

#### *The Constitutional Guarantees and Policy Mandate*

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women and forbids any discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth but also empowers the state to practise protective discrimination in favour of women. Under the protective discrimination clause, the state has passed several social and labour legislations and drawn up special programmes and schemes for the protection, welfare, and development of women and children. Additionally, women have reservations in many educational and training institutions, development schemes, local bodies, and certain categories of government jobs. Theoretically, women have gained equality. India has one of the most impressive sets of laws for women and children/girls and yet little is known about them, either by women themselves or by men.

#### Box 3.2

##### National Plan of Action for the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child AD 1991-2000

Rights can be declared and policies can be formulated to express our collective liberal and humanistic concern, but unless the real life of the girl child in her family and community is touched by tangible efforts and actions, nothing can be achieved. Therefore, a climate has to be created in which she can exercise her rights freely and fearlessly. One has to work for the transformation of those social and cultural values that shackle and constrict the girl child and mould her into stereotypical roles. For this, every forum and every platform should be used to create awareness and stimulate positive action. Along with this, effective implementation of the laws for protecting her and provision of opportunities for her to benefit from them has to be insured.

As is evident, there is a clear mandate for social mobilization to change the social and cultural practices that inhibit development of the girl child (see Box 3.2).

The foregoing presentation on the policy backdrop highlights the positive climate being created for promoting girls' education in the country. Of course, they represent only the necessary condition. Provision of facilities as well as actual participation of girls in education depends on the programmes and their field-level implementation. The next section analyses the progress made and the shortfalls in achievement with respect to girls' education in the country.

#### EDUCATION OF ALL GIRLS: PROGRESS AND SHORTFALLS

India has the second largest educational system in the world after China with 610,763 primary, 185,506 upper

primary and 107,100 high/higher secondary schools, 7199 colleges for general education, 2075 colleges of professional education and 229 universities. In addition there are 290,000 non-formal education (NFE) centres for out-of-school children in the age group 6-14 and a massive volunteer-based literacy programme for adults in the age group 15-35. There are 109 million children enrolled in the primary grades, classes i-v; 39.5 million in classes vi-vm; 27.3 million in classes ix-xii; and close to 6 million in institutions of higher learning. Girls form 43.62 per cent of those enrolled at the primary level, 40.12 per cent at the middle stage, 37.09 per cent at the higher/higher secondary stage and 36.59 per cent in higher education (1997-8). The system continues to be characterized by sharp regional and gender disparities.

Yet, Universal Elementary Education (UEE), a constitutional directive, remains unfulfilled. Six of ten females above 7 years of age were illiterate at the last census count. Secondary and higher education started as an urban-middle-class phenomenon and continues to be so even after fifty years of educational development in independent India. Rural females and urban poor form bulk of the illiterate and out-of-school populations. The National Sample Survey (NSS), 1997, however, indicates a breakthrough in literacy with male-female and rural-urban gaps getting reduced.

#### *Female Literacy*

Female literacy is considered to be a more sensitive index of social development compared to overall literacy rates. Female literacy is negatively related with fertility rates, population growth rates, infant and child mortality rates, and shows a positive association with female age at marriage, life expectancy, participation in modern sectors of the economy, and above all, female enrolment. Female literacy rate has grown from 8 per cent in 1951 to 39 per cent in 1991, and the corresponding increase in male literacy during this period was from 25 to 64 per cent. Rural-urban and inter-group disparities were sharp. The rural-urban divide was the sharpest amongst females. Urban females were twice as well off in literacy as compared to their rural counterparts. Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) females were at the bottom of the heap.

#### *Literacy Gains During 1991-7*

Renewed efforts and heavy resource inputs in the area of primary education and the voluntary-based Total Literacy Campaigns of the National Literacy Mission (set up in 1988) appears to have paid dividends. The

53<sup>rd</sup> round of the National Sample Survey 1997 indicates that India has achieved a breakthrough in literacy in the 1990s.

- The overall literacy rate has gone up from 52 per cent in 1991 to 62 per cent in 1997.
- The pace has accelerated in that the increase in literacy rate was 8.7 percentage points during 1981-91, i.e. from 43.5 per cent to 52.2 per cent, and there is already a 10 percentage point increase between 1991 and 1997.
- The male-female gap has narrowed. Female literacy has improved by 11 percentage points compared to 9 percentage points increase in the case of males during 1991-7. Female literacy in 1997 stands at 50 per cent though it is still much lower than the male literacy rate of 73 per cent.

- Rural literacy has progressed faster than urban. The gap between rural and urban literacy levels has narrowed. The rural-urban gap was 28.4 percentage points in 1991, the rural literacy rate being 44.7 and urban 73.1. In 1997 the former has reached the 56 per cent mark, only 14 percentage points lower than the urban literacy rate of 80. During the six years between 1991 and 1997, the improvement in rural literacy is to the tune of 11.3 percentage points, which is twice as much as the growth of 6.9 percentage points for urban populations.

- The north-eastern states have registered the biggest improvement and now Mizoram (95 per cent) has overtaken Kerala (93 per cent) to the top of the literacy chart and Assam has shown a remarkable increase from 53 per cent in 1991 to 75 per cent in 1997—a 22 percentage points jump.

- What is heartening is that the 'BIMARU' states are not lagging in effort. Bihar showed an improvement of 10.5 percentage points, Madhya Pradesh of 11.8, Uttar Pradesh of 14.4, and Rajasthan of 16.5 percentage points during 1991-7.

Considerable progress has been made in terms of provision of facilities and enrolment of children in the relevant age group. However, the goal of UEE continues to be elusive. This is largely on account of the inability of the system to enrol and retain girls and children from the disadvantaged groups.

#### ENROLMENT AT THE ELEMENTARY STAGE

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 enrolment is below par for the country as

a whole and is very marked at middle stage. Intra-female disparities as between rural-urban areas and among general populations, SCs, STs, Other Backward Castes (OBCs), and some minorities are sharp.

Due to persistent efforts, the enrolment of girls at the elementary stage has grown steadily over the last five decades.

- The number of girls at primary stage has gone up from 5.38 million in 1950-1 to 47.45 million in 1997-8.

- The number of girls at middle stage has increased from 0.53 million in 1950-1 to 15.84 million in 1997-8.

#### FASTER GROWTH OF GIRLS' PARTICIPATION

In fact, the growth rates for girls have always been higher than those for boys, not only because of starting from a much lower base but also on account of sustained state effort to promote education of girls as an important part of planned development.

It may be noted that even during the period 1990-1 to 1998-9, the growth rate for girls at primary stage (classes i-v) is twice as high as that for boys and more than double at middle stage (classes VI-VIII). In absolute terms, enrolment of girls during this period at primary level has increased by over seven million compared to boys whose numbers have increased by four million. At middle stage, the increase in the number of girls during this period is to the tune of 3.3 million compared to 2.2 million for boys.

#### PERCENTAGE SHARE OF GIRLS TO TOTAL

The percentage share of girls in the total has shown a steady increase since Independence at all levels of education (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2 for the elementary). During 1950-1 to 1997-8, the percentage share of girls among the children enrolled at primary stage went up from 28 per cent to 44 per cent, from 16 per cent to

TABLE 3.1  
Percentage of Girls in School Enrolment at  
Elementary Stage, 1950-1 to 1997-8

Year	Primary stage (classes i-v)	Middle stage (classes VI-VIII)
1950-1	28.1	6.1
1960-1	32.6	23.9
1970-1	37.4	29.3
1980-1	38.6	32.9
1990-1	41.5	+
1997-8	43.6	40.1

Source: Department of Education (various years), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

40 per cent at middle stage; from 13.3 per cent to 36.7 per cent at secondary/higher secondary level, and from 10 per cent to 36.6 per cent in higher education.

TABLE 3.2  
Percentages Girls in Total Enrolment by  
Groups at Elementary Stage 1997-8

Category	Primary stage (classes i-v)	Middle stage (classes VI-VIII)
All communities	43.62	40.12
SC	42.59	38.49
ST	42.82	37.09

Source: Department of Education, MHRD, Gol.

#### PERCENTAGE SHARE OF SC/ST CHILDREN

The percentage share of SC, ST girls to total SC, ST children is not very remarkably different from the overall percentage share of girls in the general population at primary stage. At middle stage SC, ST girls are way behind. It is perhaps pertinent to state that the percentage share of SC, ST children to the total is similar to proportion of these groups in the total population at primary stage but the situation is not satisfactory for both ST boys and girls at middle stage (see Table 3.3). The SC and ST population constituted 16.33 per cent and 8.01 per cent respectively at the 1991 census.

TABLE 3.3  
Percentage Share of SC/ST Children in Total Enrolment  
at Elementary Stage in 1997-8

Category	Primary stage (classes i-v)			Middle stage (classes VI-VIII)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
SC	17.27	16.60	16.96	14.99	14.01	14.59
ST	8.40	8.13	8.28	6.26	5.52	5.96

Source: Department of Education, MHRD, Gol.

#### REGIONAL VARIATIONS

In 1997-8, the share of girls to total enrolment varied from 37 per cent in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to 50 per cent in Meghalaya at primary stage; 31 per cent in Bihar to 53 per cent in Daman and Diu at middle stage; 25 per cent in Bihar to 53.5 per cent in Daman and Diu at secondary/higher secondary stage; and from 19 per cent in Bihar to 59 per cent in Kerala in higher education.

Girls are less mobile than boys on account of parental concern for their personal safety, and thus, utilize educational facilities available within the revenue village or in its sub units or habitations (an average of two habitations per village). For instance, very often a

revenue village is spread over several kilometres as in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and the same situation prevails in mountainous and forest regions elsewhere which are often divided by physical and social distance, as observed, between upper-caste- class inhabitants and SCs and STs. The well-off upper castes form the core and disadvantaged sections are at the periphery of a village, while the school is often located in the core part of the village. SC and ST parents are at times intimidated into not sending their children to school in some parts of the northern plains (see Nayar 1993-4).

The educational lag of rural girls is linked to under-development of rural areas in terms of development infrastructure, especially convenient, safe means of transport, drinking water, cheap fuel, sanitation, health, and education infrastructure. The problem is acute in small-sized villages and sparsely populated remote areas. Gender and rural poverty combine to add to the burden of the girl child whose direct and indirect earnings and work are needed by families, whereas little boys are let off and even pampered, being seen as potential breadwinners.

Shortage of women teachers in rural areas is seen as a barrier to girls' participation in education, especially at middle stage and above. The last available figures from the Sixth All-India Educational Survey are not very encouraging with regard to rural areas where the demand for female teachers is the most.

#### ENROLMENT RATIO

Enrolment ratios moved up constantly upto 1990-1, giving gross figures of 86 for girls and 114 for boys at primary stage and 47 for girls and 77 for boys at middle stage. The enrolment ratios appear to be moving towards net figures in 1998-9, being 81 for girls and 98 for boys at primary level and 50 for girls and 67 for boys at upper primary stage. This is likely on account of improved enrolment at the right age and better retention. However, unless an attempt is made to collect age-specific ratios separately, it would be difficult to come to any conclusion, because girls still continue to enter late and drop out earlier. Overall gender gaps persist and the situation of girls belonging to SCs and STs in terms of gender parity needs much greater attention. It is a matter of great concern that the enrolment ratio of boys is showing a more marked downward trend since 1990-1 at both primary and upper primary levels. Girls show an improvement at upper primary stage. In the union territories of Delhi and Chandigarh, girls' enrolment ratio is better than that for boys at upper primary level. Similar trends were noted by an earlier study for Mumbai and Kolkatta (see Nayar 1993). Tables 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 present the data on enrolment ratios.

TABLE 3.4  
Enrolment Ratio by Stages and Sex 1950-1 to 1997-8

Year	Primary stage (classes I-V)			Upper primary (classes vi-vi)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1950-1	60.8	24.9	42.6	20.8	4.3	12.9
1960-1	82.6	41.4	62.4	33.2	11.3	22.5
1970-1	96.5	60.5	78.6	46.3	19.4	33.4
1980-1	95.8	64.1	80.5	54.3	28.6	41.9
1990-1	113.9	85.5	100.1	76.6	47.0	62.1
1997-8	97.5	81.2	89.7	66.5	49.5	58.5

Source: DoE, MHRD, Gol.

#### DROPOUT RATE

Over the period 1960-1 to 1997-8, both enrolment and retention have registered improvement (see Table 3.7). The dropout rate for primary stage classes (i-v) has gone down from 62 to 38 per cent for boys and from 71 to 41 per cent for girls. At middle stage the dropout rate has come down from 75 to 51 per cent for boys and from 85 to 59 per cent for girls. The last available figures indicate that the dropout rate for SC/ST children is substantially higher than that for general groups, the same being true of rural girls.

TABLE 3.5  
Enrolment Ratio by Stages, Sex, and Caste/Tribes 1998-9

Groups	Primary stage (classes i-v)			Upper primary (classes vi-vi)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
All groups	97.5	81.2	89.7	66.5	49.5	58.5
Scheduled caste	102.25	81.60	92.36	75.84	37.59	56.17
Scheduled tribes	102.93	78.34	90.73	53.03	32.93	43.24

Source: DoE, MHRD, Gol.

TABLE 3.6  
Inter-state Disparities in Enrolment Ratio of Girls at Elementary Stage 1997-8

*States and Union Territories above and below the National Average of 81 % Enrolment Ratio for Girls at Primary Stage (classes i-v) 1998-1999*

States/UTs above the national average (23%) Andhra Pradesh (87); Arunachal Pradesh (82); Assam (104); Gujarat (114); Haryana (84); Himachal Pradesh (83); Karnataka (102); Kerala (89); Madhya Pradesh (89); Maharashtra (110); Meghalaya (86); Mizoram (105); Nagaland (86); Punjab (83); Sikkim (110); Tamil Nadu (107); West Bengal (87); Daman & Diu (89); Delhi (82); Lakshadweep (96); Pondicherry (84); Rajasthan (81); Dadra & Nagar Haveli (81).

Range: 81 in Rajasthan/Dadra & Nagar Haveli to 114 in Gujarat.

States/UTs below the national average (9%) Bihar (59); Goa (77); Jammu & Kashmir (53); Manipur (70); Orissa (76); Tripura (75); Uttar Pradesh (49); Andaman & Nicobar Islands (76); Chandigarh (73).

Range: 49 in Uttar Pradesh to 77 in Goa.

*States and Union Territories below and above the National Average of 50 per cent Enrolment Ratio for Girls at Middle Stage (classes vi-vi) in India in 1997-1998*

States/UTs above the national average (25%) Arunachal Pradesh (61); Assam (58); Goa (76); Gujarat (59); Haryana (61); Himachal Pradesh (74); Jammu & Kashmir (51); Karnataka (63); Kerala (93); Madhya Pradesh (50); Maharashtra (80); Manipur (65); Meghalaya (50); Mizoram (69); Nagaland (66); Punjab (63); Sikkim (63); Tamilnadu (89); Tripura (50); Andaman & Nicobar Islands (92); Chandigarh (81); Daman & Diu (65); Delhi (92); Lakshadweep (68); Pondicherry (89).

Range: 50 in Tripura to 93 in Kerala.

States/UTs below the national average (7%) Andhra Pradesh (40); Bihar (24); Orissa (39); Rajasthan (33); Uttar Pradesh (28); West Bengal (40); Dadra & Nagar Haveli (49).

Range: 24 in Bihar to 49 in Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

TABLE 3.12  
Estimated Number of Non-enrolled Children by Sex at the Elementary Stage in 1997

	6-11 years (classes I-V)			11-14 years (classes VI-VIII)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Estimated population in the age group in 1997	62,759	58,403 (48.20)	121,162	35,580	31,966 (47.32)	67,546
Enrolment in 1997-8	61,329	47,453 (43.62)	108,782	23,646	15,841 (40.12)	39,487
Non-enrolled children in 1997-8	1430	10,950 (88.45)	12,380	11,934	16,125 (57.47)	28,059

Source: Department of Education (relevant years). Selected Educational Statistics.

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage girls to total.

- Assuming that there are 20-5 per cent overage/underage children in the system, the number of out-of-school children in the specific age groups could even be higher.

The NSSO (1998) data on attendance rate estimates 89.64 million children not attending school in 1995-6; 65.52 million in the age group 6-11 and 24.12 million in the age group 11-14 (quoted in Takroo 1999). The NIEPA (1999) Draft EFA 2000 Assessment on Core EFA Indicators puts the figure at 35.06 million in the age group 6-11 after allowing for 21.54 percent underage and overage children in classes i-v. Nonetheless, it is clear that the problem exists even if different figures are arrived at by different agencies.

In rural areas, there is continued *shortage of women teachers*. A major study has been completed on the problems related to recruitment and posting of women teachers at the elementary stage in rural areas of the four most populous, low female literacy states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The study finds that while some effort is being made to draw more women teachers into teaching at the recruitment point and even in teacher training institutions, the real malaise is the low and extremely poor outreach of rural girls to post primary education in rural areas and these girls are unable to complete higher secondary (12 years) level which is the entry requirement for primary teacher's training. (Nayar 1995-6)

#### CRITICAL ISSUES AND INTERVENTIONS

Education of girls has been high on the national agenda since Independence. Special commissions and committees were set up from time to time to assess the progress of girls' education and to propose suitable interventions to promote their participation in education. Several strategies were adopted to promote education of girls as an integral part of the planned socio-economic development of the country. 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 university level. Besides free education for all children up to the age of 14, there are incentive schemes like free noon meals, free books, free uniforms, and attendance scholarships for girls and children from disadvantaged groups.

It may be pertinent to remind ourselves that the pro-girl policies and action that have accelerated the educational participation of girls during the 1990s owe it to the steady work of earlier decades, springboard action of the NPE, and the Programme of Action of 1992. It is also important to note the significant impact of the Total Literacy Campaigns and ECCE on demand generation, as well as the contribution of women's movement and focus on women's studies.

There are two clear axes of promotion of girls' education, namely expansion of educational facilities and following the accepted policy of undifferentiated curricula and reorienting the contents and processes of education to make it gender-sensitive and a vehicle of women's equality and empowerment. The post-NPE efforts in the area of girls' education appear to be giving positive results, a major yardstick being the sharp increase in literacy levels and greater retention and transition of girls to successive higher levels of education. In absolute terms, enrolment of girls during this period at primary level has increased by over seven million as compared to boys whose numbers have increased by four million. India has two major successes to report. One is the faster growth of girls' participation at 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.

This chapter has reviewed the progress of girls' education in India during the last five decades with special focus on the post-Jomtien period (1990-2000) and within the framework of EFA. Against the broad findings of the review, the following are some important issues and interventions that need consideration.

### *Issues that Remain*

Though significant progress has been made in the provision of education for all girls, the task is not yet complete. There are several issues that need to be seriously addressed by educational planners and policy makers in the years to come. Some of these are:

- provision of post-primary education to girls in remote rural areas and from disadvantaged groups;
- special focus on enrolment and retention of SC, ST, OBC girls;
- absence of data in case of educationally backward minorities;
- education of out-of-school girls in the age group 10-18;
- improvement of quality of state and state-aided schools;
- curricular reforms to make education more meaningful and relevant;
- continued thrust on gender sensitive and gender inclusive curriculum and its transaction;
- further gender inputs into pre-service and in-service education of teachers and teacher educators and textbook writers and textbook production boards;
- higher proportion of women teachers in rural areas;
- building up of intersectoral convergence with respect to education-health-nutrition of children and adolescent girls;
- building up of a functional relationship between the education department and *panchayati raj* institutions;
- lack of regular inflow of rural-urban statistics on girls' education.

### *Interventions Needed*

As already pointed out, the situation with respect to girls' education varies considerably across the country. Therefore, interventions have to be worked out in a contextual manner. However, following are some general proposals that may help in tackling the various issues confronting girls' education in the country.

- A large number of girls from remote and small rural habitations continue to get excluded from primary

education. It is necessary to create part or alternative schooling in small unserved habitations.

- It is necessary to 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, 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 schools 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 (classes i-vm) and to girls up to higher secondary level. The trade-off between expenditure on building an additional 2 million classrooms/motorable roads and the large array of the existing incentive schemes needs to be studied.

- Girls' primary-level boarding schools or *ashram shalas* are needed for scattered populations in forests, deserts, mountains, for instance. Successful experiments of the Madhya Pradesh tribal development block and of LJ need to be studied before taking any major policy decision.

- 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 <sup>v</sup>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, preschool teachers, *gram sevikas*, etc.

- The problem of education of Muslim girls needs to be specially addressed. The census could give out figures about their single-year agewise enrolments/participation rates for developing special strategies on a par with other educationally and economically disadvantaged groups.

- The shortage of women teachers poses a major barrier for girls' schooling in rural areas. Four-year residential courses for middle-pass rural girls should be designed to prepare women teachers for the elementary stage in all three streams (languages, science, and mathematics, social sciences with pedagogical inputs).

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

- Schemes like Apni Beti Apna Dhan (Haryana), Rajyalakshmi and Saraswati Yojana of Rajasthan, and similar other attempts to secure the fundamental right to life of girls need to be strengthened and linked to education for long-term effects.
- Wherever *panchayats* are even partially functional (even when lacking financial resources) and have taken over their schools, things have improved for children's education in general and for girls in particular.
- Articulation and organization of village women around issues of daily survival include their concern for education of their sons and daughters. *Mahila mandals/samooths* need to be strengthened and revived as a major plank of rural development and women's empowerment.
- An expanded programme of formal and non-formal vocational training for rural girls in health, employment, etc. needs to be instated. Transition rates for rural girls need improvement both at middle and secondary levels.
- A national programme of strengthening science and maths teaching in all girls' schools along with a scheme to meet shortage of science and maths teachers in girls school needs to be instated. The special focus is to improve access of girls to secondary and technical education in rural areas.
- There is need for adequate MIS on women's education and training and gender-sensitive planning.

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