Education is the catalyst that helps to form creativity, attitude, capacity, value and confers status. For women education has vast potential both for themselves and the society. It is one of the primary conditions for women’s empowerment. Education provides women the means to move from passivity to assertiveness and with it women are able to participate proactively in social, economic and political processes which affect their lives.

Much before Independence of the nation, the India Education commission of 1882-83 pointed out that female education of the country was in extremely backward condition and needed to be fostered in a very legitimate way. The beginning of the emancipation of Indian women started during the Second World War period (1940-42) particularly in the urban areas, where women started getting educated and employed.

The freedom movement provided the opportunity to Indian women to participate in the political activities with men and made society to accept it. But before that, the economic situation and opening of rationing offices during the war period enabled women in urban areas to come out of home and take up employment. During this period the per capita income in the country had gone down and middle-class people had to accept women’s employment to enhance their income.
The movement for women's education started and accelerated in response to the efforts of social reformers. Enlightened reformers launched a vigorous campaign against social evils affecting Indian women. The movement for women's emancipation went along with that of India's freedom movement. Raja Ram Mohan Roy struggled to bring social reforms like abolition of sati. From 1811 to 1828, he petitioned the government, organized vigilance committees to attend cremations and prevent coercion to become sati. Iswar Chanda Vidyasagar was instrumental not only in getting the widow remarriage act passed but also fought against polygamy and made all efforts for the spread of female education in Bengal. Swami Dayanand Saraswati, who laid the foundation of Arya Samaj and preached as well as practiced his views about widow-remarriage struggled throughout their lifetime for the upliftment of women and sought to give them a better life in society. In spite of social ostracism and condemnation he revived widow-remarriage association in Poona. Jotirba Phule took all pains to spread women education in all strata of society. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the great liberal leader, was deeply interested in the propagation of female education. Gandhiji also strongly advocated for the liberation of women.

Thus all the social reformers chalked out positive and constructive programmes for eradicating the evils affecting women and established a variety of institutions for women's socio-economic upliftment. The western progressive outlook influenced them. A section of men who were impressed by the western ideology became aware of the problems faced by Indian
women and helped them to read and write and gave them education. Some families took pride in encouraging the girls to get educational degrees. However, the objective of education was to produce a gentle lady, since hardly any women in those times used their education to seek salaried jobs. The rationing system which had to be introduced in the Second World War in India created clerks in very large number. Educated women were compelled by rising prices owing to war-times to step out of their houses and become wage earners. Compared to rural areas, their number was quite large in the cities. The economic compulsions made the age old customs of keeping women within the threshold of home crumble down.

The British government also supported in limited way the efforts of women's education. In the twentieth century, the need arose to train women as teachers and nurses with the expansion of schools and medical facilities. These two professions had to be incorporated in a general plan of female education that went well beyond the mere uplift of motherhood.

The independence of India in 1947 and the preparation of its constitution in 1949 built a different conceptual framework for women's education. Declared equal with men, women had to play equal and multiple roles in the political, social, and economic life of the nation. The new attitude led the central government to appoint various committees to frame the goals of national education.

With the growing exposure to the outside world, women's awareness about their role as bread winner as well as housekeeper grew. Their horizons
widened. They were necessarily exposed to a changing world. They had to move in contact with several people outside the home and also at the office and were exposed to a whole set of new experiences. This, in turn, changed their views and attitudes, making them look at their surroundings in different ways. They started having new expectations from the members of their family and from their own lives.

**Key Indicators of women's Educational Empowerment**

**Female Literacy Rate:** As per the census report of 1971 about female literacy, 29.8 million or 67.5 percent of women between the ages of fifteen and eighteen were illiterate. The number of illiterate women in the age group above twenty five was 94.5 million, or 88.6 percent. Such statistics led the central and state governments to launch an aggressive programme of adult literacy for working mothers.

During the decade 1991 to 2001, the female literacy rate rose to 54.16 percent. The number of literate females was 226,745,947. The highest was in Kerala (90.92 percent) and the lowest was in Bihar (47.53 percent). Over the last century, literacy in India has increased from 5.3 percent in 1901 to 65.4 percent in 2001. However, the improvement is much more pronounced for the males compared to females especially till 1981. As a result, the gender gap (difference between the percentage figures for the males compared to the females) in literacy soared from 9.2 points in 1901 to 26.8 points in 1981, but declined to 21.7 points in 2001. To a large extent, the literacy problem is a female literacy problem and overall literacy will not improve until female
literacy improves. Among major States, female literacy is still remarkably low in Chatisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar.

**Enrolment Rate:** Education of girls and mothers leads to sustained increases in educational attainment from one generation to the next. Multiple studies find that a mother's level of education has a strong positive effect on her daughters, enrollment than on sons and significantly more than the effect of fathers, education on daughters. Some other factors responsible for low enrolment are-

- The requirement for older girls to stay at home to take care of siblings when mothers are away at work;
- Need for girls to work in order to help in augmenting the family income;
- Early marriage of girls;
- Social customs that hinder female mobility after puberty;
- Lack of relevance of school curriculum; and
- Lack of facilities in the form of school buildings, hostels.

**Drop-out Rate:** In 1980-81, only twenty nine percent of girls in the age group of seven to fourteen received schooling as against the coverage of 50.5 percent in the case of boys. Worse is the drop-out rate among girls. Of every one hundred girls enrolled in the first grade, only thirty, on average, reach the fifth grade. In grades nine to twelve, the proportions of girls in the age group of fourteen through seventeen is only thirteen percent as against thirty-five percent in the case of boys.
For every one-hundred men attending a university, only thirty eight women share the opportunity for advanced education. Moreover, female education in colleges is confined to upper- and middle class women living in towns and cities.

**Government Initiatives in women’s Educational Empowerment**

**University Education Commission:**

After independence, in 1948-49 the government of India appointed a major national Commission focusing on higher education. Known as the University Education Commission, this Commission was headed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, one of India’s most distinguished scholars and philosophers and a man very sympathetic to the cause of women education. He later became the President of India. In the report of this Commission the chapter on university education for women, the utter neglect of British Government towards female education was highlighted. The report makes some powerful statements about the importance of women’s education and underlines the government’s obligation to provide equal educational opportunities for women.

Although the commission did stress on the importance on equalization of opportunities for women, it failed to visualize the role of women beyond their duties of motherhood and homemaking. However, the commission specifically mentions the possibility of the employment of unmarried girls. At the time at which the Commission submitted its report, young unmarried girls were not exposed to the world of work. By acknowledging the possibility that
unmarried girls may want to work, the Commission made a bold and radical
departure from the prevalent cultural norms that bound even educated girls
within home.

The other major contribution of the Commission is that it
recommended that the number of women's colleges in the country should be
increased. There were less than a hundred women's colleges in the country
when the Commission submitted its report. Today there are more than twelve
hundred.

There is an increasing realization that if a nation is to progress in
various dimensions, then, women should be educated to participate in a much
larger variety of walks of life than what are open for them at present. This
trend is also reflected in the reports of education commissions.

National Commission on Women: In 1958-59, almost ten years after the
appointment of the University Education Commission, the government of
India appointed a National Committee on Women.

The committee presented its report in 1959 with the following
recommendations-

Girl's education should assume the prominence of a unique need, and
special measures should be undertaken on behalf of girls.

At the central level, a national council for women's education should
take form to look after the national education system for women. At the state
level, state councils for women's education should be created.
To provide teachers for primary schools, particularly in rural areas, intensified courses for adult women (prospective teachers) should fill curricula on as large scale as possible.

Women hostels should be attached to secondary schools (grades VI to XI) so that village girls could attend classes distant from their villages. Special inducements should be offered to girls, like free books, clothing, and attendance scholarships, to encourage them to enroll in schools. The national committee noted, that, frequently, girls between the ages of six and fourteen could not attend schools during regular hours. The committee advised that volunteers and school teachers should give them non-formal education. Female teachers working in rural schools should have access to special facilities.

National Council for the Education of Women: In 1959 the central government created a national council for the education of women, and a special unit in the ministry of education began to concentrate on the issues of female education in both urban and rural areas. The state governments did the same.

The institutions of female education soon began to manifest a series of short-comings, the major flaw being the poor quality of science and mathematic teachers and equipment in the middle and high schools. The girl’s students in the cities could not earn scores high enough to enter technical colleges. This fact was defeating the constitution’s expressed promise of achieving equality of men and women. Certain academicians, therefore,
recommended co-education as the possible remedy. Opponents stated that the lack of discipline and boy’s rowdism would act as deterrents to girls, besides the custom of purda, or the wearing of the veil, some sections of communities would stand as barrier to girl’s entry into co-educational institutions. The supporters of co-education, nevertheless stated the following reasons in support of their case—

- First, co-education would allow for economy and full utilization of the existing infrastructure in science and math;
- Second, it would foster a spirit of respect for girls among their male peers, thus helping to change societal attitudes toward women.

On the recommendations of National Committee on Women’s Education, the ministry of Education took up a scheme to establish women polytechnics for post matriculation training in various skills in industrial, commercial and public service occupations in accordance with the developing needs of the national economy and to promote awareness of the new opportunities and needs for women workers in such fields as social welfare, nursing, chemical and pharmaceutical industries etc. in which women could be gainfully employed.5

Kothari Commission’s Suggestions for the progress of women’s Education

At the secondary level, Girl’s education should undergo expansion in such a manner that the present ratio of girls to boys should change from 1:3 to 1:2.
The syllabi for women’s education should be developed on the lines laid down by Hans Mehta Committee, but it should not be made compulsory. Facilities for the study of music, arts, mathematics and science should be increased.

The condensed courses of education for adult women should be organized.

The kind of adult education centres set up by the central social welfare board of the Mysore State should be set-up in other states also.

Stress should be upon making arrangements for part time and full-time employment for women.

The national committee on the status of women (appointed in 1975):
The committee recommended a series of evolutionary steps to compromise the divergent views on co-education-

1. To adopt co-education as a general policy from the primary level to the university level,
2. To bar new colleges exclusively for women so as to force female candidates to male collages.
3. To promote the ideal of co-education by including a high percentage of female teachers on the teaching staff in existing co-educational institutions.

Efforts at the International Forum: Women’s and girls, education was placed centre stage in the struggle for human development and social justice in the Copenhagen declaration on social development in 1995. The fourth
world conference on women, Beijing 1995, reaffirmed the commitments made by governments and called upon the international community to intensify efforts. Four important world conferences, one after another, impressed upon the world community with messages of equality, empowerment, human rights and universal access to the tools of knowledge—i.e. education.6

**The Five Year National Plans**

Education enables women to acquire basic skills and abilities, and fosters a value system which is conducive to raising their status in society. Recognizing this fact, great emphasis has been laid on women's education in the five-year plans.

The First Five-Year Plan (1951-56) advocated the need for adopting special measures for solving the problems of women's education. It held that women “must have the same opportunities as men for taking all kinds of work and this presupposes that they get equal facilities so that their entry into the professions and public services is in no way prejudiced”.

It further added that at the secondary and even at the university stage it should have a vocational or occupational basis, as far as possible, so that those who complete such stages may be in a position, if necessary, to immediately take up some vocation or other. Accordingly the educational facilities for girls continued to expand in the subsequent plans. The major schemes undertaken encompassed elementary education, secondary education, university education, postgraduate education and research,
technical education, scholarships, social/adult education and physical education.

The Second Plan continued the emphasis on overall expansion of educational facilities. The Report of the National Committee on Women's Education (1959) made a strong impact on the Third Five-Year Plan. It launched important schemes like condensed school courses for adult women, Bal Sevika training and child care programmes. Subsequent plans supported these measures and also continued incentives such as free text-books and scholarships for girls. This trend continued in the Fourth and Fifth Five-Year Plans.

Although there was a large-scale expansion of facilities for education up to the Fourth Plan, vast disparities existed in the relative utilization of available facilities by boys and girls at various stages of education.

Hence, the major thrust in the Fifth Plan was to offer equality of opportunities as part of the overall plan of ensuring social justice and improving the quality of education imparted. To promote enrolment and retention in schools in backward areas and among underprivileged sections of the population, in addition to the incentives like free distribution of textbooks, mid-day meals, etc., girls were to be given uniform and attendance scholarships. In spite of these schemes, it was noticed that insufficient numbers of women teachers resulted in low enrolment of girls. To remove this bottleneck, scholarships were given to local girls to complete their education and training leading to a teaching career. Besides, condensed and
correspondence courses were organized for the less educated women. Emphasis was also laid on the need for orientation of the curriculum to meet the special needs of girls.

A landmark in the Sixth Plan was the inclusion of women's education as one of the major programmes under Women and Development which was an outcome of the publication of the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India.

The programmes for universalization of elementary education were specially directed towards higher enrolment and retention of girls in schools. It was envisaged to promote Balwadi-cum-creches attached to the schools to enable girls responsible for sibling care at home to attend schools. Women teachers, where necessary, were to be appointed in rural areas to encourage girls education. Science teaching in girl schools and colleges had to be strengthened to achieve greater participation of women in science and technology. Streamlining the admission policies to promote greater enrolment of women in engineering, electronics, agriculture, veterinary fishery and forestry courses was stressed. For boosting the education of women belonging to backward classes, the number of girls' hostels were to be increased. Instead of adding more separate women's polytechnics, which were developed as multipurpose institutions for imparting training in arts, crafts, etc. coeducational institutions were encouraged as far as possible. The adult education programme too received a fillip.
The Seventh Plan envisages restructuring of the educational programmes and modification of school curricula to eliminate gender bias. Enrolment of girls in elementary, secondary and higher education courses, formal as well as non-formal, was accorded high priority. At the elementary stage, education has been made free for girls. Sustained efforts are to be made through various schemes and measures to reach 100 per cent coverage in elementary education. Financial assistance schemes to voluntary agencies to run early childhood education (pre-school centres) as adjuncts of primary/middle schools are to be expanded, particularly to help evolve innovative models suited to specific learner groups or areas. Efforts are to be made to enroll and retain girls in schools, especially in rural areas, and also to enroll children belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections.

Teacher training programmes are to receive continued priority with a view to increase the availability of trained women teachers, and thereby to enhance girls' enrolment and retention in schools. Incentives by way of distribution of uniforms, free textbooks and attendance scholarships to needy girls are to be continued. Non-formal elementary education is to be expanded to benefit girls in the age group of 6-14 years. Talented girls are to be encouraged to pursue higher education. It is also proposed to expand the 'Open Learning System', including correspondence courses for them. In order to promote technical and vocational education for girls, more women's
polytechnics are to be set up and programmes for vocationalization of education are to be expanded.

To expedite education among the girls of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, additional facilities will continue to be provided under the “Development of Backward Classes” sector. Girls above the matriculation stage will get higher scholarships/stipends than male students. Financial assistance is envisaged for construction of hostel buildings for girls at the district level and for purchase of equipment, furniture utensils, books and periodicals in these hostels.

The national Policy of Education, declared in 1986, talks of education for the “empowerment of women.” It further promises that “this will be an act of faith and social engineering”. The faith dawned on the planners with an increasing realization that if a nation was to progress in various dimensions, then, women should be educated to participate in a much larger variety of walks of life, than what are open for them at present. This trend was also reflected in the reports of education commissions. It is interesting to note that whereas university education commission’s report (Radhakrishnan commission) emphasized the special provision of soft courses like teaching, nursing, home economics, and fine arts, etc. for women; the Kothari commission (1967) comes out with the remark that “The role of women outside the home has become an important feature of the social and economic life of the country, and in the years the come this will assume large
proportions, affecting a majority of women. It will, therefore, be necessary to pay adequate attention to the problems of training and employment.”

The Eighth Five Year Plan of the country launched in 1991 categorically states that education of women is imperative in order to improve health and nutrition levels in the country and to succeed with the country’s efforts to control its population explosion. It speaks of women as “partners in development.”

In the Ninth Five Year Plan, which became operative in 1997, the title of the chapter on women’s education is Education for Women’s Equality. It is pertinent to point out that the ambivalence about equality and about the objectives of education, which were so conspicuous earlier, are now completely gone. Both the tone and the substance of these documents and other policy statements of the eighties and nineties exude a new urgency and determination. Three different factors seem to have contributed to the change. First the findings from the country’s review of its development efforts, second the feminist movement, and third the revolution of rising expectations and standards of living which has made it necessary for women to be gainfully employed.

Programmes run by CSWB for women education: The CSWB runs condensed courses for women and girls in primary, middle, big school, and secondary level to fulfill the needs of the drop-out students.
Condensed Courses of Education and Vocational Training for Adult Women

The scheme of condensed course of Education for Adult women was started by central social welfare Board in 1958 for opening new vistas of employment to deserving and needy women and for creating a band of competent trained workers such as primary school teachers, Balsevikas, nurses, health visitors, mid-wives and family planning workers.

Under the scheme, women in the age group 18-30, who have had some schooling, are prepared for middle school, matriculation or equivalent examination within two years. From 1975-76, two courses for failed candidates and vocational training courses have been added to the scheme. The programme has been extended to the families of jawans killed or permanently disabled in action.

Mahila Mandalas

These are women’s organisations running welfare programmes in rural areas. The CSWB gives grants upto 75 percent of their expenditure.

Vocationalisation of education: For girls who complete class 10 and then drop out, there has been provision for vocational training programme with thrust on entrepreneurship.

The CSWB runs vocational training programmes under which women are given vocational training in different trades leading to certificates by the states directorates of technical education. Besides, there are a number of vocational training schemes linked with employment generation such as TRYSEM (40% reservation for women), NORAD and STEP, Nehru Rozgar
Yojana, SIDBI etc. in which there are women specific targets and reservations for women. A scheme of Vocational Rehabilitation Centres (VRC) for handicapped women was launched in 1986-87 to provide rehabilitation to handicapped women through vocational training. There are 17 VRCs in the country. The department of education runs polytechnics. There are at present 450 polytechnics in the country out of which 45 are women ones.

**National Literacy Mission (NLM)**

It aims at eradication of illiteracy in 15-35 age group what is envisaged in NPE with regard to literary and adult education. The Mission document emphasizes the importance of imbibing the values of national integration, conservation of environment, women’s equality, observance of small family norm etc. and goes on to say that “the focus of NLM should be on rural areas, particularly women and persons belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes”.  

**Functional Literacy for Adult women**

A new scheme of Functional literacy for Adult women in the age group between 15-45 years was started in 1975-76. The scheme offers non-formal education to cover elements of health and hygiene, food and nutrition, home-management and child care, school education and vocational / occupational skills. The scheme is being implemented in the Integrated Child Development Services project areas at 2561 centres. About 45,000 adult women attend these literacy classes.
Adult Education Programmes

The National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) initiated on October 2, 1978 placed special emphasis on enrolling women as students, instructors and decision-makers, as women constituted more than two-thirds of the target population. A special Working Group on Adult Education Programme for Women was appointed by the Ministry of Education in 1977-78. The group identified the urgent necessity of recognizing the productive and economic roles which the large majority of adult illiterate women played in society, particularly in the case of rural women. In the Group’s opinion, the adult education programme should aim to make women and men more conscious of their rights and responsibilities and laws governing women’s status; assist women to improve their economic conditions through literacy and other skills; provide women access to knowledge in other areas including health, child care, family planning, etc. and “assist women to form their own groups for learning and productive activity and to strengthen their participation and voice in the development process.”

The Review Committee on NAEP reported in 1980 that only 35 percent of the population covered up to January 31 that year were women. The Committee identified certain special problems for this slow progress in women’s access to this programme.

These were resistance among men and the community, lack of time and energy among poor women, difficulties in finding common time for men
and women to attend classes, inadequate number of women instructors and supervisors and absence of child care facilities.

The Committee recommended more meaningful efforts to relate educational content to the characteristics and need of the women’s groups, provision of child care facilities with each adult education centre for women and organizing classes during and as a part of women’s working time by recognising work schedules of government, development agencies and other employers in the organised and semi-organised sectors. The Committee also advised stronger efforts to involve women and women’s institutions (schools, colleges, etc.) in the programme and the promotion of grass-root level women’s organizations (Mahila Mandals) along with educational level.

According to a report up to December, 2001 total enrolment under Adult Education was 62.21 lakh, out of which 29.13 lakh were men and 33.08 lakh were women, coverage of women being 53.22 percent of the total. In addition, 7.21 lakh were covered under the Functional Literacy for Adult Women (FLAW) programme for literacy learning.

It may be noted that the second National Conference on Women’s Studies (Thiruvananthapuram, April 1984) adopted a resolution that the female illiteracy should be reduced to 50 percent by the end of the Seventh Five Year Plan and to zero percent by the year 2000 and called the Government, voluntary organisations and educational institutions to harness all their resources into a massive movement for this purpose.
To encourage voluntary organisations working in the field of Adult Education to run adult education centres exclusively for women, the Government of India has liberalised grants-in-aid rules and has given them enhanced grants.

**Border Area Projects**

Welfare services in the border areas of the country have been strengthened with the setting up welfare centres in the boarder areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Leh in Jammu and Kashmir, Lahaul and Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh, Chamoli in Uttar Pradesh Kutch and Banaskantha in Gujarat and Srikarnpur and Jaisalmer in Rajasthan. These centres provide maternity services, infant care, craft training and social education for women.

**International Women’s Year**

In pursuance of United Nations General Assembly Resolution the Government of India decided to join other countries of the world in observing 1975 as the International women’s year and constituted a national committee which finalised the programme for the year.

The Highlights of this programme were: issue of a commemorative postage stamp; observance of All India women’s Day, Distribution of educative, sports, festivals, production of documentary film, organizing essay competitions, seminars and conventions.

The all-India drop-out rate for girls at the elementary level is seventy-four percent, owing to such factors as early marriage in rural areas and in urban slums and parents’ unwillingness to educate girls. In the rural areas,
girls cannot attend middle and high schools, for such institutions are usually located in areas distant from their villages. Lack of transportation and hostels and parents relentless refusal to allow girls to travel unescorted every day to school account for the high female drop-out rate after primary education. Girls in poorer sections are sent away home to look in the fields or in the houses of the upper classes. Parents inculcate the inequality of the sexes during upbringing by exhibiting different patterns of behaviour toward male and female children. While boys continue their schooling after the primary level, girls find themselves kept at home to attend to their traditional roles as defined by society. The highlight of the action plan on national policy on education was the launching of an effective programme for ensuring that no child between the age group of six and eleven would remain outside the structure of formal and non-formal education throughout the country by 1990, the end of the seventh five-year plan. The action plan envisaged that the enrolment of the school children in the age group of six to eleven would be 99.2 percent, while for the age group of eleven to fourteen would be 59.76 percent. The percentage of children in schools in the age group of six to fourteen, thus, would be 85.88 percent of the total population of children.

Non-formal education for the elementary age group: Non-formal education complements the formal system of elementary education for children. Nine education backward states, namely Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar
Pradesh and West Bengal, benefit most directly from non-formal education. The central and state governments share expenses.

To increase girl’s enrolment, the government since 1983-84 has liberalized the programme of non-formal education. Under it, the central government provides ninety per cent assistance, and the state share is ten percent.

Appointment of women teacher in primary schools in the educationally backward states: the central government contributes eighty percent of financial assistance to such states, which carry the remaining twenty percent. During the fiscal year 1986-87, total grant of Rs. 200 lakhs went to the states for appointment of eight thousand women teachers.

Population education programme: In 1980, the National Population education programme was launched to create awareness among youngsters about their responsibilities towards the nation with regard to population control. This programme collaborates with the United Nations fund for population activities and with the active support of government of the ministry of health and family welfare. Until then the project restricted its focus to the formal education sector. In the seventh plan (1985-90), the programme geared up to the adult literacy programmes and non-formal education sector.

Besides taking care of educationally backward social classes and areas, the national policy on education has proposed that physical fitness centres and
centers for talented children in every district be set up by the end of the seventh plan in 1990.

Certain high schools ushered in the computer age by introducing sophisticated new technologies to able students.

**Secondary Education:** The enrolment of girls at the secondary level is not that satisfactory. As per provisional figures of the department of education, there were only 55 girls per 100 boys enrolled in the secondary level in 1993-94. Similarly and the drop out rate for girls at the secondary stage was 74.54%.

**Other government interventions in secondary education:** Free secondary education has already been provided in many states. Free education is provided in Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kendriya Vidyalayas to girls upto class XII. In Navodaya Vidyalayas and centre of excellence, one third of the students have to be girls.

**Higher Education:** Student enrolment in universities and colleges increased from 35.39 lakhs in 1984-85 to 35.71 lakhs in 1985-86, the enrolment of women students was 10.59 lakhs in 1985-86, as compared to 10.71 lakhs in 1984. Higher Education among scheduled castes and scheduled tribes continues to receive special emphasis with the establishment of special programmes for these groups.

**Technical Education:** All the five-year plans have laid great emphasis on technical education to produce enough trained people for the economic development of the country, by the end of the sixth plan in 1985, technical education facilities accommodated thirty thousand students annually in degree
courses, sixty thousand student in diploma courses, and seven thousand students in post-graduate courses.

There are special programmes for S.C./S.T. girls funded by the ministry of welfare and implemented by the state governments for providing scholarship, hostel facilities, free uniforms and text books.

The government has taken initiatives to provide assistance to voluntary organizations for augmenting the boarding/hostel facilities for girl students of the high school and secondary students.

**Tertiary/technical/ vocational education:** From 40,000 in 1950-51, the number of women who have enrolled themselves in higher educational institutions has gone up to 51 times. In 1995-96, 2065 million women had enrolled in universities and polytechnics in the country.

In the technical and professional higher education institutions too, there has been an increase in the participation of women. From 6000 women in 1950-51, the number rose 23 times to 141000 in 1986-87. In the Indian institutes of technology and other engineering and technology related institutions, against 40 students in 1950-51, it has risen to 78300 girls.

**Scholarships:** The government of India awards scholarships to enable students to carry on studies both in India and abroad. Scholarships are usually awarded to meritorious students without adequate means, under the National Merit Scholarship programme, scholarship enabled 27000 students to undertake studies beyond the high school level. Rural children received 38,000 scholarships for carrying out studies up to the high school level. Out
of the 38,000 scholarships in the sixth plan, 23000 went to children of landless labourers, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes, five-hundred scholarships were awarded to poor but meritorious students.

The National Policy of Education (NPE-1986)

This policy attempted for the first time to address itself to the basic issues to women's equality. It gives over-riding priority to the removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles increasing their access to and retention in elementary education. Emphasis has been laid on women's participation in vocational, technical and professional education at different levels so as to promote women's participation in non-traditional occupations and existing and emergent technologies. Thus, the basic strategy of NPE and POA would be to establish effective linkages so that education of girls and women are connected to broader concerns of national development in order to develop in them a culture of self reliance, positive self image and the capacity to participate in decision making at all levels on equal footing with men.10

The programme of Action for the implementation of NPE (POA) entailed the following-

A phased time bound programme of elementary education for girls, particularly upto primary stage by 1990 and up to the elementary stage by 1995.

A phased time bound programme of adult education for women in the age group 15-30 by 1995.
Increased women’s access to vocational, technical and professional education and existing and emergent technologies, and review and re-organization of educational activities to ensure that make a substantial contribution towards women’s equality, and creation of appropriate cells/units for the realization of the objectives.

“Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well conceived edge in favour of women. The National education policy 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”.¹¹

A number of measures have been suggested to achieve the stated objectives of the national Policy on education. The Action plan enunciates that every educational institution should take up by 1995 active programmes for the development of women. All teachers and non-formal education/adult education instructors should be trained as agents of women’s development. Special programmes on general awareness and positive self-image amongst women through programmes like discussions, street plays, wall paper, puppet shows, etc. are to be taken up. Preference in recruitment of teachers upto school level should be for women. The programme of action implementation of NPE (POA) regarding women’s education gives the following suggestions-
Every educational institution should, by 1995, take-up active programmes of women’s development through study and awareness generation of women’s predicament and for promotion of communication and organization among women.

All teachers and Non-Formal Education /Adult Education (NFE/AE) instructors should be trained as agents of women’s empowerment.

Women teachers and women instructors in adult/non-formal education programmes should receive special orientation to enable them to play an active role towards women’s equality.

The National Policy of education declared that the following strategical decisions would achieve the national goals on education.

1. Single teacher school be converted to double teachers school.
2. Appointment of more women teachers.
3. Special attention to children and girls and weaker sections of society.
4. Provision of incentives like free supply of books, stationery, uniforms, mid-day meals, and scholarships for regular attendance.

These plans, schemes and commissions, made at national level have been implemented carefully to raise the educational status of women and are getting success in their purpose but we can not neglect the fact that educational status of women has been uplifted in comparison to past but it is no way satisfactory. Still the gap between education of men and women is very wide and it can be observed even from the literacy rate of men and women.
Women studies

Women’s studies programme has four dimensions- teaching, research, training and extending and extension. In this respect, following suggestions have been given-

1. Incorporation of issue relating to women’s status and role in the foundations course.

2. Incorporation of the women’s dimension into courses in different disciplines.

3. Elimination of sexist bias and sex-stereo-types from text books.

4. Research on identified areas and subjects.

5. Dissemination of information and interaction through seminars/workshop on the need

Total Literacy Campaign: The main strategy followed since 1988 to spread adult literacy has been the Total Adult Literacy Campaign (TALC) of National Literacy Mission (NLM). Post literacy campaign and continuing education programmes have also been part of NLMs effort to sustain adult literacy. The impact of this programme is reflected in the data. Female literacy has gone up from 39.3% in 1991 to 53.7% in 2001, while the male literacy in the same period has increased from 64% to 75%.

The 86th constitutional amendment act, 2002 makes free and compulsory education a justiciable fundamental right for all children in the 6-14 age groups. The government of India is committed to realizing the goal of elementary education for all and bridging the gender and social gap by 2010.
The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), launched in 2001-02, is the national umbrella programme that is spearheading the universalisation of elementary education programme through a community based approach with the specific focus on quality education. SSA has banked upon the education guarantee scheme (EGS), an alternative and innovative education programme which is specially designed to provide access to schoolless habitations. The scheme provides flexible strategies for out of school children through bridge courses, residential camps, remedial coaching etc. The gross enrolment ratio for girls in primary education has increased from 64.1% to 93.1% in 2002-03. The gap between the gross enrolment ratio of boys and girls has declined steadily over the years. SSA seeks to reduce the gender gap and social disparities through context specific innovative interventions. The major focus of the scheme is to enroll the drop-out students into the elementary education system specially from disadvantaged community. Under the scheme free text books have been distributed to the children of class I to VII. The performance of the programme is reflected in the following tables:

Table-1

| Drop-Out Rate (percent) at different stage of school education in Assam |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| **year**                    | **Primary**                 | **Upper primary**           |
|                             | **Boys** | **Girls** | **Total** | **Boys** | **Girls** | **Total** |
| 2002-03                     | 19.53    | 18.91     | 19.23     | 18.99    | 18.49     | 18.75     |
| 2003-04                     | 3.71     | 3.50      | 3.61      | 9.54     | 9.05      | 9.30      |
| 2004-05                     | 1.63     | 1.53      | 1.58      | 5.12     | 4.83      | 4.98      |
| 2005-06                     | 4.10     | 3.85      | 3.98      | 5.04     | 4.87      | 4.92      |
| 2006-07                     | 2.56     | 2.45      | 2.51      | 2.94     | 2.63      | 2.79      |

Source: Office of the Mission Director, Axom Sarva Siksha Abhijan, Assam.
Table-2
Gross enrolment as percentage to the population to the relevant sex/age in Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th></th>
<th>Upper primary</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the mission Director Axom Sarba Siksha Abhijan Mission, Assam.

As the present work is closely related to the district of Kamrup data compiled on the relevant points reflect the status of women education in the district.

Table-3
Drop out rate of girl students in Kamrup district for the year 2004-05 (data collected from the office of the DPI Elementary Education)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Total Drop out</th>
<th>No. of girls</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 to 6 years</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10 years</td>
<td>2295</td>
<td>1093</td>
<td>47.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-14 years</td>
<td>2593</td>
<td>1233</td>
<td>47.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-4
Enrolment of girl students in Kamrup district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>5696</td>
<td>2724</td>
<td>47.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Primary</td>
<td>10080</td>
<td>4737</td>
<td>46.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Drop-out rate for girls for the year 2005-06 in Kamrup district was 1.13% for primary level and 5.40% for the upper primary level.

It is seen from the above data that the drop-out rate at primary and upper primary classes in Assam has shown a diminishing trend both for boys and girls except for the year 2005-06. Again, enrolment rate for both boys and girls in primary and upper primary classes has shown rising trend. It is reflected in the data for Kamrup district also. The data regarding drop-out in respect of girl students in Kamrup district is slightly lower than that of boys. All this speaks volume of the positive benefits that government measures for women education have yielded.

The national programme for education for girls at elementary stage, a component of SSA, provides region specific strategies to enable girls to come to school, provide remedial teaching through bridge courses and residential camps. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) started in 1994 had a holistic approach to reducing gender gap and social disparities and universal access, retention and achievement. During the tenth plan, a public-private partnership has been built upon to achieve the objectives of universalisation of elementary education. There has been significant mobilization of women groups and grass-root level women associations to secure regular attendance and continuation in schools.

**Early Childhood Education:** ICDS is the major initiative by government for early childhood education in India. The programme started with 3009 projects covering 13.9 million children, out of which 8.6 million were in the pre-
school age of 3-6 years during 1995-96. The gender disaggregated monitoring of ICDS shows that out of 10.5 million children in the pre-school age being currently covered, 49% are girls. For the first time, the sixth five year plan included setting up of early childhood education centres as adjuncts of primary schools. The centres would provide for educational development of this age group and also crèche facilities to enable girls to attend schools by leaving their younger siblings in such centres. The ministry of Education formulated a scheme of financial assistance to voluntary organizations for running these centres as adjuncts of primary and middle schools run either by the government, local body or private management in the nine educationally backward states.\footnote{12}

According to 6\textsuperscript{th} educational survey the total number of children enrolled in the primary classes (1-5) in 1993 was 97.74 million, out of which 43.1\% were girls while boys comprised 56.9\%.

School retention: During 1993-94, on an average, a little more than one-third (39\%) of the number of girls enrolling at the primary stage dropped out before completing the primary level and more than half, nearly 57\% dropped out before completing upper primary levels and of the remaining 43\% who reached the higher secondary stage, another 10\% dropped out before the end of school. Thus, only 32\% of girls entering primary stage reached the end of secondary schooling.

Presence of female teachers is believed to have co-relation with female enrolment and retention rates.
Under the operation blackboard scheme, 50% of the teachers were required to be women and has to be at least one woman teacher in every school. Out of 12,7000 teachers appointed under the scheme, 49% are already women. According to the sixth education survey, female teachers comprised 31.41% of all teachers in the primary schools.

The non–formal education system has been expanded to meet the needs of the girls who can not attend formal schools. NFE centres run entirely for girls and receive 90% central assistance. There are at present 100000 exclusive girls’ centres out of 270000 centres.

**Mid-day Meal Scheme:** The scheme was launched on 15.08.95 as a nutritional support programme to provide thrust to universalisation of primary education. It is now extended to all the primary and middle schools in the country.

**National Policy for Women Empowerment:** According to this policy, equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured. Other goals are special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender sensitive education system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life long learning as well as the development of occupation, vocation, technical skills by women. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus area. For achieving the desired outcome in the aspects of women health, economy and education, convergence amongst different policies is essential.
Female Literacy Rate

An analysis of illiteracy data is an important indicator of changes in women’s access to the educational process and the reduction of the gender gap because it helps to prevent any attitude of complacency and identifies a new problem of a widening gender gap among the illiterate population. The early decades of the 20th century, gender differential among illiterates was negligible since the large mass of the population was literate, but with the progress of education, the sex ratio among illiterates changed to 1055 women for every 1000 men in 1911 to 1138 in 1951 to 1250 in 1961 to 1248 in 1971 and 1322 in 1981 and 933 in 2001.

Rural literacy rates in Assam are nearly 25% lower than urban literacy rates. For women the rural urban gap is close to 30%.

In 1971 the female literacy rate in Assam was as low as 18.63%. In 1991 it rose to 43.03% and to 56.03% in 2001.

In 1971-91 period while male literacy increased by 25.19% the corresponding rise in female literacy was 24.19%. Between 1991 and 2001 the rate of growth of female literacy was higher than that of males. The literacy rate increased by 13% for women and by 10% for male.

In 1991 the district of Dhubri had literacy rate of 29%. The rise is 42.64% in 2001.

Enrolment rate for girls in Assam at primary level is 48%. At Higher secondary stage the enrolment rate is little over 35%. In the higher education segment the enrolment rate for women is 28% which is lower than the
national average of 34.17. The Assam figure is lower than those of several
north eastern states. Mentionable are Manipur (48.8%), Meghalaya (37.71%).

Drop – out rates for girls in Assam are extremely high. It is 42% at the
primary stage, 72% at the middle level and 75% at the high school
level. In 1997 girls constituted less than 10% of the enrolment in Engineering
Colleges, 11% in polytechnics and 17% in technical and industrial school and
women’s enrolment in medical colleges was 27%

School Infrastructure

Between 1981 and 1993, there has been a growth of 8.78% in the
setting up of schools all over the country. According to the fifth education
survey, 94.5% of the rural population had schools within a walking distance
of 1k.m. As a proportion of GDP, total spending on education increased from
1.2% in 1950-51 to 3.5% and was expected to reach 6% by the end of ninth
plan. Public expenditure in elementary education increased from 0.46% of
GDP in 1950-51 to 1.7% in 1989-90. The share of elementary education in
total public expenditure on education is about 45 to 46 percent. Particularly
important is the need to improve the quality of rural primary schools, where
more than 78 percent of children are educated. Providing better services
should not only directly improve learning achievement, it should also increase
the school’s attractiveness to children and parents alike and thus increase
enrolment and attendance.¹⁴
Table-5

Position of School and Colleges and Enrolment in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary('000s)</td>
<td>650.0</td>
<td>585.5</td>
<td>408.4</td>
<td>330.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle('000s)</td>
<td>140.0</td>
<td>116.4</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High/Higher secondary('000s)</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, Sc. &amp; Commerce college (no)</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>3,393</td>
<td>2,587</td>
<td>1,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional colleges (no)</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1,382</td>
<td>1,017</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary (Mn)</td>
<td>85.4(91.8)</td>
<td>72.7(83.1)</td>
<td>57.0(76.4)</td>
<td>35.0(62.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle(Mn)</td>
<td>26.7(53.1)</td>
<td>19.8(40.0)</td>
<td>13.3(34.2)</td>
<td>6.7(22.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High/Higher secondary(Mn)</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University &amp; above</td>
<td>3,442</td>
<td>2,752</td>
<td>1,956</td>
<td>557</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


N.B. Figures in the brackets show percentages of enrolment in class I-V and VI-VIII to the population in the age groups 6-11 and 11-14 respectively.

Table-6

Recognised Educational Institutions in India.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Education</th>
<th>Number of Institutions</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary and Basic schools</td>
<td>6,41,695</td>
<td>11,36,12,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/senior Basic schools</td>
<td>1,98,004</td>
<td>4,20,65,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher secondary</td>
<td>1,16,820</td>
<td>2,82,14,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>7,782</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Education</td>
<td>2,124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities/Deemed</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>77,30,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-7:
Position of female teachers in Kamrup district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Total teachers</th>
<th>No of female teachers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>6229</td>
<td>2379</td>
<td>38.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper primary/middle level</td>
<td>2932</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>24.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-8
Position of women institutions, women enrolment and women teachers at high school and higher secondary level for the year 2003-04 in Assam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>No of total inst.</th>
<th>No of women inst.</th>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th>No of women teachers against total no of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>4607</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>525612</td>
<td>14242 (54224)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher secondary</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1811825</td>
<td>6002 (21201)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-9
Position of women inst./ Enrolment of women and teachers at high school and higher secondary level in the dist of Kamrup for the year 2003-04.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Total nos of Inst</th>
<th>Women inst</th>
<th>Enrolment of girls against total nos. of student</th>
<th>Women teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51423 (119680)</td>
<td>1251 (5068)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher secondary</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>11137 (44272)</td>
<td>952 (3326)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: For Table No. 7-9 : Office of the DPI, Secondary Education, Assam, Kahilipara, Guwahati.

The data cited above indicates how at the primary level the gap between girls with regard to enrolment is decreasing fast. The ratio of women teachers at this level is also highly encouraging. However in both enrolment and intake of women teachers at the upper primary level, a huge gap is get to be filled up.
Education undoubtedly plays the most important function in the empowerment of women. The extant of educational attainment is measured in the form of achievements in some key areas which include literacy, enrolment and drop-out rates of girl student and the corresponding scope and opportunities to utilize acquired knowledge and skills in productive activities.

Table-10
Educational status of women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Qualification</th>
<th>Goreswar Dev. Block</th>
<th>Hajo Dev. Block</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upto H.S.L.C</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree/P.G.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below High school level</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 400 respondents among women interviewed each in Goreswar and Hajo Dev. Block it is observed a substantial nos of them are educated below high school level and equally vast number are educated upto primary level. With regard to age of target group again interesting features are seen.

Table-11
Age-wise Educational Qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>18-35 years</th>
<th>35-45 Years</th>
<th>45+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree / P.G.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/Professional</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table cited (cumulative figure of both blocks) indicates that in the younger age group of women the percentage of education upto higher
secondary level and Degree / P.G. level and for that matter the number of technically literate women is considerably higher than the older age group. This is obviously due to the tremendous singular emphasis given on women education and universalization of education in the last twenty five years or so. It is, however, another matter that there is little linkage between education acquired and current occupation of these women.

Community wise and economic status wise significant variations are observed with regard to parental initiatives for children education.

**Table-12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Goreswar Dev. Block</th>
<th>Hajo Dev. Block</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary level</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upto HSLC</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree / P.G.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical / Professional</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table-13**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>No of women supporting the reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender bias within family</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage at young age</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unattractive environment of school</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of incentives</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-educational school</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of career &amp; job prospects in education system</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance of school from home</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work load at home</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compared to S.C./S.T. and minority population, women/girls belonging to general categories seem to take a lead in educational empowerment. One primary reason of tribal girls lagging behind in this regard is due to their inadequate parental motivation which may be again due to these people's more pre-occupation with the agricultural aspects. Small Land holding and absence of alternative scopes for income-generation other than heavy reliance on agriculture and animal husbandry require whatever work force they have available in the family. But it will be wrong to generalize this trend only among schedule castes and tribal population because economic compulsions drive many families to curtail the educational years of their children, not necessarily girls. The data from field survey reflected in table-13 present perceptions of women with regard to enrolment and drop-out rate of girl students. It is obvious that lack of school infrastructure is no longer the primary cause of low enrolment. The incidence of gender bias within family is also slowly crumbling down with the rise in overall literacy, but poverty induced situations and lack of employability of the present education system are the main reasons.

**Reasons for the Backwardness of Women’s Education**

There are a number of reasons which keep girls away from schools. Important among these are (1) the high cost of education (2) social factor such as early marriage and a wide spread belief in female seclusion (3) discriminatory processes at work with the school system in itself.\(^{15}\) There are
also a few other reasons which are major obstacles toward s universalisation of Primary Education for girls. These are as follows -

**Poverty**

Particularly in rural areas, parent’s income is low and a substantial number of girls are engaged in contributing to the family income by their own labour. So, they are deprived from education. Another factor is poverty syndrome. Demand for female education is low in rural areas, where many of the poorest families live and communications are difficult and there may be no access to a local school. A study in rural India has shown that girl’s participation in schooling may be much more affected by parental wealth than boys enrolment rates. Moreover, the indirect cost of schooling may be higher for girls than for boys.¹⁶

**Unhealthy attitude toward girl’s education**

Many people still regard girls as private property. There is no advantage of girl’s education in parent’s house. So, boys should be educated because their education will be useful to raise the family income. Though education is a major force in redefining women’s role and status, yet women are deprived more in receiving formal education due to less prioritization of their needs in poor families. Besides economic factors, it is felt that social and cultural rigidities are responsible for such inequalities. Availability of equal educational opportunities only can lead to women’s assumption of a range of social roles. Denial of economic rights of women is necessary consequence of ignorance and lack of education.¹⁷
More House-work

It is thought that washing, clothes, cooking, child-care and other household labour are for girls. So, formal education is not much needed to them as for boys.

Community pressure

It is also a major obstacle in the spread of education among women. Other members of community dislike higher education of girls in some castes, specially which are lower in caste-hierarchy.

Distance of school from home

In 1978 it was estimated that there were 1,91,000 habitations without primary schools, of which 11,370 have populations of 500 or more. More schools have been provided since then. Even where schools are available, distance from place of residence is an inhibiting factor.

The unattractive environment of schools

Particularly those schools which lack even the basic facilities such as toilets, drinking water, building, blackboards, etc. fail to attract girl students. The 1978 surveys showed that 53 percent of schools did not have permanent building, 59 percent lacked safe drinking water, 40 percentage lacked blackboards and 61 percent did not have libraries. The situation has improved to a large extent at present, but, there are huge gaps to fill up in many areas.

Lack of lady teachers

There is lack of sufficient number of female teachers who could help in overcoming the bias of sending girls to schools.
Lack of segregated schools

Problem of co-education is a major obstacle in urban area and also in girl’s education. Many people like to send their daughters in segregated schools. If they are not available then they do not send their daughters to schools, specially for higher education.

Child Marriage

Child marriage is very much prevalent in rural areas nowadays also. It is the cause of dropping out of girls. According census of 1991, in I-V class, drop-out rate of girls is 47.6 while that of boys it is 42.0% and in VI-III class drop out rate of girls is 67-6% while that of boys is 60.6%.

Single Teachers Schools

In these schools, teachers are often absent or unable to cope with the responsibility of organizing consistent and meaningful educational activity.

Lack of Parental Involvement

There is lack of parental involvement in educational processes.18

Recommendations

Universalisation of elementary education: Indian government specially since Independence has invested considerably for women education. Significant policy formulations have been observed with respect to improvement of women educational scenario. But, despite the good efforts, there is still a huge gap to fill up. The problem lies in implementation of the
policies. The need of the hour is to assess the performance and introspect on the causes of the glaring shortcomings. Unless every child-girl and boy has an opportunity to go to school, and is retained and taught in school for at least five years there will be no significant change in the educational scenario in India. Adult and Non-formal education programmes should continue as a supportive system. However, Non-formal and other forms of partial education programmes cannot be a substitute for universal access to elementary education. This is of particular importance for girls' education. Only provision of universal elementary education with particular emphasis on women education will make the difference.

**Convergence of Education, Economic and Health policies:** While it is imperative to implement women specific education policies in order to increase the enrolment and retention rate, convergence of literacy programmes with economic and health programmes is all the more essential. Women better skilled and economically independent as well as aware on health matters, are well placed to take decisions regarding education of girl child. Such an intervention will have a positive impact on primary education-creating role models that have visibly benefited from education.

**Legislation for deliberate action to fight gender discrimination:** Social norms are embedded in kinship, culture and religious systems that are highly diverse across - and often within - societies. But such norms can be changed with more powerful socially organized positive efforts as in the past. Alongwith economic development and exposure to information, there is need
of transformation in societal outlook and beliefs. Strong political will and affirmative legislation might force people to change retrogressive mindsets with regard to women.

**Enhancing incentives and opportunities for girls, education:**
Decisions about girl childrens, participation in schooling are made by families. It is here that notions of gender relations are transmitted from one generation to the next. The gender roles traditionally assigned to women and girl child here appear as obstacles many a times. There are familial economic compulsions which girls in a poor family are likely to fulfil more compared to male. The responsibility of sibling care, taking care of household in partial absence of the mother, rests on the girls. Provision of creches, incentives and opportunities for income generation in the premises of house will lessen the burden on the girl child.

Gender sensitive policy making: Government policies need to be gender sensitive. National Commission of Women and State Commission of Women along with the department of women and child development particularly look after the aspects of gender sensitive policy initiatives by all departments. Most nations including India are signatories to human rights treaties that guarantee equal access to education.

Legal measures have already ensured that women enjoy non-discrimination and protect their fundamental freedoms. The establishment of property rights is a crucial step in the direction of securing economic and social justice for women.
Women component in any policy initiative needs to be explicitly focused. The objective of this kind of mainstreaming is to ensure that women and men benefit equally and that inequality is not perpetuated.

Regarding private-sector and community schools, it is seen that the costs of attendance is often significant and its impact on gender parity and equality in education is often less positive. The private sector and NGO initiatives in the expansion of women education is to be welcome, but, government must exercise strict control on the gender aspects regarding enrolment etc.

Awareness campaign for Girls, education: Awareness needs to be generated among the masses regarding the necessity of educating girls so as to prepare them to effectively contribute to the socio-economic development of the country, to strengthen their role in society and to realize their own capacities. The media and various forms of communication have to be geared to this end. In many research studies, education is found to have a significantly positive effect on child health status. Education increases the efficiency of parents in the determination of their children’s health. It is often argued that education provides women with the ability to understand and adopt new methods of child care.

A fruitful rapport has to be established between the community at large and the teachers and other education personnel. As per the programme of Action under National Policy on Education-1986, every educational institution should actively participate in bringing about such awareness.
Involvement of local leaders, voluntary agencies and women's groups is also necessary. Mahila Mandals and Anganwadi workers need to be revitalized and sensitized to provide an effective forum for the purpose. One measure to achieve this could be to assign the responsibility to Mahila Mandals for ensuring that all children in a community attend school. An incentive scheme should be introduced to motivate panchayats to ensure 100 per cent enrolment of girls in their villages.

Early childhood care and education introduces children into the school system gradually and smoothly. When children get used to attending schools, it ensures in some measure retention of children, including girls, at elementary stages also. Hence there is need to have a comprehensive and effective programme of early childhood care and education linked to an integrated package of learning for women. The most comprehensive example of this is the Integrated Child Development Services Programme which needs to be universalized.

**Measures for increasing enrolment and retention:** The committee on the status of women India had recommended several measures to increase enrolment in schools. These included Provision of schools within walking distance, provision of child care centres with schools, abolition of single teacher schools, provision of women teachers at all schools, free education for girls upto the secondary stage and launching of an active propaganda campaign to persuade the community of the value and importance of education of girls. Incentives in the form of free text books and study
materials was also recommended to improve enrolment and minimize dropouts and wastage in case of girl students. The ratio of students to teachers should also be increased so that the interaction between the teacher and the taught, which is so essential for good education also increases. This would help in the retention of girls in schools and would be more effective if teachers from the area are employed. In single teacher schools, the teacher must be a woman. In Orissa all jobs of primary teachers have been reserved for women.

School timings should be flexible and fixed to suit local conditions and the needs of the working girls and must be available within the walking distance of the child. A substantial increase is required in the number of schools for girls.

In addition to incentives like free textbooks, free supply of uniforms, award of attendance scholarships and mid-day meals, facilities such as proper school building, safe drinking water, and toilet, etc., need to be provided to encourage school enrolment and retention of girls especially girls from educationally deprived social groups and from hilly, tribal, desert and remote areas and urban slums. It is worth mentioning that presently a very good percentage of government run schools are equipped with basic facilities like drinking water, sanitation etc.

**Development of Human Resources:** Ideally the teachers for primary and elementary levels should be drawn from local talents. This is required on many grounds.
It builds an instant rapport between teachers and students who are already familiar with one another.

Linguistic distinction in between teacher and students is minimized.

Identification and selection of the better teacher becomes easy.

There should be a reservation of 50 per cent posts for women teachers in elementary schools. Women teachers working in the rural areas should be provided suitable accommodation.

**Augmenting system of non-formal education:** Non-formal education is an alternative to the formal system which has the potentiality of becoming the major programme of education for girls who cannot attend school during normal school hours due to various reasons. The Central Government is already implementing a centrally sponsored scheme under which grants to the extent of 90 per cent are provided towards maintenance of non-formal education centres exclusively for girls in nine educationally backward states. This programme should be strengthened further and extended to other states where education of girls is lagging behind. It should at least cover all the pockets of low enrolments of girls and areas of high dropout rate.

There are a large number of girl children at the middle level age to tap under non formal education system. Universalisation of primary education will remain a distant possibility if the vast numbers of over aged girls are not brought into the non formal education system.

Special focus on Tribal and Minority children: Special efforts are necessary for bringing tribal children particularly, girls into the school system.
Tribal dialects, extreme poverty, problems of commuting, rigidity of formal education and its irrelevance to the tribal culture and the tribal's distrust of the ways of the mainstream society, must be borne in mind in formulating strategies.

Likewise, in the Muslim minority societies the percentage of education of girl child is relatively low due to factors integrated to culture and traditional beliefs.

**Diversification of courses in Secondary education:** The curriculum for secondary education need imaginative and creative changes keeping in mind the necessities and compulsions of girls students in the rural areas.

Diversified courses leading to occupational preparation should be of parallel duration to the general secondary courses. In addition, there should be a variety of short and long term, whole time, part-time and apprentice courses. Keeping in view the rapid modernization and advancement in technology for agriculture, there is an urgent need for skilled artisanship, for promoting productive activities on the one hand, and a variety of learning programmes for adjustment of the rural society to socio-economic change on the other. Efforts should be made to ensure that girls have every opportunity to enter into apprenticeship in areas that are non-conventional, and incentives be provided for the same.

General and vocational training courses should be combined so that prospects of a career immediately on completion of schooling may attract girls from weaker sections. While designing the vocational courses, available
occupational opportunities as well as the need to overcome market stereotypes should be kept in view.

Liberal incentives and other facilities to encourage girls from weaker sections should be started.

Multiple entry system should be introduced in the secondary classes. Part-time education facilities should also be made available.

Condensed courses should be organized in cooperation with local vocational training institutions to cover all rural areas and areas inhabited by weaker sections in urban areas. Such courses may be organized for small groups of girls, and combined with job training. Correspondence courses and self-study programmes can be especially useful for girls desirous of continuing education but are unable to do so because of circumstances. Apart from imparting elementary education and knowledge about farming techniques, the curriculum for non-student girls should include courses of training in occupational skills. Similar programmes should also be designed for girls in the urban areas.

Special scholarship may also be offered to rural women, who opt for teachers' training, especially those who complete the condensed courses at the secondary stage.

There is a need to open more colleges and polytechnics for girls, especially in rural areas as most of the technical institutions of such nature are located in the urban areas.
Incentives like scholarships, freeships, etc., should be provided to enable girls from rural areas to pursue higher education for girls belonging to weaker sections. In addition to freeships and scholarships hostels should also be provided to meet their requirements for food and lodging.

**Continuation and increasing the provision for adult education:** Adult education programmes have been successful to a large extent in increasing the literacy level amongst adult population. But, the programmes must keep the flow of new information especially to rural and tribal areas, particularly to inculcate positive attitudes towards women; continuous training of the people in the use of modern tools and methods of production; and acquisition of permanent reading and computation skills has to be sustained so that those who have been educated continue to acquire new skills and knowledge and more importantly do not relapse into illiteracy.

**Exposure to media**

The growing availability of communication media should be directed towards keeping up information flows and portraying positive images of women in non-conventional roles. Audio-visual materials, combined with non-formal training arrangements, could impart to various population groups the kind of instruction they need in the use of new technologies. Involvement of mass media in motivating women to attend literacy classes is most essential. Rapid strides in the development of technologies and tools for the reduction in women's drudgery and easy access to work places, water and fuel supply, child care, health services and population control can contribute
significantly to the success of learning programmes for women. Women's literacy programmes would succeed better if they centre around women's concerns and also provide opportunities of recreation and sharing of experiences.

Amalgamation of literacy campaign with other departmental programmes: The existing Integrated Rural Development Programme, National Rural Employment Programme, Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas, Training of Youth in Self-Employment Programme, Integrated Child Development Programme, etc., should have a component of literacy for their women beneficiaries. Training should be provided to the functionaries of various development departments by Directorate of Education in the States.
Notes and References:

3. B.N. Singh, 2000, “Rural Women And Education” p-87
11. Dr. Sures Chandra Jain, “Education And Socio-Economic Development, Rural-Urban Divide in India and South Asia”, p-131
20. Sarojini Nayak & Jeevan Nayak, 2005, "Women Empowerment In India", p-246


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