers in primary schools in the nine educationally backward states. During the Ninth Plan special mention was to appoint additional teachers both at the primary and upper primary stage of whom 50 % will be women. Despite all these efforts the rural areas are still facing acute shortage of women teachers at all levels of school education.

Administrative Issues

No worthwhile co-ordinating mechanisms for planning and monitoring of women's education. Policy performance gaps persist for lackadaisical partial implementation of schemes, programmes, largely sectoral, segmented and truncated approach. No holistic approach. No organic linkages among and between levels, concerned departments and desks within departments.

Lack of inter sectoral convergence: Education- health – nutrition of children and adolescents.

Lack of functional relationship of education department with the Panchayat Raj institutions.

Lack of gender statistics in several areas; no gender break up of schemes for the SC and ST; for ECCE, ICDS; for that matter in data on reservations of seats and jobs for SC, ST and OBC.

Lack of regular inflow of rural urban statistics ; absence of data in case of educationally backward minorities. Rural urban data is available only at long intervals. There is no national management information system for women in vocational and technical education as well as in professional employment

Low participation of communities and women's groups.

Proposed Interventions

The last ten years have witnessed intense EFA activities with a strong rural and gender focus, additional outlays for primary education , innovative child / people centred projects and community mobilization. The National policies are designed to reach out to the rural and remote areas and education of rural girls and women. The continued under development of rural areas, lack of roads, communication, transport facilities continues to hinder rural female education. And, the burgeoning slum population in Metropolitan areas remains unserved by the urban authorities as far as any basic amenities are concerned leave alone schools. Much has happened and yet much remains to be done to reach out to the last girl, the last woman in the country.

Draw up a carefully designed national plan of action with clear time frame, allocation of resources and assigning definite responsibility to concerned government agencies and involving NGOs.

Make all weather motor able roads to all villages as a first charge and provide free school bus service to all elementary school children(Classes I-VIII) and to girls up to the higher secondary level. The trade off between expenditure on building additional classrooms/ motor able roads and the large array of the existing incentive schemes needs to be studied.

Junior/Part/alternative schooling in small unserved habitations; Upgrade all primary schools to middle schools. Girls do not

cross village boundary ordinarily. The 3 Km radial distances for a middle school is forbidding at times due to terrain or reasons of personal safety. Moreover, we have to be practical. If all the feeder primary schools are able to retain all entrants in Class I and nearly all of them pass out of Class V, the present serving middle school can by no means take in all primary school graduates. Further, there is enough evidence that girls continue on to higher classes wherever there are complete middle/secondary or higher secondary schools within the village.

Girl's primary level boarding schools/ashrams are needed in extreme circumstances like scattered populations in forests, deserts, mountains, for instance. Successful experiments of Madhya Pradesh TWD blocks and Lok Zumbish need to be studied before taking any major policy decision. Girl's primary level boarding schools/ashrams are needed in extreme circumstances like scattered populations in forests, deserts, mountains, for instance. Successful experiments of Madhya Pradesh TWD blocks and Lok Zumbish need to be studied before taking any major policy decision.

Need to move to block based holistic inter sectoral approach to education and training of girls and women. It is of prime importance to open exclusive Balika Vidya Peeths in every block with provision for general and vocational education up to Class XII with residential facilities for all girls of the villages which do not have a middle or a high school. Vocational courses could include modern trades and among others elementary teacher's training, training as para health workers, Anganwadi workers, pre school teachers, Gram Sevikas etc. One girls' hostel attached to a higher secondary school in each block to accommodate at least 200 girls from Class VI onwards.

Distance education potential is immense and needs to be tapped for educating girls living in difficult areas and the large out of school girls population. No fee to be charged from girls entering distance education courses.

Let us not put the problem of education of Muslim girls under the mat. Census needs to give us figures about their single year age wise enrolments/participation rates for developing special strategies at par with other educationally and economically disadvantaged groups. Action Plans for education and health requirements of women and girls need to be developed and operationalized in blocks with heavy concentration of Muslim populations.

Shortage of women teachers poses a major barrier for girls schooling in rural areas. Four year residential courses for middle pass rural girls be designed to prepare women teachers for the elementary stage in all three streams (Languages, science and mathematics, social sciences) with pedagogical inputs). Some states are offering Elementary Teacher's training as part of the Vocational Courses being offered in school for general education at the higher secondary stage. A scheme of scholarships/bursaries/residential courses needs to be developed for meeting the shortage of women teachers in rural areas.

Schemes like Apni Bet Apna Dhan (Haryana), Rajyalakshmi and Sarawati Yojana of Rajasthan and similar other attempts to secure the fundamental right to life need to be strengthened and linked to education for long term effects.

The revised POA recommendation for setting up of women's/ girls education cells/bureaus in MHRD/Planning Commission/National agencies and an inter ministerial/ inter departmental steering/monitoring group has not been operationalised. We need to do this at the earliest forthwith

We need a strong cell/bureau in the Department of Education, MHRD and corresponding structures in the states/UTs to look at the problems of girls from rural areas, educationally backward minorities and other disadvantaged groups, with state counterparts. Standing Committee on Girls Education of MHRD has never met so far. This should be activated. Specifically, to evolve coherent training policies and programmes for women need to be pursued. Further there is no coordinating mechanism for looking at the programmes of general, technical and skill development for women under a multiplicity of agencies and departments. The National Council for Women's Education which was functioning till 1974 needs to be revived and made a hub for holistic planning of education and training of women and girls to include vocational, technical and professional training.

Inter departmental coordination and convergence of efforts is direly needed even among the departments of MHRD itself. The formulations of the DWCD on education of girls and women's empowerment are far more potent and comprehensive compared to those of the department of education in the Ninth Plan Document. Education- health – nutrition of children and adolescents needs inter sectoral convergence.

Need to develop functional relationship by education department with the Panchayat Raj institutions. Wherever, Panchayats are even partially functional (even when lacking the teeth of funds) and have owned up their school, things have improved for children's education in general and for girls in particular. Greater cooperation and participation of PRIs is needed.

Articulation and organisation of village women around issues of daily survival include their concern for education of their sons and daughters. Mahila mandals / samoohs need to be strengthened and revived as a major plank of rural development and women's empowerment

Expanded programme of formal and non-formal vocational training for rural girls in health, employment etc. Transition rates for rural girls need to be improvement both at middle and secondary level.

A national programme of strengthening science and mathematics teaching in all girls school along with a scheme of meet shortage of science and mathematics teachers in girls school. Special focus is to improve access of girls to secondary and technical education in rural areas.

Studies are needed on impact of incentives; institutional structures/ delivery systems to include EFA projects, open learning and alternative schooling

Effective strategy to reduce huge illiteracy of women to include provision of 8-10 years of general education.

Expanded programme of formal and non-formal vocational training for rural girls in health, employment etc. Transition rates for rural girls need to be improvement both at middle and secondary level.

A national programme of strengthening Science and Mathematics teaching in all girls' school along with a scheme of meet

shortage of science and mathematics teachers in girl's school. Special focus is needed to improve access of girls to secondary and technical education in rural areas.

Encourage participation of girls in non-traditional courses for there is need to provide adequate hostel facilities for girls to studying technical and management institutions.

Provision of guidance and counselling services for girls also needs to be specially catered to.

Creating public awareness and acceptance of women in work roles. Create support structures for working women in the area of domestic services and child care in particular.

Adopt totally non restrictive policies while opening courses. More courses leading to self employment.

Rural poverty and lack of employment opportunities in rural areas need direct and indirect interventions both. There is need to improve the out reach of basic services of education, health, housing, sanitation and communication to rural areas. A conscious effort needs to be made to generate employment and higher productivity through application of science and technology and setting up of rural industries and rural service as also relevant technical training institutions and programmes in rural areas.

As the case studies show, urbanization and more importantly industrialization gives rise to demand for literates qualified, skilled workers, technicians and professionals and additional services like banking, insurance, management training etc. Women tend to benefit to the extent which the cultures are gender egalitarian and permit them to cross the gender lines in occupations. Political will and State policies determine implementation of national policies.

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Need to match policies with commensurate resources allocations, appropriate institutional structure and expertise.

Need for regular inflow of rural urban statistics.

Need for adequate MIS on women education and training and gender sensitive planning and gender inclusive curriculum.

The implementation of the Ninth Plan provisions for education of girls and women's empowerment need to be reviewed urgently. The Prime Minister's Special Action plan has identified expansion and improvement of educational /social infrastructure as a critical area and women's empowerment as one of the nine primary objectives of the Ninth Plan. To this effect several strategies were proposed to ensure easy and equal access to women and girls for eradication of illiteracy; to eliminate gender bias in all educational programmes; appoint additional teachers at primary and upper primary level, women to form at least 50% of these; to reduce drop out of girls and to increase their retention through incentives, improved quality of education, distance education and self study programmes; to expand and diversify existing second level vocational and technical education especially in non traditional and emerging areas; to institute plans for free education of girls up to college level, including professional courses; special package for girl child from poverty groups announced on 15 August, 1997; special attention to low female literacy pockets, SC,ST, OBC, Minorities, disabled, working children and children from deserts, hilly areas, coastal areas, deep forests, children of migratory populations; and hostels for girls at the secondary stage in remote areas, among others. It is perhaps necessary to point out that contours and implementation of free education for all girls and the special package for the girl child for instance are not very clear. We need to concentrate on the education of rural girls and women or may we say adopt a RURAL SHE APPROACH to all development. The following national programmes need to be worked out:

I Rural Girls Education Fellowship Programme : a five year programme to help rural primary school girl graduates complete ten years of general education; a two year fellowship for completing two years of general and technical Plus Two level education.

II Rural Women Teachers Fellowship Programme : for primary and secondary levels.

III Strengthening of teaching of Science and Maths in Rural (Girls) schools.

IV An integrated programme for education ,training and development of the out of school girls and young women (10-35 years) both rural and urban including health and legal awareness and income generating inputs.

V Balika Vidya Peeths in each block with provision for general and vocational education up to Class XII with residential facilities for at least 200 girls from villages without a middle or a high/ higher secondary school.

VI At least one rural degree college with vocational and general education courses for girls in every district; reservation of seats for rural girls in college hostels.

SUMMARY–

The authors has made an attempt to explain the present policies related to women's education and also thrown the lights on the action needed for improving the situation of women's education. Various programmes and actions taken by Govt and its social implications are also discussed in detailed. The paper concluded by stating that the initiatives taken by the government have resulted in significant progress in women's education. Various centrally sponsored schemes have been formulated to strengthen school education with special inputs into Science Education, Vocational Education, Culture, Values, Computer literacy and study, Educational Technology and education of children with disabilities. These schemes have benefited girl students in general. In addition there are schemes focussed on providing better facilities to girl students to enable them to pursue their education.

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