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# WOMEN'S LINK

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# Editorial

Education is recognized as the most important tool for achieving sustainable development of any nation. With this tool of development, relevant skills, knowledge and values are learned and reproduced by the members of a society to enable them to maximize their potentials in the ever changing world. Educating a girl is one of the best treasures her family, community and the country can make. A quality education can be life-changing for girls and boys, women and men helping them extend their full potential and putting them on a path for success in their lives. Educated women are more likely to ensure health care for their families, educate their children and become income earners.

In many traditional societies, girls are prevented from attaining their full potential because of lower priority placed on educating daughters and the lower status of girls and women in general. Families may also have concerns about the school fees, girls being taught by male teachers and girls' safety away from home. Governments and communities have begun to break down these barriers, however, because of overwhelming evidence of the benefits of educating girls.

Gender equality in educational access, participation and outcome is central to the promotion of democracy. A vibrant civic life in which citizens are engaged in all aspects of society is critical to the flourishing of democratic institutions, and an important precondition for promoting social justice and human rights. Without education, individuals cannot develop their full potential, nor can they participate fully as citizens in society. Educational institutions therefore play a key role in the democratic process by giving individuals the opportunity, the knowledge and the commitment to influence the nature and direction of society. Educational institutions also contribute to civil society by offering individuals a chance to better their lives.

Educational qualifications are a form of social and cultural capital which can be converted into economic capital in the labour market. The distribution of education therefore has considerable significance for those groups in society, such as women, who still need to access what is their civic entitlement. For women to achieve equal status and to be awarded recognition as individuals in their own right is central to agenda of development. Such recognition can only be achieved through the promotion of a gender sensitive education.

In this edition, we review in detail the progress in women's education, the work that remains to be done, and the strategies for success. Governments, international development agencies, and civil society organizations have supported a variety of programs that have made a difference in both large and small ways. There are valuable lessons to learn from them—but more progress is needed, especially in the developing countries and among the disadvantaged population.

The article 'Construction of Gender Identity among Boys and Girls in Government Schools of Delhi' by Shailly focuses on developing the relationship between gender, education, and schooling applying the feminist theoretical frameworks to unpack the links between gender and society and identify its strains within the contemporary educational sphere, policy, curriculum, and classroom practices.

Juhi Gupta in her article 'Initiatives in India to Curb Gender Disparity in Education: An Empirical Investigation' establishes a connection between the effect of different government policies and programmes and the growth of women's education in the country. Bhumika Bhatia and Manvi Yadav explore the microfactors such as textbooks, curriculum, classroom culture and pedagogy impacting the women education and analyses the role of feminist movements in addressing the issues of women's education and the feminist pedagogy through their

article 'Dovetail between Sociological Dogmata, School trajectory and Girls Edification'.

Krishna Chandra Choudhary's article discusses women's education from psychological perspective highlighting the importance of education in improving economy of the society and country and also the role of national and international organizations. Richa Saxena and Amba Mukherjee identify the socioeconomic factor constraining girls' education, appraise government policies in the educational sector, and suggest ways to ensure that education remains both affordable and accessible to all. Sunny S. Gurumayum discusses the descriptions of the Nupi Maanbi and the stories of survival. Yashdeep Singh in her article traces the intersecting trajectories between Dalit-Feminism and Postcolonialism.

This issue frames the issues and challenges involved in achieving gender equality and quality education for all. It also explores gender equality within the school, examining the curriculum in terms of rights, decision-making processes, and social relations and it also investigates teaching and learning strategies and the different dimensions of a gender-equitable approach to education.

**Prof. Sabiha Hussain**

# **Construction of Gender Identity among Boys and Girls in Government Schools of Delhi'**

**Shailly\***

## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on developing the relationship between gender, education, and schooling. It focuses on feminist theoretical frameworks to unpack the links between gender and society and identify its strains within the contemporary educational sphere, policy, curriculum, and classroom practices. This paper explains how NDMC schools in Delhi create differential spaces for gender identity and confirms to societal expectations among the girls and boys of elementary school students. The evolutionary nature of boyhood influences the construction of an adult male. Although the construction of boyhood and girlhood begins right after birth in Indian society, it blossoms at the primary level. As a boy and girl leave the secure environment of home, he/she reconstructs himself/herself to accommodate into the school space. School is treated as a miniature form of society. It encourages its own established norms of culture, values, and philosophies as per its interpretation of gender roles. The predominant patriarchal bias at home makes a neutral construction of boyhood difficult for most boys as he interacts with living and non-living elements in the school. Non-living components are physical activities, duties, and spaces demarcated for boys. Living elements pertain to the interplay among classmates, teachers, students, and curriculum. This paper seeks to explain how gender stereotypes through formal and hidden curriculum impact the construction of boyhood and girlhood in New Delhi Municipal Council Government schools of Delhi associated with urban villages of South Delhi. The study explored that girls and boys within the classroom and outside the classroom faced differential treatment like gendered seating arrangement, playground, physical education, school assembly, and co-curricular activities. The construction of boyhood was not the same for all the boys as some boys practice hegemonic masculinity over others, whereas some were subordinated masculinities. These differences exist because of diverse socio-economic background, familial ideology, caste, and religion. Teachers are the souls of our school system. Until they are equipped to deal with gender stereotypes, class, and caste discrimination, we cannot think of equality to thrive in our society. In the teaching experience, over the years, it has been observed that gender and education are closely related. The gender issues are better understood in schools when we focus on the interrelation between schooling and the feminist perspective on education. I understand if we need to minimize the menace of the violent nature of males/boys towards girls, there is a need to know how they rationalize their conduct and why every time they need to have the superiority and rule the female sex.

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## **Introduction**

Education imparts a significant meaning to an individual in the course of study. It is the aim of education, as an ideology and as practice, through educational processes, to fashion, construct and equip the human mind with reason to choose right and wrong. Such training involves the teaching of skills and techniques to read, write numbers theories, all of which constitute 'knowledge' in one form or another that constitute

appropriate knowledge and how this knowledge is executed and communicated through the curriculum. The school is a significant physical and intellectual space within which knowledge is disseminated and received. The school, however, is not merely a building where information and technical skills are learned, some social skills inculcated, examinations conducted, and students assessed evaluated and eventually certified. It is also that the moral and symbolic space where socialization takes place and identities constructed. The society constructs the identity differentiated by gender, caste, class, race, ethnicity among others where young minds followed the tried and tested path of learning, memorizing as well as challenging the given limits of knowledge and where peer cultures are formed and tend to shape everything that takes place in school. Peer cultures also define students' relationship with the world. The aspect of education that encompasses the socialization of the young into the accepted benchmark and values of society is referred to quite simply as education for socialization. The implications of this process are far-reaching and have consequences for the growth and development not only of individuals but also for society as a whole. School as the site of the construction of gendered identity as boys and girls where through engagement with formal and informal/hidden curricular processes, communications and day to day interactions creates gendered socialization among school students which they internalize as a necessary norm to be accepted to affirm as masculine and feminine traits in their behavior. The dominant idea of education, the processes in educational practices result in the constitution of the self. The study of education provides us with an understanding of the manifold processes at work within the space of the school, the peer group and the community that is all tied up in the process of constructing the self. The school, therefore, is a center not only for a different kind of activity but also for space where different types of relations are created, established, maintained, questioned, or acclaimed. There is a first relationship to knowledge, to the written text to ideas and their limits to peers, teachers and other school personnel and to the entire assemblage of activities events and emotions that constitute the daily life of the school (Thapan, 2005,p 3).

At the same time it is essential to identify that although the individual construction of self in relation to the social, this does not happen only as a random imposition or inculcations, it is always at the same time creation and engagement, albeit always informed by the limiting, constraining and restraining aspect of such an engagement. Schools are a space for the evolution of power through the various nerve centers that constitute the school whether these are spatial or intellectual, moral or material academic or social, personal or public. In this process, how does the human subject find space for articulation voice and resistance? Moreover, how indeed is this self-constructed in the school vis a vis the pedagogic encounter that remains essentially a political act charged with intent and meaning? There are undoubtedly demands of negotiations, challenge, and acceptance as well as ambiguities, conflicts, and tensions that reflect the multiplicity and complexity within which selves are constructed and reconstructed.

Thus in this sense school fulfills the expectations in the contemporary society as the primary function in the composite society schools- as formal institutions with planned curricula and professional teachers- exist to transmit and communicate our rich social heritage: its knowledge systems, beliefs practices, skills, and technologies. Schools enable the child to go beyond the particularistic values of family/kinship ties and adopt universalistic values without which a modern/ complex society cannot function. In other words, schools are necessary for bringing about social transformation. Schools work to fulfill the expectations of state-society by



promoting uniformity and loyalty to the state. Schooling by certifying and choosing people for upcoming adult roles, justify their existence. (Pathak, 2002).

### **Rationale of the Study**

The study examined the construction of gender identity among the boys and girls as well as societal expectation as a boy and girl to perform and undertake roles and responsibility determined by society. According to Kakar (1978, p.2) 'identity is represented to express the mechanism of growth and is in the combination of innermost being and the external societal real world as well as the feeling of individual continuum and coherence in self. It states that sense of having a stake in oneself and simultaneously, in some conforming community. It implies that identity has cultural and historical implications as well.

The child cultivates self-images through all the experiences of childhood and gradually prepares a sense of identity. To be a person, identical with oneself, presupposes a primary faith in one's origin which signifies a multitude of interactions, relationships, and actions that are accessible to a child including religion, language, community, school, teacher, family, text, and socio-cultural and political contexts. The child internalizes all these contributing factors in social connotations.

Schools are an essential place where young students understand the concept of gender, both directly and indirectly. School as an organization offers real visions and understanding of boyhood and characteristics associated with this Nayak & Kehily (2006) recognizes the school as spaces where the formation of social norms take place by direct experience and further contribute to the existing social norms relating to gender and sexuality. The Justice Verma Commission (2012) on teacher education encourages the school to act as counter socializers to offset the adverse effects of gender bias and discrimination. A school is a place where identities are constructed, and students internalize the traits of boyhood and girlhood that they imbibe from family values, formal curriculum and hidden curriculum as affirming the right behavior of boy and girl. These constructions are not universal but differ in context to caste, religion, family background.

### **Objectives of the study**

- How do boys and girls construct the meaning of boyhood and girlhood in the everyday practices of school?
- How do the gendered differentiation within the classroom and outside the influence the construction of boyhood and girlhood?

Survey method was used to conduct this study. The study was descriptive cum analytical in nature. The interpretation of responses of students, teachers of Government school is predominantly qualitative in its approach as it is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas. The sample was collected through observations and participation in the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) schools. As a supervisor of B.EL.ED graduates during school experience programme observation of intern classroom teaching help to understand the school culture and power dynamics work in classroom teaching as a teacher is bearing the responsibility of transacting the formal curriculum. As actively participating in different schools activities helps us to gauge the working culture of schools, issues associated with students and teachers.

## **Tools**

The structured interview schedule for the teachers and students were used to gauge the understanding of gender identity among boys and girls, the perception of teachers towards boyhood and girlhood. The interview schedule was based on dimensions such as understanding of self as boy and girl. The awareness of societal expectation as girl and boy roles and responsibilities to be carried out by them in school and family. The differential treatment among girls and boys in school, classroom, peers, and family. The observation was used in the classroom to understand the classroom dynamics, peer interaction, and student-teacher relationship in the classroom.

## **Sample**

The study was conducted in New Delhi Municipal Council schools (NDMC) Kidwai Nagar and Sarojini Nagar school located in South Delhi. The sample consisted of one section of VII and VIII (11-14 Years) class students of Kidwai Nagar and Sarojini Nagar and 15 teachers of each school including subject teachers, art, music, and physical education teacher.

## **Analysis and Findings of the study**

### **1. The Understanding of Self and internalizing societal expectation**

- Understanding of self among girls and boys

The students were well aware of their gender identity as boy and girl as well as the societal expectation to confirm the gender roles and responsibilities in the society. The boys described themselves as physically strong, intelligent, independent, and accepted that decision making power lies with the male members in the society. The girls described themselves as that they have to face criticism if they act like a boy, i.e., speak loudly, fight and, show aggression against the discomfort of any decision affecting their lives. The society, teachers, classmates, and family member expects girls to be docile, passive, receptive, and, should not raise their voice.

- Internalization by boys as bread earner and girls to be dependent on males

The significant development has been the attempt to combine the analysis of gender, as a psychological and interpersonal matter, with an understanding of how a social order as a whole reproduces itself. Between the 5-11 years, when the physical and mental growth of the child is underway, socialization of the girl child starts with customs, rituals, and body-centric consciousness. The boys left relatively untouched. This makes it difficult for a girl child to have a favorable education at school. Slowly the idea of matrimony and motherhood is seeded in the girl's mind as a significant reason and goal of her being a girl. I had a firsthand experience of this fact when our domestic help proudly declared that her 11 year old girl child's marriage is fixed provisionally. Once she turned 18 years, she will be married off. Worse still a token amount of money is also given to the boy's family as a booking amount. This unfortunate situation closes all doors for education to have any meaningful impact on the girl's mind. There is so much discrimination that a girl child has to face that goes against the healthy construction of girls (Kumar 2016 Economic and Political Weekly, p.12-14).

Similarly, the boys are prepared mentally for the impending marriage and the responsibilities that he has to shoulder once he turns 21 years. His anxiety and apprehension are less stressful than the girls, but still, there

are real hurdles with clashes with the aims of education. Early marriage means early employment to support the family and no furthering of formal education in most cases.

In this context during observation in the NDMC school located in Sarojini Nagar school, the girl students of class VII and VIII internalized that they have to be dependent on father and elder brother before the marriage and afterward they have to be dependent on the husband. Their parent's concern is to find the right match when they complete school education. Mostly girls accepted that their parents were not keen to educate them further. Whereas boys have understood that after completion of school education they have to take admission in some professional course and college so that in the later stage they stand to earn a livelihood to support and contribute to the family income. Most of the students accepted that boys have to undertake a job to gain respect in the society and undertake family responsibility, whereas it is not necessary for a girl to be an earning member in a family. Girls may or may not work but, if the boy would not work, everyone will question the character of the boy and label him as nikamma (not working).

In this context, as per the National Curriculum Framework (2005), position paper on gender and schooling stated that girls enrolled in school but could not complete the schooling. Only 1 out of every 100 girls enrolled in Class I reaches Class XII in rural areas, and 14 out of every 100 girls enrolled in Class I reach Class XII in urban areas. Thus, the possibility of an urban girl pursuing school education is low, and of a rural girl reaching Class XII very unlikely. In a real sense then, what matters is not just access or enrolment but retention. While the cost involved in schooling is a reason for poorer children not enrolling or dropping out of school, studies show that school factors are also responsible. One of the primary reasons why children, both boys, and girls, in both rural and urban areas drop out is lack of interest in studies; hostile environments, poor teaching, non-comprehension and difficulties of coping. (Karlekar,2000) In her paper entitled 'Girls Access to Schooling: An Assessment' stated that accessibility of girls schooling is mainly dependent on educational provisions initiated by the government for girls, family's effort to send girls to schools and effective role played by non-governmental organization to bridge the gender gap. The educational subject matter and teaching-learning methods in primary school proposed in favour of a curriculum that includes a hidden intention for proper socialization of girls. As in Kakoli and Sayeed (2013) stated in their paper Educational Progress in India in the Context of Out of School Children observed that hindrances to equal access for girls include expenses associated with school education. The lack of proper food and household responsibility like to help a mother in doing domestic work, taking care of siblings while boys had to provide financial assistance to the family.

- **Responsibility and roles assigned to boys and girls**

( Nambissan, 1995) article is an eye-opener on how social processes within the family and the school has important implications for girls and boys following to gender stereotypes and also for girl's education per se. She also notices that this differs across social strata. Gender socialization first begins in the family. However, she approves with Bourdieu that the role of schools is 'immense in strengthening gender identities and therefore, needs attention.' In this context, citing few observations, she says that in Indian schools in various ways such as the official curriculum, task-allocation by teachers, organizational structure, this is done. Emphasizing on the Indian scenario, she says that at one level it is necessary to analyze the interplay of economic and socio-cultural factors through which the gender norms are mediated and how they constrain the access that girls have

to education. She further says that it is equally significant to explore the primary forces of gender as it affects pedagogy and classroom practices and thereby the learning experiences and life chances of the relatively small proportion of girls who participate in schooling.

(Bhattacharjee, 1999) offers an ethnographic journey into a primary school setting to recognize that the complex ways in which gender is created and interpreted in societal institutions like schools. She directs the attention towards the 'hidden' curriculum of the school especially institutional regularities, routines as well as teaching process itself, which are significant in defining the contours of the child's 'gendering.' She takes a look at the organizational arrangements; control of disruptive behavior; differential task-allocation by the teachers and shows that by way of empirical evidence that these play an active role latently to heighten and legitimate the gender distinctions.

The following observation was noticed for the NDMC schools located in Kidwai Nagar and Sarojini Nagar of class VII and VIII:

- **Teacher gives duties to students.**

During the observation in Upper primary NDMC schools, roles, and responsibilities given by the teacher in the classroom were gendered as Boys were assigned the task of disciplining the boys only. Boys were allowed to go outside the school to bring food for teachers or do small shopping for schools. They were involved in the distribution of mid-day meal during lunch. Carry or shift furniture from one place to another. On the other hand, Girls were instructed to mind the girls only. The task given by teacher included cleaning the classroom, blackboard, and table, decorate teacher's register, etc. And teach both in teacher's absence and when she is busy, read aloud lessons write questions and answers on the blackboard.

- **Hidden Curriculum**

The hidden curriculum is that which is not outlined in the formal work culture of the school. However, over the years it has come to be seen as a kind of a norm which nobody seems to be bothered or confused about. It can be an organizational arrangement which includes separation of physical places inside the classroom and school simultaneously in the gender arrangement, which further creates differences based on sexes. Boys are allowed to cross the school boundaries while girls are assigned indoor tasks like sweeping, cleaning gardening — the adoption of different strategies to discipline the students according to their gender. Routines, formal procedure and practices in the daily life of schools like segregation of boys and girls while seating, forming teams and sports.

Children themselves also structure interactions in classrooms and playgrounds around gender. The literature on this is vast and mostly follows psychosocial approaches. Gender segregation is widely observed in peer networks, seating arrangements, and verbal communication and work patterns; moreover, shared interests define peer networks (Lockheed, 1985; Grant, 1983). However, Deaux and Major (1987) emphasized that in public places/sites, students are likely to fit themselves into this gender-differentiated structure. Thorne (1993) in a critical review of experimental and clinical approaches to the study of children's gender identity and separation in schools, concludes that these explanations do not account for situations when girls and boys form groups across the gender divide - which is as much a part of gender relations as the instances when they

are apart. Thome emphasizes that the 'origin' and 'ultimate explanation' frameworks, employed to understand how children themselves create and maintain gender separation cannot grasp the 'fluctuating significance of gender in the ongoing scenes of social life '(p.61).

The findings in the context of children and gender segregation within the classroom as observed in seating arrangement and outside the classroom in school assembly, playground, and physical education, co-curricular activities affirm the claims made by the Lockheed 1985, Grant 1983, Deaux and Major, 1987 and Thorne 1993. The observations of Sarojini Nagar and Kidwai Nagar school are summarized as follows:

- **Seating Arrangement.**

Seating arrangement within the classroom was arranged in such a way girls and boys were not allowed to sit together. The boys were strictly told by the class teacher as well as physical education teacher who was involved in disciplining the students that boys will not sit with girls. If a boy commits some mistake or misbehaves in the classroom, then as punishment, he is made to sit beside a girl student. During the observation, the NDMC school girls, as well as boys, resist sitting together and if they are found sitting together in the class, boys were subject to harsh corporal punishment by the teacher and girls were advised not to repeat this action. As students were in the adolescent stage, one of the English teachers said that if we allow them to sit together, then there would be chances of them getting attracted to each other. According to her, adolescence is a very tender stage when they should concentrate on studies, that is why they follow segregated seating arrangement in the class.

### **Playground and Physical Education**

In the playground, the games and activities were segregated based on gender. There was strong resistance from boys not to play with girls as they are considered weak and not capable of keeping up with boys. Girls should play with girls only. If by chance, girls got hurt while playing, then they start crying, and boys do not cry as well as run faster. Boys had this understanding that boys are strong and can be violent among each other, but with the girls, they have to keep so many things in mind like not to touch or pat here and there otherwise they would be punished.

During the observation, even the girls were interested in playing with girls only because boys many times while playing use abusive language as well as get violent. The girls accepted that during the physical education period, our teachers selected different games for girls and boys. Girls prefer to play with rope, hopping, running, hide and seek whereas boys play physical sportslike basketball, cricket, badminton, etc. The boys were encouraged to participate in the inter-school sports competition, whereas girls are not encouraged to participate because teachers also believed that there are many health and security issues associated with the girls. On the other hand, boys are rough and sturdy as well as they can travel anytime after the competition, there is less security concern associated with the boys.

The playground spaces and boundaries used by girls were generally clearly marked by the physical education teacher or by the girls themselves to keep themselves away from the boys and are not allowed to go out of the school boundary during the lunch break or school hours. On the other hand, boys, however, use whatever space is available and even use playgrounds in the vicinity of the school. During the school, observation boys

have crossed the school boundary to buy some food or take back their ball if it falls out of the school boundary. (NCERT, Position paper on Gender Issues in Education,2005).

During the observation of the boy's cricket team, the physically strong boys tried to create pressure on boys with weak body build as they want to dominate the boys who were not playing well. The winning team always portrays the hegemonic masculinity over the losing team. If any boy did not perform well in the game, then the next time nobody would like to take that person in the team. The notion is that a good player must perform better and never lose any game; otherwise, our fellow team members would tease him as a loser.

### **School Assembly**

In school assembly activities were organized in a gendered way where all dancing and singing of prayers are done by girls whereas drum beating, maintaining discipline, boys do the line up of classes. However, during the observation of school assembly in Kidwai Nagar girls and boys were used to stand in one line according to height, whereas, in Sarojini Nagar school, different lines for girls and boys were made. Few male students in class VIII were derided for being shorter in height in comparison to girls by their peer group. " Kya yaar ladkiyaan Bhi tujh se lambi hai.kab tak sab seagaye line mey khada hota rahega". This instance indicates that male students have to confirm the societal expectation as physically strong, tall, and powerful in comparison to girls.

### **Participation in Co-Curricular Activities**

In school space, co-curricular activities were also gendered in a way where girls will do all the dancing and singing activities, whereas debates, extempore, etc. are offered to boys. In schools, there is a lack of gender mix activities among boys and girls. During the observation of music class in school, girls were encouraged to sing and dance with girls only whereas boys were encouraged to learn an instrument like tabla, dholak, drum. The girls were happy in learning dance and singing because their parents would not buy an instrument to practice. The girls shared that their parents even discourage them from learning dancing and singing in school because good girls do not get involved in these activities, whereas boys were free to do whatever they want to learn. The girls internalized that their parents have to contribute money in marriage whereas boys could use playing instruments as their profession.

The understanding of feminist critique of education helped in understanding how social structures remain so rigid despite the students sharing the same classrooms, reading the same textbooks, listening to same teachers and having the same criteria used when graded. However, are we having the same experiences in those classes? From our earliest classroom experiences, we are becoming gendered. We learn more than standard concepts and formal subjects in school. We learn the importance of being men and women and the attributes they carry with them. In our society, through the teachings, we receive from our teachers in the schools that are organized as institutions. They are described as factories which produce a gendered individual. The official and hidden curriculum run side by side to produce gender differences which are held responsible for gender inequality.

Before engaging in the research and thinking of the construction of boyhood in schools, there was an impression that only females are vulnerable and face all challenges in their life, but upon engaging with the readings of masculinity it impressed the notion that masculinity is not a uniform category, and it has different

aspects. It helped in understanding gender issues in the education of the boy. Gender is constructed within the institutional and cultural context that create various types of masculinity. Usually, one exercises the hegemonic power over others (Pam Gilbert and Robert, 2017). Schools play significant roles in the creation of boyhoods. School's overall gender regimes usually strengthen gender dichotomy. However, there are some practices which lessen gender discriminations. Masculinizing processes are deep-rooted at certain sites, curriculum, divisions, discipline systems, and sports.

## Conclusion

Construction of identities is internalized and experience based on specific values, norms, tradition, and customs of society. However, the creation of these social processes is not free from gender biases. These constructions generally associated with power relations in each society and, assist the social, economic, and political benefits of powerful groups in it. The gender roles are socially constructed as the process of construction is culture-specific, which are the ideological and institutional arrangements of each society.

Education thus conserves, and often enhance, the societal beliefs present in society. The diverse socio-economic understandings of students have noteworthy inferences on the number of identities or individualities developed among the girls and boys and impact their mindset, abilities, and education, they acquire, which consecutively influence their academic achievement in school. There are numerous factors in their socialization, which helps them in gaining their education in school, while there are others, which locates the schoolchildren at a disadvantage *vis-a-vis* school and discourage learning. To be part of a distinct type of family, social class, caste or gender group and be exposed to a particular type of child upbringing process have definite connotation for the kind of individual we develop into and later on acquire the competencies, possess different outlooks, wisdom and linguistic forms, which in turn impacts our performance in school. The gender-neutral approach in the teaching-learning process is a way to deal with the prevailing gender stereotypes.

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# **Initiatives in India to Curb Gender Disparity in Education: An Empirical Investigation**

**Juhi Gupta\***

## **Abstract**

Education plays a pivotal role in the development of a nation by empowering people socially and economically. Many economists and philosophers have agreed on the fact that one of the most significant assets of life is educating oneself. Mahatma Gandhi had said that ‘there is no justification for men to deprive women or to deny them equal rights on the ground of their illiteracy; but education is essential for enabling women to uphold these natural rights, to improve them and to spread them.’ (Gandhi, M.K., 2001) This article critically analyses the status of women’s education in India through different decades. Suggestions made by various committees and commissions set up on education in India have been evaluated for their effectiveness in improving women’s education. The aim of the study is to establish a connection between the effect of different government policies and programmes and the growth of women’s education in the country. With an exploration of various initiatives for education in India, the result of this research highlights the effectiveness of these initiatives by correlating them with the results.

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## **Introduction**

The guidelines prescribed by UNIFEM on women’s education emphasizes on the importance of educational equality to establish equality in different walks of life. It states that women’s education and literacy status is a fundamental necessity to achieve the goal of gender equality and women empowerment. It further asks its coordinators to emphasize more on raising global awareness about female education to reduce fertility rates and equate the provision of quality education. Several Studies by the World Bank and other organizations has exhibited that increasing girls’ schooling enhances women’s wages and creates faster growth of the nation than educating only boys. Education is now a fundamental right in India. However, gender discrimination still has its roots. Male literacy rate in India is more than 82 percent, while for females it is 65 percent. There is a mismatch between education and the skills needed for the workforce, which needs to be addressed. (Aragon, J. and Miller, M., 2012)

Educated women are better respondents to personal and social challenges which help them in confronting their roles as demanded by the traditional system. An in-depth evaluation of the scenario of women’s education in India, decade by decade, can help in evaluating the cause and effect relationship between different educational reforms in the country and the decline in the gender gap in education.

## **Women’s Education in Pre-Independence India**

### **The Period of 1901-1950**

During the British era, there was a revival of women’s educational status in society. Social reformers, Christian missionaries, philanthropic foreigners as well as the British government stepped ahead for improving the state of women’s education in India. London Missionaries Society’s Institution began its educational work by

1798. Founded in the year 1819, Female Juvenile Society (Calcutta) established around four schools for promoting female education. Around 1835, there were about 108 scholars to impart quality education to the female sections in Calcutta. In association with and on the grounds of Church Missionary Society (Calcutta, 1799), the Ladies Society established a girl's school. Under the patronage of Annie Cook and the aid of Church Missionary Society, many primary schools were set-up for the girl child in Sobhabajar, Thanthania, Krishnabajar, Mallikbajar, and other nearby places. Shortly, India witnessed the establishment of its first girl's school in the year 1847 at Barasat (Calcutta). Residents of Calcutta exhibited enthusiasm for seeking education for their girl child. On account of increasing participation from citizens, the society stepped ahead with the establishment of Central Female School in Calcutta. Bishop's College (19th April 1864) was the result of efforts of the Incorporated Society for the propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts to promote the ideology of female education.

The role of Christian missionaries in promoting female education was a unique aspect of the colonial era. The missionaries believed that educating female strata of society is the sole factor to contribute towards their social upliftment. Shortly, they took up the responsibility of imparting both religious and scientific knowledge to the female section of the society. Christian missionaries whole-heartedly undertook the aim of educating the widows and later moved ahead with recruiting them for the positions of both teachers and doctors. Shortly, society accepted women in these roles. Later, Christian missionaries thrived in establishing other schools exclusively meant for the social and political development of women.

There were a few efforts made to streamline and formalize education in the early 1900s. The Indian university act was passed in 1904, which provisioned a grant of Rs. 5 lakhs for higher education. The government of India resolution in 1913 and the Hartog committee in 1927 suggested decentralization of the governance of education to the provinces in order to enhance literacy. During the British regime, the education department came forward with a proposal for opening schools for females. However, such schools were only attended by the poor girls as they were attracted to the stipends being paid. On the contrary, the upper-class families did not send their daughters due to lack of female teaching staff. Also, governmental funding for such schools was insufficient, and as a result, the government schools were finally shut down.

In such a scenario, some sincere efforts were being made by the Indian organizations towards women's education. Arya Samaj, established in the year 1875 in Mumbai, observed that the Hindu girls required special kind of educational assistance to cope up with the new demands put forth by the educated male section of the society. Shortly, the Arya Kanya Mahavidyalaya was set up in Jalandhar in the 1890s. Brahmo Samaj was also established in the year 1828 in Calcutta to reform Hindu society by emancipating it from the clutters of Sati and caste system. Well-educated boys started demanding at least a preliminary educational status of their spouses. Radical Brahmos stood in favour of providing elementary and higher education to women. The end of the nineteenth century witnessed a sudden rise in equal education of both men and women. Similar efforts were made by Prarthana Samaj, established in the year 1867 to end the caste system and practice of child marriages, thereby providing equal educational opportunities for girls. Since the influence of the Brahmos philosophy was mainly confined to the state of Bengal and the Northern region of India, the western part soon came up with the establishment of Prarthana Samaj (1867). Justice M.G. Ranade and Bhandarkar were the promising faces of this Samaj. From the 1880s, Pandita Ramabai Ranade began her contributions towards the Prarthana Samaj's initiative for the upliftment of women's educational status in the society.

## **Impact:**

Numerous interventions were put in place in the four decades of pre-independence, to improve literacy in India, especially amongst women. However, the interventions had minimal impact. The reasons could be many. There was a priority for achieving independence from the British on the one hand and an effort to lift the society from religious and social dogmas on the other hand. Hence secular education did not find favour with the masses who were dealing with daily survival issues and trying to make ends meet. Women Literacy rate moved from 0.7% to 8.9% over a period of approximately 47 years. This is an improvement of just 0.17% per year.

## **Women's Education in Post-Independence India**

After India became an independent and sovereign country, women's education witnessed an exponential phase. Around 1941, India accounted for 7.3 percent of women's literacy rate, which rose to around 65 percent in the year 2011. Still, the present literacy rate of Indian women is quite less as compared to male counterparts (approximately 82.14 percent). **University Education Commission**, in its annual report for the year 1948 to 1949, emphasized on availing the women-friendly subjects such as home economics, nursing, teaching, fine arts for training women in their field of interest.

## **The Period of 1951-1970**

### **a) The Year 1951-1960:**

The education of women in the Third world is an emerging field of study. Before 1970, the researches did not focus on the factors like aspects of women's education, the differences in the type of education female as compared to men received, or the personal, social or political effects of women's education. (Kelly, D. H. and Kelly, G. P.,1982). The post-independence era witnessed a significant turnover for the women's status, educational rights, and empowerment in India. A number of committees and commissions were set up to improve the status of education in India with a special focus on women's education. The emphasis was on providing universal education to all children between the age of 5 years to 14 years.

**Mudalier Commission:** According to the recommendations of this commission set up in 1952, the government should provide compulsory education to both boys and girls irrespective of their gender differences. Wherever required, girls' schools should be opened to encourage girl child to seek compulsory education. All hostels and residential schools should emphasize on availing a balanced and nutritious diet for all their students. Teachers should be facilitated with residential as well as medical facilities, study leave, allowances for travel, and so on.

### **b) The Year 1961-1970:**

**Hansa Mehta Committee:** Established in the year 1962, the Hansa Mehta Committee suggested the following improvement measures for ensuring a quality women's education:

- Adoption of the co-education system.
- Encouraging girl child to study Science and Math as main subjects at the Higher Secondary Levels.
- Increasing the overall count of women employed in primary schools.

- Emphasis to be levied on facilities such as scholarships, free transportation facilities, and a stipend to promulgate girl's education.
- Standard academic curriculum for both boys and girls at all levels of education.

**Bhaktavatsalam Committee:** It was set-up in the year 1963 for studying and analyzing problems associated with women's education. According to the recommendations of this committee, governmental and public schools should join hands to impart and ensure quality education to girls. This committee too emphasized on the introduction of co-education system and adequate help from the central authority for the establishment of social, educational centres to impart women education.

**Kothari Commission:** Article 45 of the Indian Constitution asks for rendering free and compulsory education to all children till the age of fourteen years. National Education Commission popularly known as Kothari Commission of 1964-66 emphasized more on uplifting the role and position of teachers in the society and granted them academic freedom to publish their independent studies. It also stressed on imparting quality education to girl child without any grounds of discrimination.

India inherited a very weak educational base after the British left. The first census conducted after independence indicated approximately only 9 percent of females and 27 percent of males as literate. The Constitution of India made a Directive Principle of State Policy under Article-45 as follows -

“The State shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years within ten years from the date on which the Constitution comes to force.”

### **Impact:**

The 'Kher Committee' in 1944 recommended that the goal of education for all, should be achieved in 16 years, that is by 1962. The government spent Rs. 6371 crores on education in the years 1951-1971, which was a mere 1.5% of GDP. Therefore, the years went by, and the desired results could not be achieved. Female literacy rate between 1951 and 1971 went up by 13.1% points, a mere 0.65% a year.

### **The Period of 1971 – 1991**

#### **a) The Year 1971-1980:**

The most notable intervention by the government a few years prior to the start of the next decade was the national educational policy in 1968. It envisaged a common structure of education across the country, the 10+2+3 system. The expenditure on education increased to about 2.5% of GDP during this period.

#### **b) The Year 1981-1990:**

**Operation BlackBoard:** Operation Blackboard was originally launched in the year 1987. It was a centrally sponsored time-bound programme that aimed to supply necessary facilities to all primary schools already established across the country. The operation aspired to provide at least two teachers, toilets, chalk blackboards, verandas, and other essential requirements. Despite the agendas, the operation failed to serve its purpose and was hugely criticized for its monetary wastages and non-functionality. The project was supposed to be completed in three phases: 20 percent of schools in the first phase (1987-88) 30 percent in the next (1988-89),

and the remaining in the next year. Surveys revealed that the task was so poorly handled that several states set out to boycott the mission. A huge outlay of funds was mishandled and wasted.

### **Impact:**

The two decades of 1971 – 1991 once again witnessed a very low growth in female literacy rate. The growth was a mere 0.86% points per year during the entire period. Significantly, the expenditure on education was ramped up to Rs. 1.26 lakh crores, operating at 3.3% of GDP. The efficiency of spends was clearly the lowest during this period.

### **The Period 1991 - 2011**

The National Education Policy was updated once again in the year 1992. In 1999, a high- powered committee comprising a group of experts (Saikia Committee) submitted their report where it was clearly recommended to allocate a public expenditure of 6 percent GDP, which is still unattended. One of the crucial objective of the National Policy on Education was the removal of gender disparities in education and to bring this about ‘a well-conceived edge in favour of women’s position.’ (Agrawal. S. P., 2001)

In May 2000, the Government announced to achieve a sustainable threshold level of 75% literacy rate by the year 2005. This was declared before the World Education Forum at Senegalese capital Dakar for reaching the goal of Education for all. During the same year, a national program under the campaign called Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) as an effort towards universal education.

#### **a) The Year 1991-2000:**

**Balika Samridhi Yojana:** Balika Samridhi Yojana was launched in the year 1997 (August) and is focused towards bringing up the girls belonging to both rural and urban areas. Under this scheme, every registered girl child is provided with a monetary benefit as she progresses to the next educational level.

#### **b) The Year 2001-2011:**

**National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL):** This programme was launched in 2001 with an objective to reach the girls who are most challenging to access and are not incentivized through SSA. About 3272 educationally backward blocks are covered under the scheme in 24 states and one UT of Dadar and Nagar Haveli. It provides access to quality education to upper primary level girls belonging to SC, ST, OBC, and other minority & BPL blocks. It gives training such as life skill development, early childhood care, and education, etc. During the year 2014-15, out of 1305 children who were enrolled in primary schools, 629 lakhs were female. (MHRD Statistics)

**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan:** The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002 sparked a major development by making elementary education free and compulsory for the children belonging to the age group of 6-14 years. With this, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was initiated in the year 2002 with the fund outlay of Rs. 7,000 crores and Rs. 21,000 crores in 2011-12. (Bhagat, Rasheeda, 2011) With the program’s implementation, a considerable rise of enrolment in elementary schools was observed. Schools were established to specifically

combat girls' drop out from regions with low literacy levels. Incentives for teacher training, aids, and appliances for children with special needs and rise in the gender parity index was provided. Although the SSA showed some significant changes in the statistics, 29% of students still drop out before completing five years of primary education across India with 1.4 million children in the age group of 6-11 without primary schooling, revealed the UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report on out-of-school populations.

**Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV):** Launched in the year 2004, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Yojana provides quality education to rural and urban girls, thereby facilitating knowledge acquisition process. Its major agenda is to set up residential schools at primary level for girls belonging to the SC, ST, OBC and other minority communities. Under this scheme, a minimum reservation of 75 percent of the seats is allowed for girls who come under SC, ST communities in the rural blocks with a literacy rate below 30%. The remaining 25 percent, is allotted to girls belonging to families below the poverty line. The scheme provides free textbooks, uniforms. It makes provisions for scholarships and food and accommodation facilities along with Medicare, sports equipment and other necessary materials, stipend, etc. Although several attempts are made by the government to centralize the program, the evaluation of schools set up under KGBV shows that the materials provided for schooling are of poor quality. Maintenance of school infrastructure was inadequate. Medical aid provided to the children was also poor. IMRB (Indian Market Research Bureau) results claim that the schemes could not reach its objectives. According to the UNESCO Institute of statistics, there were 2.89 million children out of primary schools while there were supposed to be none. (UNESCO Data) This mission was successful in the retention of girl child in educational institutions through the consent of their parents. However, the provisions of rendering quality education under this scheme are yet to be achieved.

**Girls Hostel Scheme:** This is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched in 2008-09, meant to cover all the 3479 educationally backward blocks in the country. Its main objective is to retain the girl child in secondary school and minimize the dropout rates causing due to distance from home to school and parents' financial crisis, thereby making enhanced secondary and senior secondary schooling accessible to a larger number of girl students. It targets girls in the age group of 14-18 years falling under SC, ST, OBC and other Minority communities and BPL families. The scheme provided one hostel with the intake of 100 girls in each of the 3500 educationally backward blocks. The students of neighboring schools were also granted eligibility for the hostel facility. The minimum living space of 40 sq. feet excluding kitchen, toilet, and other common space. Earthquake resilient buildings equipped with basic fire safety, equipment, solar cooker, and biogas facility.

**Saakshar Bharat Mission:** Saakshar Bharat Mission was a scheme launched by the ex-prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh on the International Literacy Day, September 2009. The mission aspires to strengthen adult education in the age group of 15-35 years, especially to those women who missed the opportunity to receive a formal education. Under this program, 170,000 libraries and reading areas have been established so far. As one part of its mission, the National Literacy Mission Authority (NLMA) have assessed and evaluated adult females for their reading, writing, and numerical proficiency. The scheme aims to reduce the imbalance in male and female literacy, particularly focusing on raising female literacy. As a result, according to the 2011 census, India witnessed a significant reduction in the literate gap assessed in 2011 (16.68 percent) as against 2001 statistics (21.59 percent).

**Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan:** This scheme was launched in March 2009 by the Ministry of

Human Resource Development, Government of India. It aimed to provide improvised access to secondary education and to enhance its quality. According to MHRD of India, the programme aspired to raise enrolment rate from 52.26% in 2005-06 to 75%. (MHRD data) It aimed to set up schools within a reasonable distance of any location. It provides facilities like additional classrooms, laboratories, libraries, art and crafts room, toilet blocks, provisions for clean drinking water, availability of residential hostels for teachers in remote areas. The scheme provided a rise in enrolment for secondary schooling, but despite an increase in the number of schools, their geographic distribution remains uneven.

**Right to Compulsory Education in India:** This Act came into effect from 2009 and emphasizes on the following features:

- Granting free and compulsory education to all children falling in the age group of 6 to 14 years.
- No one can deny any child from seeking elementary education.
- A child completing elementary education is entitled to receive a certificate.
- School teachers must obtain essential professional degrees within a tenure of five years, or they may lose their jobs.
- The financial burden under this act shall be shared by the state in conjunction with the central government.

### **Impact:**

Researches indicate that the common belief that ‘girls are leaving boys in the academic dust is hyperbolic.’ Gender gaps in the ‘accomplishments are nuanced, depending on the metrics and outcomes used.’ (Morris, E. W., 2012). Different types of school feeding programmes reflect a positive correlation with higher enrollment and attendance. But it is also true that maximum benefits reach to boys rather than to girls and have minimal impact on reducing the gender gap. (Maureen, L., 2008) It involves different approaches and higher costs to get and retain girls in schools. Focus need be made in two directions—first on expanding school opportunities and second on boosting the demand for education. This shows a significant increase in enrolling and retaining excluded children in general and girls in particular. (Lockheed, M. E., 2008)

Accordingly, the interventions during the above two decades resulted in the improvement of a very important metric – “number of females enrolled per thousand males”. The number for primary enrolment improved from 32 in 1950-51 to 92 in 2010-11. More importantly, the enrolment in higher education, which was a mere 46 in 1990-91, improved to 78 in 2010-11. The gender parity index improved from 0.41 in 1950-51 to 1.01 in 2010-11 at the primary level. (MHRD,GOI)

## **Current Status of Women’s Education in India**

### **The Year 2011-Till Date**

In poor countries, the systematically huge gender gap in educational attainment is associated with poverty. Poverty is generally one of the deepest correlations to gender gaps in the cases when universal completion is not achieved.(Lockheed, M. E.,2008) Evidence suggests that initiatives like offering cash or in-kind benefits to parents who keep their daughters in school, spending on schools’ infrastructure, improving facilities, and regular activities to reduce general gender disparities, etc. lead to increases in girls’ education. On the other



hand, policies for general women welfare, also have positive spillovers onto education. For instance, it was seen that the granting of land inheritance rights to women in India positively affected girls' schooling. Interestingly, reservation and quotas to increased female representation in elected positions in India also resulted in more education for girls as it raised girls' own aspirations and their parents' aspirations for them. (Heath, R. and Jayachandran. S, 2017). According to the 2011 census report, the rate of women literacy is evaluated to be around 65% against the male literacy rate of 82.14%.

**Beti Bachao Beti Padhao:** Launched in January 2015, this national initiative is meant to ensure safety, survival, and educational rights of every girl child. Under this scheme, the government initiates to impart quality education to the girl child in India.

**Sukanya Samridhi Yojana:** Launched in the year 2015, this scheme is meant to safeguard girls' educational rights to enhance their economic well-being. Under this scheme, the government offers a higher rate of interest on savings account meant for girl's educational savings.

Women's education is not only a matter of concern for the government, but the non-government organisations are also making a substantial contribution to create opportunities for women, particularly in developing countries. Educate Girls, is an organization based in India, that aims to develop educational models and reach out to the "educationally backward" areas of the country. The organization was founded by Safeena Husain in 2007. The organization partners with UNICEF to address the issues at district schooling levels. The preliminary aim of this organization is to provide quality educational support, increase the girl students' enrolment rates, and counter the dropout rates. Camfed or Campaign for Female Education is another international organization aimed at reducing the global poverty levels by educating girls. It partners with governmental ministries for creating awareness about available educational resources for moulding strong female characters. In India, the contribution of 'Mahila Samakhya' to women's education is also noteworthy. It was launched in 1989 and is supported by the government, World Bank, UNICEF, and others. Its objective is to make women aware, empowered, capable, and self-reliant through the means of education.

One of the major long term ambitious universal goals adopted by UNESCO is 'The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', an initiative to wipe out poverty through sustainable development by 2030.(UN SDGs) It was adopted as one of the key agendas in September 2015, that recognized that education was essential for the success of all 17 of its goals. It ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and opportunities for lifelong learning for all by 2030.

Various Programmes and schemes are launched time and again to serve the agenda. Yet social norms, orthodox behaviours, fear of violence, poor management by authorities, lack of awareness, and poverty continue to be the major hurdles preventing the overall success of these programmes. For the successful implementation and improvising the effectiveness of policy, we need better coordination among the society, common people, NGOs, and government authorities in developing a public scheme.

### **Reasons for Slow Progress in Indian Women Education:**

Despite all these efforts by the government and non-government organisations, the goal of gender equality in education is yet to be achieved in India. Several factors contribute to the slow progress of Indian women

education.

**Infrastructural Problems:** In certain places, there is still a dearth for co-educational institutions or girls only schools. Researchers suggest that lack of female teachers, separate toilets for girls, transport facility, and long distance to schools affects girls' stay in school to a significant level.

**Social problems:** Domestic duties such as serving the husband and in-laws are one of the significant responsibility of a woman in India. Situations are worse for women belonging to the poor section of the society. Their roles are restricted to fetching potable water for their families, looking after younger siblings, or taking care of their own children. Women trafficking, and child labour are amongst the other factors contributing to the slow progress of women's education.

**Economic problems:** Not all the parents are in a financial position to send their children in the best possible school. Moreover, children and especially girls are employed at an early age to supplement their family's income requirements.

**Patriarchal Mindset:** Our society still functions under the patriarchal mindset. Father figures under this family structure are more or less concerned about investing in his son's education rather than educating his girl child. This is because the son would be staying with them throughout their life, whereas the daughter has to leave her birthplace after marriage. This prevents her from seeking education in her subjects of interest.

### **Conclusion:**

In contemporary India, when a large number of women are financially supporting their families, it is evident that spending on their education is profitable for generations. It is high time that we acknowledge women and girls as the assets they are and empower them. Education is a ladder to upward progress and brings succeeding generations out of poverty. (Carnevale, A. P. and Smith N., 2009). There are a number of explanations behind the striking gains of women in the educational field. Undoubtedly, the increased participation of women in the labour market is partially responsible for this positive change. (DiPrete. T. A., Buchmann. C. B., 2013).

In order to narrow down the existing gender gap, the government of India has increased the monetary supply for women-specific schemes by 4% to Rs. 1,21,961.32 crores for the next fiscal. (The Economic Times, 2018) As per a report of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, with an aim to provide quality education and eradicate education related crisis, the total budget allocation for the HRD Ministry in interim Budget 2019-20 is Rs. 93,847.64 crores, 10,000 crores more than previous year's budget allocation. Additionally, the government has funded more than Rs. 17,000 crores using the HEFA funding mechanism. It expects more than Rs. 14,000 crores in the coming year through this window. The government funds Rs. 69,193.68 crores for Higher Education Sector for 2019-20. Therefore, the funds allocated for 2019-20 is almost double as compared to the previous year. (The Press Information. (Press Information Bureau, MHRD)

With the above discussion, it is evident that the Indian government spends a significant sum on improving the status of women's education. There is no dearth of policies being framed at both regional and national levels. However, slow progress in attaining 100 percent female literacy rate is the failure of the policy implementation strategy. If achieving 100 percent of women's literacy rate accounts for a national perspective, it is now the need of the hour to take collective efforts beginning from the individual level itself. In the first place, it is necessary to alter the mindset of people who are least considerate about their girl's educational status.

Awareness programs, seminars, and conferences aiming at the promotion of women's education at all levels of society can prove to be a fruitful initiative. Banks, insurance providers, and other financial institutions should take an effort in educating parents about financial planning for their girl's education. Strong emphasis should be laid on ECD or early childhood development. A girl child should be encouraged to pursue her dreams and creativity with continuous skill development assistance to keep the momentum on for her.

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# **Dovetail between Sociological Dogmata, School trajectory and Girls Edification**

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**Manvi Yadav\*\***

## **Abstract**

The present paper “Dovetail between Sociological Dogmata, School trajectory and Girls Edification” is focusing on the microfactors such as textbooks, curriculum, classroom culture and pedagogy impacting the women education. It discerns that education itself reinforces the gender inequality of socialization and social control. In fact school build the boundaries and limit the opportunities. Second section of the paper analyses how feminist movements has addressed the issues of women’s education and further it study the role of feminist movements in changing the school curricula and introducing the feminist pedagogy. Lastly this paper also discusses how women’s studies have contributed in redefining the knowledge.

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## **Background**

Today education is more crucial in size and scope than ever before in the history. Moreover the focus is on the access, equity and equality in education system. As we talk about the access it means each and every child should be in school, complete their education (retention) and satisfied from within, equality calls for the quality in education and equal educational opportunities and most importantly equity demands, what superfluous efforts we putting to make education accessible and equitable in every possible sense. Education enhance the capabilities of the individual and it is person as well as society centered, as it contributes to individual self-realization at the same time education does symbolic and practical work for the social system. It is evident that education, contributes to public enlightenment. However, there are limitations on the competence of the school to perform effectively as knowledge providing agencies particularly in Indian context. The most conspicuous defect occurs in the relations of the schools to children of disadvantaged families specially women. There is comparatively high rate of failure, drop out and low enrolment rate among low income group. In elucidation of this fact, both social background and the character of the school should be well-thought-out. Social background takes in factors like less or no resources in stimulating the child which is helpful in schooling. However, school character comprise of inappropriate pedagogy, belief in limited potential (labelling), discriminatory tracking (segregation of learners on the basis of gender, ability.), etc. Differential access is another dimension, in Indian context education is very varied in a sense that learners from marginalized group gets poor quality of education as compare to learners from elite background and gender is also one of the major reason which adds to the differential access. Gender disparity is very much evident in Indian education system where girls are knowledge deprived due to non-enrolment and dropout due to cultural issues and on the other hand social milieu affects educational opportunities. The social background of the family affects opportunities, aspiration and ability to use the school. This alarming issue become the basis for this paper.

## **Gender issues in Education**

Inclusive education means, cater to the diversity, it includes all micro and macro variables not only focusing on disability. Education system and school become inclusive in true sense when it is accessible to each and every child irrespective of cast, creed, economic background, gender, etc. We often see gender disparity in education, where girls are every so often seen knowledge deprived. This ineffective inclusion of girls in education is due to numerous socio-cultural factors which contribute to exclusion of girls from the main stream education. Gender parity cannot merely rely on the enrolment rate rather it is contingent on the retention rate, participation rate and the diminution in the dropout rate. Gender gap can be observed in the area of knowledge as the patriarchy mindset is willing to invest in male education as compare to women; parental attitude plays a crucial role in deciding the future of the girl's child. In order to render the notion of gender parity or equality in education one must have to understand the relationship between gender parity, gender equity and gender equality also the continuity and relevance. Gender equality is based on the parity and equity. Whereas building blocks of gender equality strengthen the key issues in education such as access, equality in terms of quality, resources, socio-cultural development and opportunities. The relationship between quality and equality is very crucial in education; if education is of meagre standard or have no relevance to girls are the root cause of low retention rate and high dropout rate. The traditional approach to improve the enrolment and participation rate among girls by providing mid-day meal or by providing financial inducements to the parents not likely to improve their status, rather it is an approach to treat the symptom not the root cause of the problem.

Gender is social construct which defines the attitude, role and responsibilities of an individual. In country like India with multicultural context, gender issues spread like an epidemic. Education is the only means to address this issue and has inbuilt potential to bring social change. Reflective vision is required to address gender concerns in order to bring transformation in the society in the context of attitude, value, power dynamics (male are superior), etc. Despite of the several measures, there are still certain loopholes in the education structure and system which communicate directly or indirectly the incongruence among both sexes.

Gender is the most pervasive form of inequality, as it operates across all classes, caste and communities. Yet, while gender equality has been a key objective of education policy in India for over three decade, it has lacked critical edge in implementation. In real term, the dropout rates of girls, especially from the marginalised section of society and rural areas continues to be grim-9 out of every 10 girls ever enrolled in schools do not complete schooling and only one out of every 100 girls enrolled in class 1 reaches in class 12 in rural areas. Factors cited for dropout include poor teaching, non-comprehension, difficulties of coping and high cost of private tuition or education. Despite the education system focused on efforts to include girls, it continues to "push out" those who are already within. Clearly issues of curriculum and pedagogy require equal and critical attention, in addition to enrolment (NCF, 2005).

The context and concerns is that school itself is creating gender inequality and also limit the possibilities in various ways. The book "pedagogy of oppressed" by Freire (1972), also lay emphasis on pedagogical issues viz, "narration sickness", "banking concept" and the "oppressed state" of the learner and develop pedagogical model to challenge these issues through "engaged pedagogy" a style of teaching which prepare learners (girls) question their inequalities and oppression. However, the concept of "authentic Dialogue" and dialectic

relationship in which Freire put emphasis on interrelationship between “action” and “reflection” and reject the notion of “activism” and “verbalism”. The concept of “authentic Dialogue” debates about the dialogue between student, teacher and most importantly the community which symbolize the social realities. In this context the role of the teacher is very crucial where she/he poses the problem to learners and helps the learner to develop the critical view of their own realities.

As soon as girls are given entry to schools, the belief is that as girls and females have entered the public sphere, empowerment will comply with obliquely. Their existence choices will broaden and they’ll be equipped to take larger control of their lives. But the complexity lies in the truth that faculty does themselves create boundaries that limit prospects. The content, language, images in texts, the curricula, and the perceptions of academics and facilitators have the energy to support the keep of patriarchy. The school turns into an enclosed space, just like the home sphere the place discriminations and violations will not be mentioned or questioned. As we look deep into the nomenclature of the school in sociological context, school is considering as the mirror image of the society. As a miniature of the society, school cannot manoeuvre in isolation, as an upshot of this school translates societal ideologies in classroom which create barriers for the girls.

Firstly, **representation of gender in textbooks**, book represents the “window of knowledge construction” which reflects the societal realities present the mirror image of the society. The content in the books are the important source of knowledge which is accessible by both girls and boys, should includes equity and equality not only in textual material but also in visual present in books. The content and pictorials should be gender neutral and inclusive which reflect balance. Secondly, the aspect of **teaching and learning** through classroom transactions: Educator plays a crucial role in shaping the personality and attitude of the learner. As the learner progress to the upper grade their understanding regarding surrounding become critical and view things from gender lens. In context to gender, various platforms should be given to learner to explore social realities and challenge those realities through discussions, inquiry, problem solving, etc. which develop critical thinking and help in breaking the barriers. According to Elizabeth Minnich “a false generalization that has taken a very few privileged men from a particular tradition to be the inclusive term, the norm and the ideal for all” as stated in her writing “transforming knowledge”. Thirdly, **curriculum**, while making a curriculum, constructional ideas were taken from various fields explicitly, psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc. The psychology dialogs about nature of learner (cognitive structures) on the other hand sociology (societal values and issues) also add to it, in many cases it is translated in action, where educator differentiate girls and boys on the basis of cognitive abilities say for instance math and science boys can do better whereas girls do better in social sciences and humanities. Critical analysis done by Myra and David Sadker stated that schools are “falling at fairness” such as discouraging girls to study advance maths and science. No curriculum and pedagogy be outlined without the notion of learning. Traditional learning theories and constructivist perspective can be traced from the time of Dewey (pragmatist) and Piaget (constructivist), who focused on how the child creating meaning from the environment. According to Walkerdine, an old fashioned theory ignores the differences on the basis of girl or boy. They see child as an active constructor of her/his knowledge as knowledge is operative and keeps on changing. However, child is creating schemas where they store the valuable knowledge build by making adjustments between previous and present knowledge. On the other hand Howard Gardner and John Head, argue on the sociological view point, where they suggest that early socialization of the child affect

their thinking style which shows gender difference in many aspects. The socially constructed knowledge is negotiable and can be modified by teacher's wisdom reflected in her practices in deciphering the content in gender neutral approach. According to Gardner student own "kinds of mind" and think to fit same pedagogy to all is a big challenge to education system. In translating the curriculum, the attitude, language, activities, ideas, engagement of learners should be gender balanced. Fourthly, **classroom culture** which includes classroom organisation and management. If the classroom environment is gender sensitive will play a proactive role in removing gender bias and stereotype. The Ecological system theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner, in great detail deliberated about the substantial role of the environment in child's development. In fact creating gender inclusive classroom is completely on the educator rather indoctrinated. This will lead to a harmonious relationship between girls and boys. Hence, *it is imperative for us to assess the limitations of the ways in which gender concerns have been addressed in education, particularly in the very construction of knowledge itself. Such a pedagogical approach would be greatly enhanced by a teachers' needs too being viewed in relation to those of learners', Critical reassessment of their own socialisation would be an integral part of developing their own abilities as teachers if they are to be sensitive to the life-worlds of learners coming from diverse contexts Innovative pedagogies have to be grounded not just in learning new games, songs and activities but developing in the teacher a conceptual and lived understanding of all that experiential knowledge and learning has to offer. In the final run is not in monitoring teachers, but in enhancing training, and encouraging them to contribute to the shaping of critical, imaginative and innovative curricular and pedagogic process, that the real hope for transformation lies (NCF, 2005).*

### **Feminist approach to address School processes**

The prime concern of the feminist approach was nurtured due the privation of transformative dialogue on the concerns and issues of girls. The feminist approach aim to create the consciousness of "difference" and the processes by which social division are construct. Feminist approach in education "*provides students with the access to alternative discourse to help them understand how identities are shaped and meanings and truths constructed*" (Murphy, p.18). The approach (pedagogy) is inclined towards the critical pedagogy, which advocates that students (girl student) should analyse their own experience constructed through "cultural wisdom", text, knowledge presented, etc. and develop critical understanding on the phenomena.

The roots of the feminist pedagogy can be traced from the philosophy of the Paulo Freire, which extent his thoughts on the equity debate in the community as well as in classroom. However, the Edwards and Mercer in 1987, highlighted on the "common knowledge" of the learner as a substantial challenge. Here the common knowledge is used as a metaphor for the context, which is the central part of the learner past knowledge and understanding. Most of the girls and boys come with differences in their responses with regard to teaching content. How girls and boys identify analogous milieu with different understanding because of their view of the context is different. This means the educational opportunities given to the students to construct the knowledge of a particular content vary in spite of the ostensible commonalities in teaching learning process, Jan Harding.

To address these challenges in classroom many theorist reflect and present their views to transform the situation. Burton, suggested that knowledge construction should be a task of the learner and this responsibility however should shift from the teacher (external authority) to the learner. It then become the part of the learner



responsibility and the work left with the teacher is of scaffolding which help the students to construct and reflect on the knowledge. When we understand the student teacher relationship, “this reflects both a different understanding of the significance of student’s knowledge and ways of knowing and of the purpose of education, the latter now being seen as providing entry into different cultural practices and knowledge. The teacher has to find ways of helping students find create and negotiate meanings” (Murphy. P. 15) according to Lerman. Another area of discussion is between “Authentic knowledge” and ‘Ritualistic knowledge”. Where the prior focuses on the knowledge that is explicitly applied in the community and later, only applicable to the environment in which is learned. Authentic knowledge is much needed by the girl’s other than boys. As authentic knowledge is generated through dialogic action between student – student and teacher – student, it is a process where students validate their understanding rather than accepted transmitted views. However another argument stated focused on the “reconceptualization” of pedagogy, where it is talked about the shift from the “concept knowledge” to “pedagogical content knowledge” metaphorically it talk about the “wisdom of practice” which holding the least codified source of teacher’s knowledge, Shulman (Murphy, p. 17). Although, redefining the pedagogy which aims towards gender equity, sensitivity and breaking gender stereotype cannot be totally dismantle from the society or wider educational system. On this thought Freire (1971) present this view on the effective pedagogy or liberating pedagogy that help the learner (girl in particular) to develop the critical thinking of their context.

Many researchers suggested that heterogeneous grouping (co-educational) should be the bases for the effective pedagogy where both the sexes bring in their knowledge and experiences where teaching takes care of it. The best possible way of gender equality does not prologue a separate pedagogy for girls. However it suggested that the difference in pedagogy might increase the objectivity and debate is ever ending. A gender sensitive approach explores that the discussion of gender is inapt to the question of, for instance who should receive an education in “*critical thinking, who should study math and science, who should develop self-confidence and self-esteem, while insisting that gender does make a difference to the pedagogy one harnesses to those goals, and also to the ways in which the goals are defined. Indeed, it allow us to hold up a single overarching educational ideal for the two sexes should we wish to while designing different pedagogies for males and females*”(murphy p. 24). Whereas Jordan, Hook and Carly also discuss that pedagogy of difference puts more emphasis on the differences instead of commonalities between the genders.

The project conducted in Finland “citizenship differences and marginality in schools” was also reported on how schools itself creates the inequality between both the gender, as schools give more responsiveness to boys success rather girl as their roles and responsibilities are perceived differently in society, this attitude and processes are the reflection of the society, where school itself create the gender hierarchy, where girls are not considered as an individuals. A parallel situation is also echoed in African continent, in response to this situation, pedagogy of empowerment was suggested, which is gender responsive and promising in nature to promote democratic context in school and switches unquestioning fidelity to authority with critical understanding, (Bennaars, 1994).

### ***Feminism: Indian thought***

With the birth of “renaissance” in 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of social reform in India. Before that, where practices like” purdah, sati and child marriage” were prevailing, the question of girl education is regarded

as trash. Women face social and economic oppression, where their identities and dignity was questioned. In India girls were not considered autonomous being. Although visionaries see the different picture of India, where they link girl education with national development as well as with the improved quality of life at home and outside. If we trace the evolution of girl's education, the stepping stone of Indian education starts from the Vedic period which is also known as "golden period". In this period girls had access to education. During British period, the interest in women education had resuscitated. During this era various national movements were led by the great reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, who focus on the girl's education in India.

Whereas the members of educated class ascertain many impediments in the path of women development, denial of education is one of the obstructions. While formulating the argument reformers refer several Sanskrit texts. The reformers like Durgaram Mehtaji argue that denial of girls education is the reason for many problems, D.K. Karve also talked about girl's education, where as M.G.Ranad, Karsandas Mulji and G.H .Deshmukh contributed to the betterment of women status and education is one of parameter to raise the women status. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar was also raised his voice against women rights on the ground of equality. Ishwar Chandar Vidayasagar opposed polygamy and strongly supports women education by citing the scriptures and historical data.

Within the wider canopy of political agenda, Indian feminism addresses the issues of women education and the women empowerment. Under this whole spectrum the critical areas were focused apart from the gender sensitive policies and programmes. These critical areas were transformation of curriculum and redefining the knowledge as well as pedagogy, these fields of work also focused by the western feminism. Bringing triadic change in the field of education, they believe it would act as a catalyst for women empowerment. However it was perceived that women empowerment to some extent give women a sense of dignity, confidence, and helps in constructing positive self as well as promotes autonomy and also paved the way for women equality.

### ***Systemic reform in education***

The women movement in India make a shift in Indian education system. Revivalism in curriculum, knowledge and pedagogy bring a considerable change in the status of the women and institutionalised gender sensitive education reform.

### **Curriculum**

Women education committee (1958-59), commended common curriculum and opposed the concept of differential curriculum, as it is reaffirmed that differential curriculum in schools counteract traditional stereotype regarding "feminine" and "masculine" tasks. This ideological orientation is also supported by the Education Commission (1966). Mazumdar (1987) reflected on the status of the women, highlighted that instead of bringing reform in social and attitudinal change towards women, school system itself disseminate patriarchal ideologies.

### **Stereotypical images of textbooks**

Nevertheless, urban women picked the issue of sexist bias in the text book, where the images and the content regarding women roles and responsibilities were very mortifying. Reformists critically examine the textbook for children and their socialisation into gender defined roles and activities (shah and Gandhi 1991). As shah and Gandhi stated that "women voiced their concern about how most textbooks propagated gender division

of labour and reinforced women's subordination and men's knowledge and authority. Nonetheless, alternative text books which are non - biased for learner was in scanty, these reforms did not marked a success.

In turn, constitutional response the situation was government of India, envisaged women education for equality and translated the vision in National Policy of Education (1986) which reflects the liberal view of promoting equality. It flagged the way for women development and empowerment through restructuring the curriculum and textbooks. However the policy objectives are not properly translated in practice.

### **Restructuring knowledge: theory and praxis**

Women's studies in India pursuits at encouraging gender equality and justice by means of

Producing significant potential that leads to action. It's grounded on the idea that talents are not "worth-neutral". It is an instrument for supremacy as well as revolution. For this reason, women's studies is aptly described "because the intellectual arm of the women's action" now not just for altering state insurance policies, but in addition for remodelling women's perceptions about themselves (Mazumdar 1987). Transformation of the prevailing mental lifestyle, which has additionally contributed to keeping patriarchal social members of the family, is emphasised equally by means of women activists and lecturers.

In India, there is a close linkage between women's studies and the women's action. Females activists and lecturers have laboured together to redefine potential. Women's groups have played a significant function within the expansion of advantage and iteration and dissemination of knowledge. Activists from women's organizations and establishments are additionally energetic contributors in all public boards pertaining to women's educations. They have made a big contribution via giving expression to the silent voices of typical women's and integrating their concerns into the research agenda of women's stories. They also have performed a predominant function in articulating the necessity for constructing feminist methodology on the foundation of experiences of the women's motion as a way to understand the social reality of women on the grassroots (Gladstone1994).

Women's experiences have additionally striven to interrupt the isolation of academia and gain knowledge of from the experiences of others. That is evident from the closed involvement of many educationists with the routine of the women's motion. Study inputs of ladies' reviews have additionally enriched the women's action with the aid of offering conceptual and analytical instruments to interpret types and mechanisms of women's oppression (Pandhe,1988). Women's organizations working at various levels also appear to substitute capabilities produced by using women's studies to advance methods for empowering women.

For this reason, women's experiences in India comprises the potential of bringing substantial trade to the function of females through linking tutorial visibility of women's issues with political motion.

"With the growth of women's studies, nevertheless, opinions have ended up divided concerning its position and focal point. Women's activists fear that the immoderate academicization of women's reports will alienate it from the women's movement. On the other hand, women's reviews scholars are fearful that excessive preoccupation with action can lead to the dilution of scientific endeavour. As a substitute of acting as a catalyst to change all disciplines and shake the foundations of present capabilities, it would be marginalized as a discipline in the institution approach. In opposition to the twin hazard of immoderate academicization and activism, the key undertaking dealing with women's experiences is how to blend research study and actions, thought and practice without dropping its broader political targets (Ila Patel).

In summary, the growth and development of women education in India is caught in two simultaneous processes. On one hand, public discourse on education put a premium on the need to promote education among girls and women to generate positive forces at the macro level. On other hand, the micro level forces rooted in the family, kingroup and culture determine the educational policies, programmes and abilities of girls and women to access them. Therefore, it is not possible to view women's education without reference to their social context, which is rooted in culture, religion and patrifocal family structure and ideology" (Chanana, 2003, p.287)

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# **Women Education: A Psychological Perspective**

**Krishna Chandra Choudhary\***

## **Abstract**

Education is the major factor that decides the progress and development of society in modern era. Education is a massive need for any nation and required to develop by psychologically (self awareness), socially, economically and all prospect of life. These are directly related to thought (thinking) process, management behaviour of the individual surrounding in all spheres of life. In that case we can't ignore the contribution of women as educated women are the real weapon that yields positive impact on the society, community and national building through their contribution at home and their professional fields. Women education is the essential factor that decides the progress and development of any individual as well as the society and nation. Since independence there was a gradual and continuous progress in women's education and now looking to achieve quality education that meet the goal-4 of sustainable development in psychological perspective. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)-4 means (Goal 4: Quality Education) ensuring everyone has access to education. SDGs-4 aims to provide equal access to affordable vocational training and to eliminate gender and wealth disparities with the aim of achieving universal access to a quality education for all. Overall, quality education is one of biggest goal that make up the 2030 agenda for sustainable development to bring wellbeing and betterment of the society.

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## **Introduction**

In today's era human is developing the potential and capacities of the individual to be successful in society. Educational experts apply theories of human development to understand individual's learning, thought process and reasoning or problem solving which is foundation for psychosocial development and it will be too essential for the knowledge economies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Education manifests it's self in many ways like cognitive thinking and affirmative thought for human being to bring wellbeing for the individual as well as society. In this connection, higher education sector attract greater attention of the government than elementary and secondary education sectors. University education commission was set up in 1948 by the central government for the betterment of the higher education by thinking that India will have the fastest growing youth populations in the world. In that case we can't ignore the population of women. In this process family and society together are leading women toward increased optimism, strong social connections and healthy self-confidence of positive psychological domain. Family, community and society together can lead women toward increased optimism, hopefulness, strong social connections and healthy self-confidence with the positive reinforcement. On the whole, India is now a leading country in the field of women education.

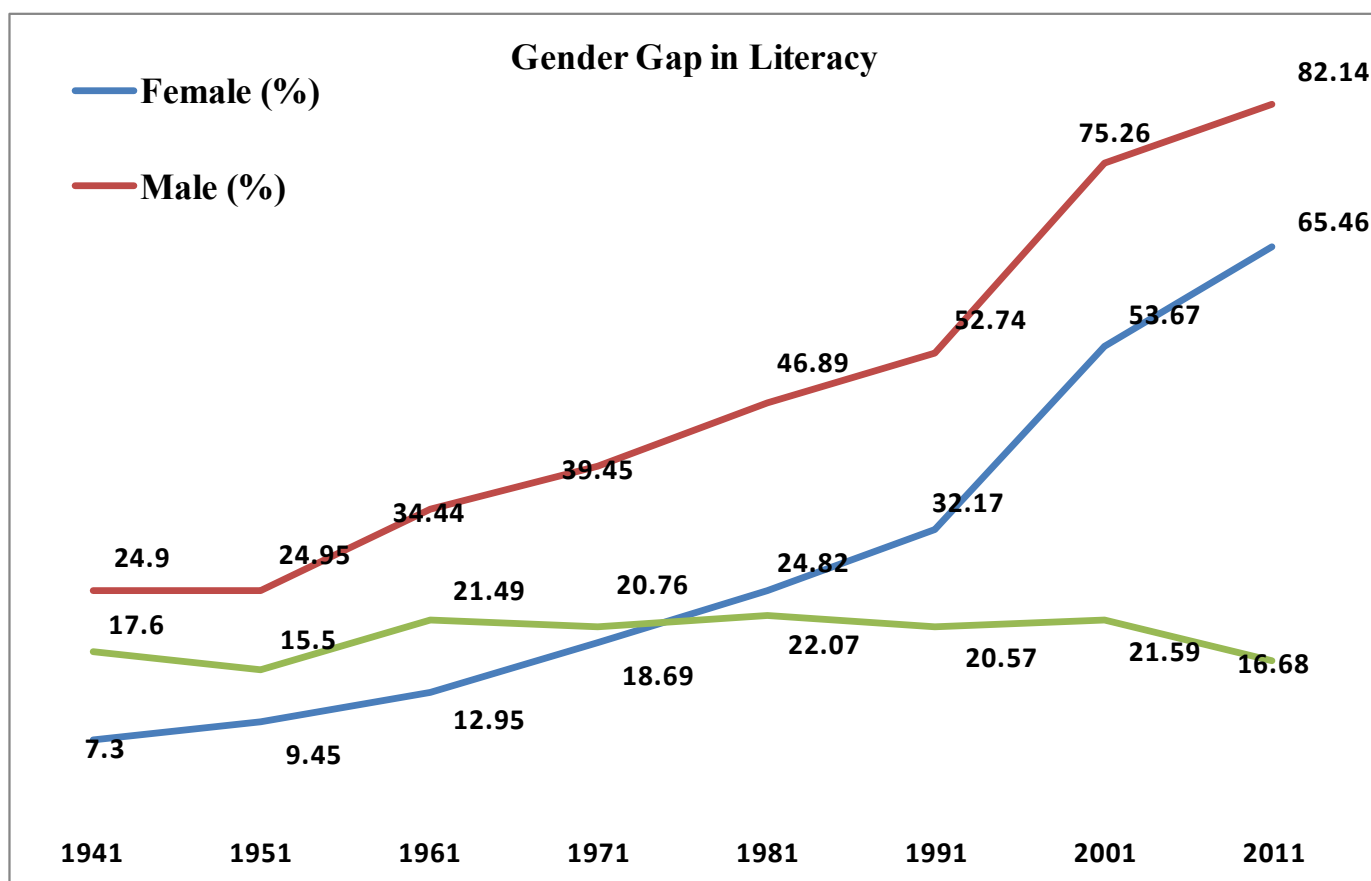
Present paper is based on the secondary sources such as books, internet materials, journals, research papers and other library sources related to educational aspect of women in India. Psychological aspect was applied not only to gain the individual strength but also to compensate for particular faults and limitations of exiting knowledge related to present dimension of women's education. The application of theory provides the strength

of perspectives and additionally avoids the short comings of single perspective in detailed understanding of women education in current scenario. The use of theory from a variety of angles and dimension will be helpful to investigate women educational status in psychological perspective. The subject matter and data used in this research paper is pan Indian by nature. The universe of research is broad and involves large amount of text (secondary sources).

### 1. Women Literacy and Education

For the development of the any country, women education is very important. Women education is real milestone of women empowerment (Choudhary, 2017). As a result of women empowerment, it permits to responds to challenges, to confront their ancient role and alter their life and society (Choudhary, 2019; Choudhary, & Rawat, 2019). We can't neglect the importance of education, as education of women is the basic tool to change the position in society. Women education is a foundation stone for the empowerment of woman (Choudhary, 2017).

#### *Literacy Rate between Women and Men*



Source: Census of India, Registrar General, India (Census from 1941 to 2011 for Literacy Rate).

The literacy rate in India has improved a lot and remarkable over the last one decade i.e. 2001-2011 (as per census of India, 2011). According to 8<sup>th</sup> report of All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE, 2017-18) India has managed to achieve an effective literacy rate of 74.04% (female 65.46%; male 82.14%) population

in 2011. The most notable thing that came across in the 2011 census is the sharp rise in the literacy of females over males. According to the report released by the latest census (2011) there are almost 74% literates that constitute the total population of India aged between seven years and above. Similarly, some of the states and union territories like Mizoram, Tripura, Goa, Kerala, Puducherry, Chandigarh, Lakshadweep, Daman and Diu, National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, in the last decade (2001-2011) have done extremely well for themselves by attaining a literacy rate of almost 85% (Kaur & Kumar 2014; Seth, 2000).

### **1.1 Literacy rate in States and Union Territories (UTs)**

The National Literacy Mission (NLM) also worked through female instructors in villages. Although the minimum marriage age is now 18 years for girls, many continue to be married (yet now more than 40%) much earlier. Consequently, at the secondary level, female school dropout rates are high. The education of women in India plays a vital role in improving livings of standards and positive way of life. Meanwhile, it was found that there is a large disparity between female literacy rates in different states in India. For instance, while Kerala actually has a female literacy rate of about 90%, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (UP) have female literacy rates around 55 to 60%. These values are further associated with health levels of the Indians, where it was found that Kerala was the state with the lowest Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) at the same time as Madhya Pradesh (MP) highest IMR while Bihar and UP are the states with the lowest life expectancies in India. Furthermore, the disparity of female literacy rates across rural and urban areas is also significant in pan India approach. Out of the 24 states in India, 6 of them have Female Literacy Rates (FLR) of below 60%. The rural state Rajasthan has a female literacy rate of less than 12 percent. Kerala is the most literate state in India, with 93.91% literacy, followed by Lakshadweep at 92.28%; as Bihar is the least literate state, with a literacy of 63.82% paid to highest Total Fertility Rate (TFR) and high Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in India (Kaur & Kumar 2014; SSA, 2000).

Large variations in literacy exist even between contiguous states. Whereas there are states at the top and bottom, most states are as given below: Bihar is the only remain Indian state in the census 2011 where less than 65% (below the national average) of the population was literate. It is also only one of two states where less than 75% of the male population (the other being Arunachal Pradesh) was literate and only one of two states where less than 55% of the female population (the other being Rajasthan) was literate. In addition, six Indian states account for about 70% of all illiterates in Indi such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. Slightly less than half of all Indian illiterates (48.12%) are in the six Hindi-speaking states (Hindi belt/region or background) of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

### **2. Women Education through different Committees (from 1947 to 2019)**

The steps taken by pioneers in the Nehruvian period (1947-64) was building up a University Education Commission (UEC) headed by Dr. Radhakrishnan. In this context, Hansa Mehta Committee was designated in 1962. This committee prescribed that co-instruction at essential stage and extension of instructive offices, arrangement of female educators alongside male instructors in auxiliary schools, colleges and universities.



This committee also suggested for home science and vocational courses for both (co-education means boys and girls).

In addition, the Education Commission (1964-66), popularly known as Kothari Commission, which examined in-depth the role and goals of education in the process of national development towards a secular, socialist and democratic society, endorsed the views of the Hansa Mehta and Durgabai Deshmukh Committees, and observed: “In the modern world the role of women goes much beyond the home and the bringing up of children. Now, women adopt a career of her own and sharing equally with men the responsibility for the development of society in all its aspects. This is the way in which we shall have to move. In the struggle of Indian freedom movement women fought side by side with men. This equal partnership will have to continue in the fight against hunger, ignorance and ill health.”

In this connection, National Committee on Education (NCE) for girls was setup in 1958 under Dr. Durgabai Deshmukh had recommended concentrated attention on this most important problem and allocation of resources for greater facilities to girls at primary and secondary levels. It also recommended the setting up of national and state level councils for the encouragement of female education. A resolution to this effect in the National Policy on Education (NPE) was issued 1986 modified in 1992 and National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005 recommends that life educations must be linked to their life. We must recognise that given space, time and freedom, generate new knowledge and idea by engaging with the information. Inculcating creativity and initiative is possible if we perceive and treat as participants in learning (Chaudhary, 2013).

In 1951 the percentage of female literates was barely 9%, while in 2011 it has gone to 65.46%, though compared to males the picture is not bright. In 1951, 27.16% men were literate, where as in 2011 the percentage was 82.14%. Women have a Lower Literacy Rate (LLR) than men in India. Low rate girls are enrolled in the schools and many of them drop out. In the patriarchal setting of the Indian family, girls have lower status. In fact, that freedom there is undoubtedly by and large increase in the female literacy rates. Low rate girls are enrolled in the schools, and many of them drop out. In the patriarchal setting of the Indian family, girls have lower status.

In fact, Hansa Mehta Committee (HMC) on differentiation of curricula for girls and boys was appointed in 1962. The responsibility for the existing gap between the education of girls and boys lay in the continuation of traditional attitudes and values which regarded girls as inferior to boys in physique, intellect and aptitude; the perpetuation of such ideas through the existing practice of prescribing subjects for girls that reinforced the tradition of division of tasks and roles between men and women.

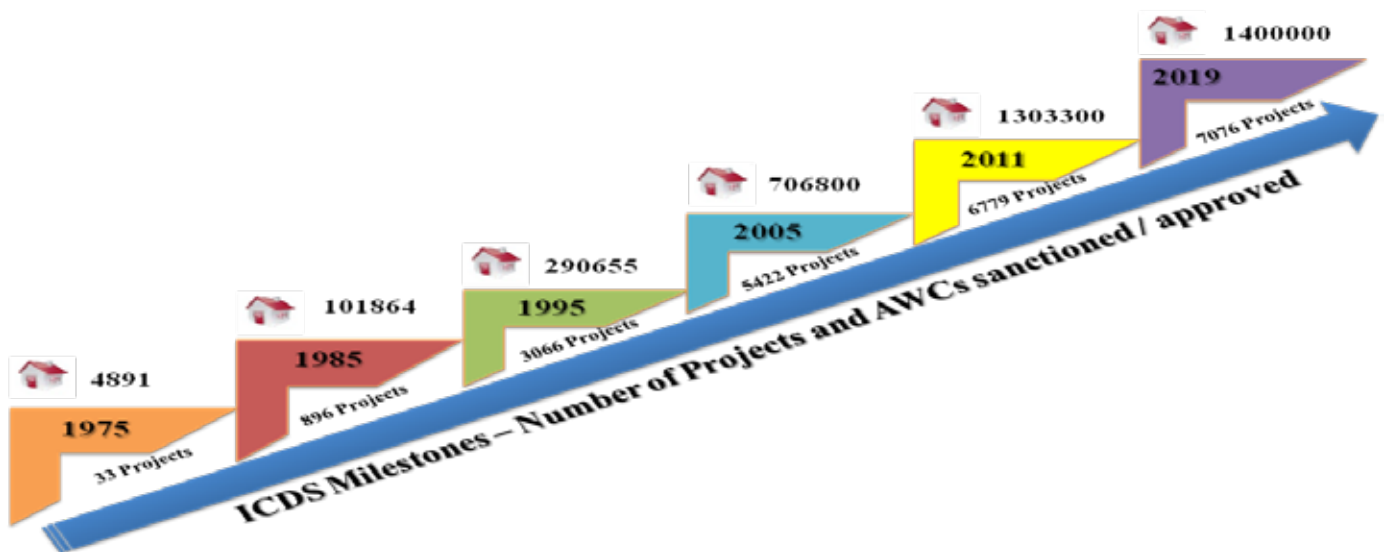
In this context, Hansa Mehta and Durgabai Deshmukh Committees (DDC) observed: “In the modern world the role of women goes much beyond the home and the bringing up of children. She is now adopting a career of her own and sharing equally with men the responsibility for the development of society in all its aspects. This is the direction in which we shall have to move. In the struggle of Indian freedom movement women fought side by side with men. This equal partnership will have to continue in the fight against hunger, ignorance and ill health.”

The Government has started Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NSPE) on 15th August 1995, aiming to provide free Mid Day Meals (MDM) scheme to children studying in I-V Class. This programme aims to increase the enrolment of all children and will definitely have an impact on the enrolment of girl children.

### 3. Strengthening Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) for Early Childhood Care Education and Development (ECCED)

The entry of adolescent girls in the ICDS was granted primarily for 1.4 Million Anganwadis Centers (AWCs child care centers and non-formal education means early childhood care and preschool education) under Integrated Child Development (ICD) programme along with their younger siblings and get some education and acquire income-earning skills (vocational training) across the country. ECCED is the key component under ICDS for miles stone development of child. Access to girls in the non-formal sector of education was also planned for betterment of child education. In contrast, both these efforts have not succeeded to the extent desired. The setting up of 70 thousand crèche centers in pan India (rural areas and urban slums) has been promoted on a large scale but still there is reluctance to partake of their facilities which leads to young girls bearing the burden of child rearing. The best solution would be to compulsorily attach a crèche to every primary school so that the girls can bring their siblings to school and take them back when they return home after school hours (NIPCCD, M/oWCD, GoI; Strengthened and Restructured of ICDS Scheme).

### ICDS: World's Largest ICD Programme



Source – NIPCCD, M/oWCD, GoI (Strengthened and Restructured of ICDS Scheme).

### 4. Elementary Education through Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009

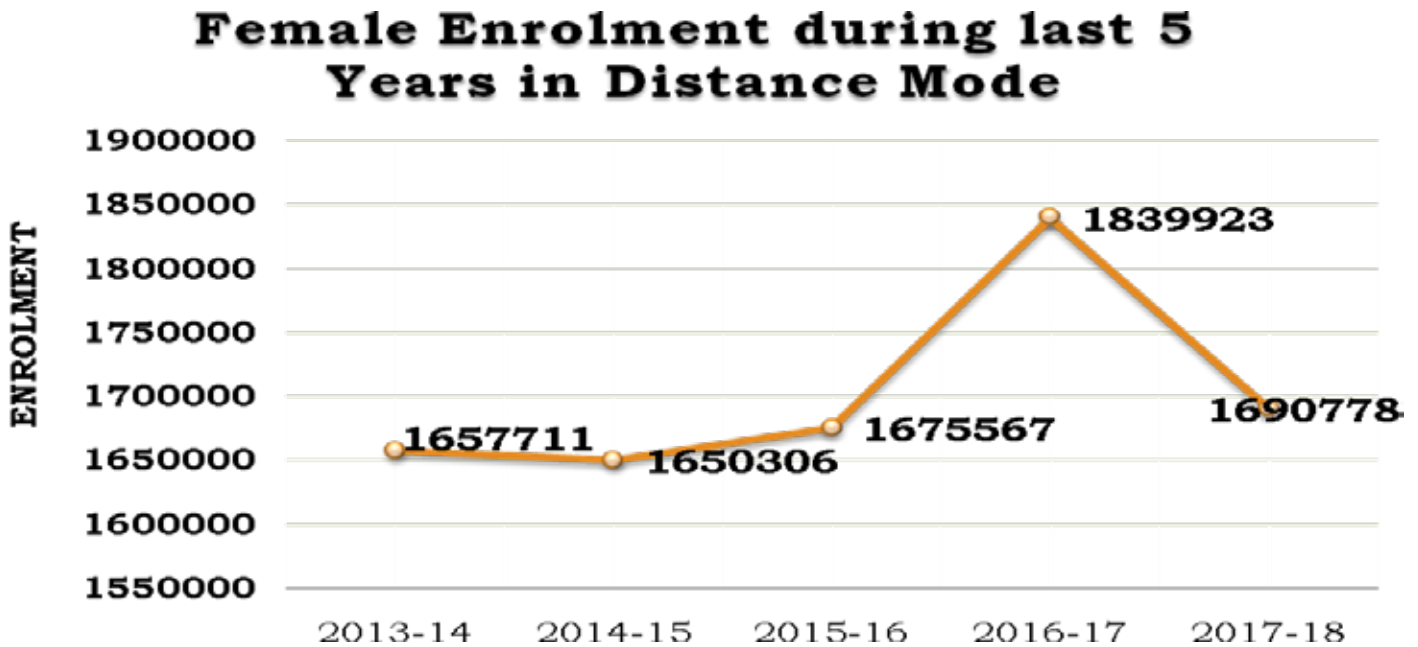
RTE Act was passed on 4th August 2009 by Indian Parliament. This act describes the modalities of the importance of free and compulsory education for children between 6-14 age groups (Class I - VIII) means up to 8 standers in India under Article 21 (A). RTE act came into force on 1 April 2010 pan India approach except Jammu and Kashmir. India became one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every

child. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the national vehicle for the universalisation of elementary education. Finally, there are challenges in the education sector as well, as there have been delays in the implementation of education programmes in most of states.

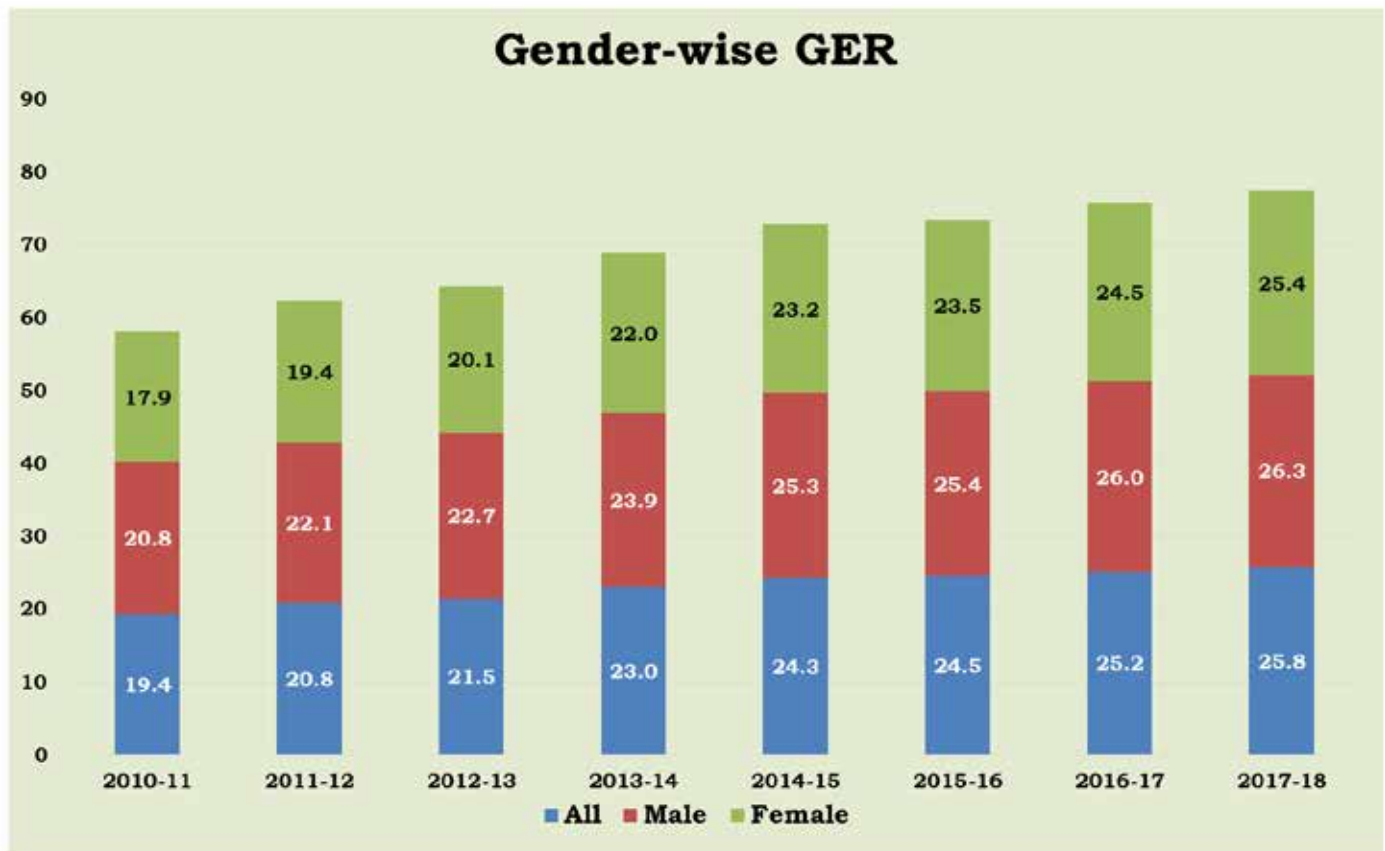
Basic and fundamental education fulfill human development needs and move toward becoming instruments of better wellbeing, higher education of women promotes social and occupational mobility and leads to overall development and also accelerate intellectual and personal development. Accordingly, higher education is seen as a crucial step in personal, familial and societal mobility (Desai, & Thakkar, 2001; Menon-Sen & Shiva Kumar, 2001; Karuna, 1988).

### 5. Higher Education for Women and Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

Higher education is known as an essential importance for our country, as it is calculated as a significance tool to build knowledge based society of the 21st Century. GER is a ratio of enrolment in higher education to population in the eligible age group i.e. 18-23 years. There has been an improvement from 19.4% in 2010-11 to 25.8% in All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE 2017-18), which is a significant achievement.



In the other words, GER in Higher Education in India is 25.8%, GER for male population is 26.3% and for females, it is 25.4%. In addition, six million is the total enrollment in higher education with 19.2 million boys and 17.4 million girls. Girls constitute 47.6% of the total enrolment. Tamil Nadu had the highest GER in the country at 46.9%. In this connection, Bihar is at the bottom with 14.9% of its youth. The country has set an aggressive target of achieving 30% GER in higher education by 2020. The importance given to girl’s involvement in education is a vital instrument of the state to building method by leaders of the national movement from the nineteenth century ahead; it’s stunning that a comprehensive review of the complete education system was undertaken after independence. In the other hand the national average of colleges per Lakh (1,00,000) eligible students is 28 in spite of 7 Bihar state where as 51 in Telengana state (AISHE, 2017-18).



### 5.1 Government Initiatives for Girls and Women Education

Education is very important tool for women empowerment. Government has taken many initiatives to increase girl's education. Innovative flagship scheme 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' (BBBP) scheme is a collaborative initiative being run by Ministry of Women and Child Development (M/o WCD), Ministry of Human Resource Development (M/o HRD) and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (M/o HFW), GoI. The aim is to enhance the sex ratio and status of girl child along with their enrollment in education. In the other words, BBBP is to be addressing the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) issue, to celebrate the girl child and enable her education. In this context, three Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) such as Mahila Samakhya (MS), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE) merged with Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBV) provides girls with residential upper primary school. Providing Assistance for Girls' Advancement in Technical Education Initiative (PRAGATI) scheme was launched by All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to pursue technical education for girls.

New incentive, Uddan is initiative undertaken by Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to provide free online resource to girl's students of Class XI and XII for preparation of admission test in engineering colleges. The effort is to enhance the teaching and learning of Science and Mathematics at school level by addressing the three dimensions of education- curriculum design, transaction and assessments. National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE) is a CSS with the objective to establish an enabling environment to reduce the dropouts and to promote the enrollment of girl children. Saakshar Bharat (SB), a CSS of Adult Education and Skill Development (AESD), was launched to impart functional

literacy to adults in the age group of 15 years and beyond with the prime focus on women besides Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Minorities and other disadvantaged groups (Kaur & Kumar, 2014). Over all, the education vertical took various initiatives on policy issues during the year including analyzing the progress of major flagship programmes (viz. MS, SSA, MDMS, RMSA, KGBV and BBBP) and deliberating on outstanding issues in school education for the preparation of folders.

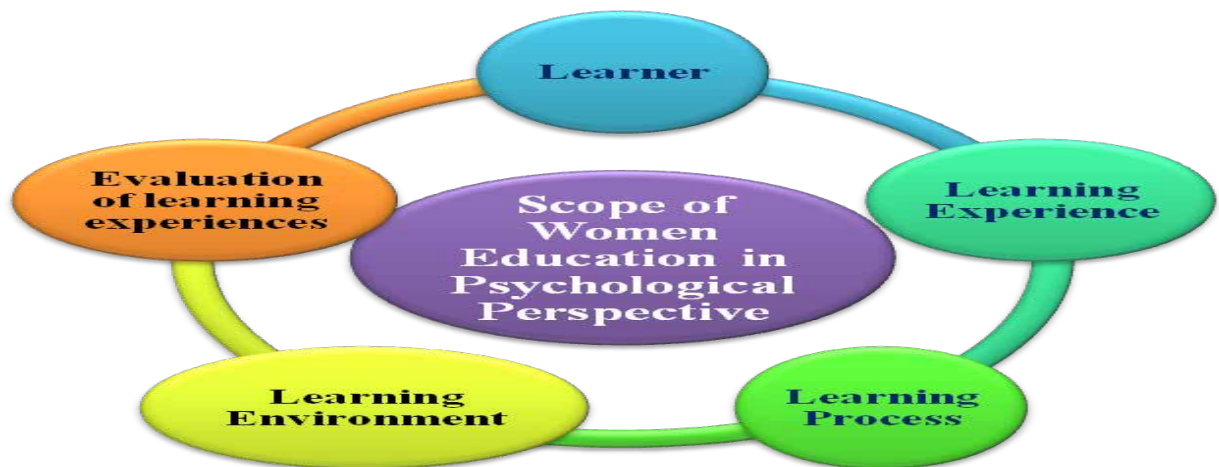
## **6. Women Education in Psychological Perspective**

Psychology is a basic tool in the teaching and learning process. Psychology in the educational setting has helped educators in reforming. Mainly psychological perspective is that findings of psychology are applied in the field of education. It is the scientific study of human behaviour in educational setting for holistic progress. According to the great educational psychologist Charles E. Skinner, “Educational psychology deals with the behaviour of human beings in educational situations”. Therefore educational psychology is a behavioral science. In relation to E.A. Peel, “Educational Psychology is the science of Education”. Education For All (EFA) means is an attempt to shape the behaviour of the learner. It aims to produce desirable changes in her for the all-around development and holistic progress of every individual personality. Cognitive awareness and social improvements are psychological perspective. Where cognitive style is refers to adopting an integral approach. Cognitive style is normally defined as a common component that sheds light on the traits and propensities of learners. Cognitive means knowledge use involving conscious intellectual reasoning for education in psychological perspective (Choudhary, 2019; Choudhary & Rawat, 2019; Choudhary, 2017; Choudhary, 2014; Choudhary, 2013). Cognitive awareness or style directly influence social improvement as thought process, attitude/ image formation, perception about the society, problem solving and reaction/ behavior toward the society, community and nation.

In the same way educational psychologists, who is a technical expert in the field of education, supplies all the information, principle and techniques essential for understanding the behaviour of the student in response to educational environment and desired modification of his/her behavior to bring holistic development for they learn and their social relationships. In this way, it is quite reasonable to call educational studies for human beings and their sociability. For that reason, education primarily with understanding the processes of teaching and learning that take place within formal environments and developing ways of improving those methods. It covers important topics like learning theories, teaching methods, motivation, cognitive, emotional and moral development, and parent-child relationships (Choudhary, & Rawat, 2019).

By and large, education has seen rapid growth and development as a profession in the last couple of decade due to psychological perspective. Educational psychological perspectives apply theories of human development to understand individual learning and inform the instructional process. Although interaction with teachers and students in educational settings is an important part of their work, it isn't the only surface of the job. In general, learning is a lifelong endeavor. People don't only learn at school, college, institute and university they learn at work place, in social situations and even doing simple tasks similar to household tasks. Educational psychological perspective is the relationship of mind and behavior of different individuals. Overall, psychology has influenced the all round (holistic) development of women education. Basic relationship with education and psychology are manifold for positive reinforcement.

## Scope and Role of Psychology in Women Education as given below in Chart Format



Psychological perspective of learning involves acquiring and modifying knowledge, skills, strategies, beliefs, attitudes, communication and behaviors. Psychology has contributed a genuine and convincing capacity to provide a better environment for learning. Learning is often defined as a relatively lasting change in behavior that is the result of experience, but learning is actually an ongoing process that takes place throughout all of life. Psychological theory and research have contributed significantly to learning. Psychology can be applied to the behaviors. It is argued that one of the most important ways that psychology can contribute. The point is illustrated with examples of how personal construct theory has been used to develop. Because psychologists might emphasize various points within psychology in their research and analysis of behavior, there are different viewpoints in psychology for betterment of the society.

### 7. Education and Empowerment

Education systems are different in administration, curriculum and personnel. As women have gained fundamental as well as human rights, formal education has become a symbol of progress and a step toward gender equity for holistic approach. Women's education is solutions for eliminating violence against women and economic dependence. Education systems play a central role in shaping girls for all round development (Choudhary, 2019; Choudhary, 2017; Choudhary, 2014; Choudhary, 2013).

Psychology of women provides feminist correctives to the theories and research that have omitted trivialized and distorted women's experiences to fit into a male biased structure. The field of the psychology of women recognizes the inequality of family, social and institutional power between women and men; makes values of the researcher central to scientific study; studies of women's behavior and experiences within social contexts across the life cycle; and advocates for change at the individual, organizational and societal levels. The field of the psychology of women also encourages individuals to critically analyze all subareas in psychology for their portrayal of women in psychological perspective. The psychology of women addresses topics such as gender stereotyping, physical development across the female life cycle, theoretical perspectives on women's personalities and mental health, women's health issues, sexuality; reproductive health and rights, verbal and

nonverbal communications by and about women, women and intimate relationships, career psychology of women, women and leadership, gender, power and violence against women, and equity and social change. The psychology of women also is concerned with intersectional ties among sex, race, class, age, ability, sexual orientation, education and social aspects of society. Psychology of women is used in policymaking on issues such as work life (participation) integration, day care, violence against women and child abductions and missing children by psychological perspective (Choudhary, 2013).

Finally, education has a key role to play in the psychosocial, familial, cultural, economic indicator and political aspects of human development. To improve rapid human development, educations of women and girls have been central to national discourse in India for over a century. Possibly the greatest and most encouraging impact of adult women's empowerment and education has been the psychosocial impact that; it has had on the lives of girls. One of the most effective expressions of women's understanding of their life situations is in the decisions that women across all the states have taken with regard to girl's education. At last, girl and women students' engagement is widely recognised as an important influence on achievement and learning in higher education.

## Conclusion

In the present scenario women are playing a major psychological perspective for role in making a nation progressive and guide it towards development. Women's empowerment has been an issue of massive discussions and observation for last couple of decades in the country. Efforts have been made on a regular basis across nation to address these issues on psychosocial, cultural, political, economical perspective. It has been observed that most of the policies, programmes and schemes that government implemented for educational development for women education were in depth focused for women empowerment and overall growth. Finally, girl and women are widely recognised as an important influence on social welfare and development of a nation.

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# **Education: Ground Reality versus Policy**

**Richa Saxena\***

**Amba Mukherjee\*\***

## **Abstract**

Education is one of the primary needs that serve the holistic development of each individual and the society as a whole. Despite the significance of education, the status of girls' education in India is not satisfactory; still wide gap persists between male-female literacy rates (Census, 2011). Gender disparity remains a major issue in India's goal of achieving universal elementary education. To address gender disparity and develop appropriate interventions, it is necessary to understand the nature and extent of the problem comprehensively. The paper aims at identifying the socioeconomic factors that constrain girls' education, appraise government policies in the educational sector, and suggest ways to ensure that education remains both affordable and accessible to all. The study location is a "backward" district, Nuh of Haryana, where the majority of the populace lives in rural areas, with their ethnic identity being Meo Muslim. Women in this community remain under a strict patriarchal structure. Girls are often not allowed to pursue higher studies. The female literacy rate is very low and stands at 36 percent (Census, 2011). The study found that socio-cultural and economic factors are responsible for gender inequality in the education sector. Qualitative findings suggested that one of the reasons for not sending daughters to schools was long travel distances and their safety. Although the government and NGOs are working toward narrowing gender inequality, there is still a need for concerted efforts.

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## **1. Introduction**

Education is one of the primary needs that serve the holistic development of each individual and the society. Education is considered as both an objective and a component of development, as well as "fundamental to the broader notion of expanded human capabilities that lie at the heart of the meaning of development" (Todaro and Smith, 2011). India is well aware of the importance of education, even though education is not yet accessible to all children. Per the National Sample Survey (NSS) 71<sup>st</sup> round report, overall, 76 percent of males and 62 percent of females are literate; in rural India, the figures stand at 72 percent for males and 57 percent for females; whereas in urban India, 84 percent of males and 75 percent of females are literate. The number of children who do not receive education, especially in rural areas is still high. A gender gap in the literacy rate is clearly visible. Gender disparity is one of the crucial issues in India's goal of achieving universal elementary education. To address gender disparity and develop appropriate interventions, it is necessary to understand the nature and extent of the problem comprehensively.

One of the prominent reasons for this gap is "social exclusion." Rene Lenoir is given the credit of authorship for the expression. The concept covers a wide range of social and economic problems. Lenoir used this term in the context of a section of the French population, which included mentally and physically handicapped

people, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal and asocial persons, as well as other social “misfits” (Silver, 1995). Thereafter, literature has included lots of other categories, and the list has expanded. In simple terms, social exclusion can be defined as “individuals or groups who are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live” (European Foundation, 1195). Briefly, social exclusion is an umbrella under which many factors combine like gender, caste, creed, and class, etc., which act as barriers to participation in the society as a whole on a common platform, which includes socio-cultural and economic aspects.

Gender disparity is one of the main obstacles to achieve a universal literacy rate. A wide gap in the gender ratio has been one of the most significant characteristics of India throughout the twentieth century. Remarkably, the gender ratio has almost continuously declined from 972 females (per thousand males) in 1901 to 940 females in 2011. An extensive gender gap in educational sectors is a significant problem in the development of the nation. According to Todaro and Smith, women carry a disproportionate burden of poverty, which can be reduced through significant improvements in their roles and status via education. Female education has strong correlations with other dimensions of social development. As Mehrotra notes, low levels of education significantly affect the health and nutritional status of women. Despite that, in rural India, girls continuously face gender-specific barriers including social, cultural, economic, and infrastructural restrictions leading to a high dropout rate.

## **2. Education Policy in India**

After India’s independence, it was realized that in order to have an enlightened citizenry the country had to have an educated population, especially the youth. The education of adults became imperative as the literacy rate was just 12 percent at the time. This resulted in the evolution of the concept of “social education,” which emphasized literacy, health, hygiene, and economic improvement.

Passing the Right to Education (RTE) Act had various positive social and economic implications. Free and compulsory education has resulted in increased enrollment in schools. The Act has provisions where the state has to provide amenities like uniforms, textbooks, and writing materials. RTE also mandates all schools to have a kitchen within its premises. The Mid-Day Meal (MDM) scheme, started in 1995, was implemented to provide nutritional meals to all students enrolled in government and government-aided schools. The purpose is to make sure that enrolled students are able to attain basic nutrition in their meals during school hours. The government has invaded with several steps to ensure food safety and testing of meals and issued some basic minimal standards pertaining to cleanliness of the kitchen, utensils, and food storage. The MDM, infrastructure, and other facilities attract parents from lower economic backgrounds to enroll their children in these schools. Even though the act envisions a universal retention of education, dropouts persist, which questions the effectiveness of the education policy. Various social reasons result in dropouts. A wide number of females drop out after the completion of the eighth grade, especially in rural areas. Marriage is one societal norm that compels the girl child to dropout from school. Furthermore, parents from poor backgrounds feel that, after receiving basic education, girls do not need further education and household chores are delegated to them. The educational level of parents has a significant impact on the child’s education; educated parents prefer their children to study more, as compared to illiterate parents (UNESCO, 2010). Colclough argues

that the income generation factor, post schooling, workout less favorably for girls than for boys (Colclough et al. 2010). The general perception is that even though the government provides free education and financial assistance, it is not equivalent to foregone earnings, or urban-oriented high-cost education. Other reasons for dropouts include poverty, lack of teachers, school quality, distance to schools, and gender-based violence; these factors influence gender disparity as regards to access to school.

The Government of India has taken different initiatives to facilitate improvements in providing universal education. Among education initiatives, Article 45 in the Constitution is very important. Article 45 has made a provision for free and compulsory education for all children up to age fourteen. States are directed to provide early childcare and education for all children until they complete age six.

## **2.1 Initiatives for girl-child education**

To address the huge gender disparity in the education system, the Government of India has come up with various schemes and initiatives, which are majorly focused on girls' education. The first step was the National Policy on Education, 1986. Its key objective was the removal of disparities and equal education for women, scheduled tribe (ST) and scheduled caste (SC) communities.

The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) was launched in 2003, with an overarching goal of reaching the "hardest to reach girls," especially those not in schools. Under NPEGEL, "model schools" have been setup to provide better opportunities to girls.

*Saakshar Bharat*: The National Literacy Mission was re-casted into the *Saakshar Bharat* program launched in 2009. It aims to accelerate adult education, especially for women (age fifteen years and above) who have no access to formal education, targeting female literacy as a critical instrument for women's empowerment. This has led to an increase in literacy among women from 54 percent (Census 2001) to 65 percent (Census 2011). For the first time, of the total of 217.70 million literates added during the decade, women (110.07 million) outnumbered men (107.63 million).

*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* (BBBP): To address the alarming decline in the child gender ratio, Government of India introduced the BBBP program in 2015 with an overall goal to celebrate the girl child and enable her education.

As discussed above, it is clear that the Government of India has taken many initiatives for the improvement of the girl child's education. Despite this, the level of girls' education has not met expectations. This could attribute to the fact that initiatives have not reached the grassroots level, making it imperative for the Government of India to take responsibility for the implementation of these schemes and provisions at the grassroots level.

The government and NGOs are working toward narrowing gender inequality, but there still stands a need to intensify efforts. The government tries to regulate and encourage the right to free and compulsory education for all children through programs such as the District Primary Education Program (DPEP), *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* (RMSA) and the Mid-Day Meal Program. However, the gap still persists. In a recently launched report by *NITI Ayog*, district Mewat (now Nuh) ranks 99<sup>th</sup> out of the 101 most "backward" districts in India in the education sector. The education sector comprises 30 percent of the overall index, which is based on eight indicators focusing on learning outcomes (transition rate from primary to upper primary, and subsequently to secondary schooling; average scores in mathematics

and language, etc.), as well as infrastructural (toilet access for girls, drinking water, electricity supply), and institutional indicators (RTE mandated pupil/teacher ratio, timely delivery of textbooks, etc.).

### **3. Objectives**

The paper aims to identify the socioeconomic factors that constrain the education of the girl child, appraise government policies in the education sector, and suggest ways to ensure that education remains both affordable and accessible to all.

### **4. Methodology**

A mixed-method approach was used, where data was collected concurrently from both secondary and primary sources. To gain an overall understanding, and for the purpose of triangulation, a desk review of available documents and relevant literature was done. The paper explores the major challenges faced in girl-child education, and factors inhibiting the effective implementation of education policies. This paper also emphasizes on issues related to access, equity, and quality of education in Nuh, and subsequently offer a possible way forward. To meet particular objectives, the study covered 200 households from ten villages of Nuh district using lot quality assurance sampling (Lot quality assurance sampling (LQAS) methodology was developed in industry for quality control and allows the use of small sample sizes when surveying small geographical or population-based areas). Data from households and other stakeholders were collected using qualitative and quantitative tools. Twenty households with school-going children were randomly surveyed from each village, and two teachers from each school were interviewed. Focused group discussions were carried out, and interview guides were administered with different stakeholders including teachers, girls, and other key persons in the village.

### **5. Findings**

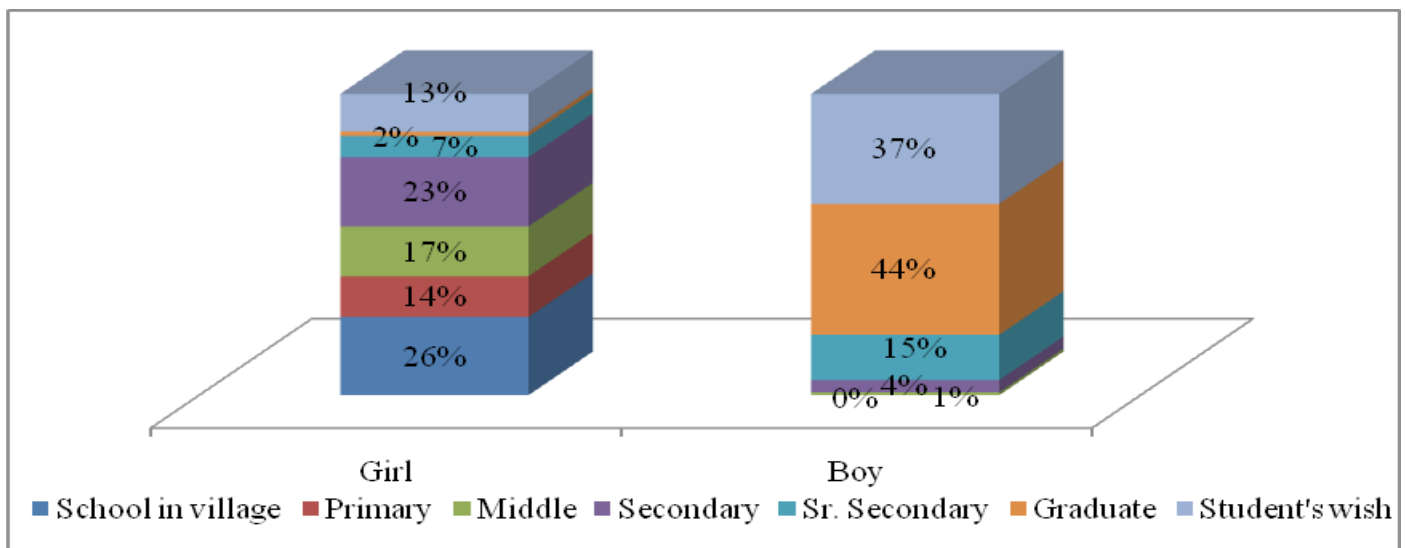
This section initially discusses the community perceptions of the reasons for school dropouts and the relevance of policies in overcoming the barriers to girls' education, and subsequently provides broad recommendations for improving girl-child education. Of the total respondents, 82 percent are Muslims. Haryana has the lowest gender ratio in India, with 879 females per 1,000 males in the population. There is no major country in the world with such a low ratio. Males are the sole decision-makers in a patriarchal society. Considered as heirs of the household, sons are preferred over daughters, resulting in social evils such as female feticide and infanticide. The average number of children (under age eighteen) per family stands at five, of which three are daughters, and two are sons.

Literacy of household heads is one of the major factors influencing girl-child education. Three-fourths of the population of Haryana over age seven is literate. Among them, 66 percent of females are literate while 84 percent of males are literate. Nuh has a male literacy rate of 70 percent against the abysmally poor 37 percent female literacy. Haryana ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> of the thirty-five states and union territories in the literacy rate. In male and female literacy, Haryana ranks 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> respectively. In Nuh, it is the perception of parents that school teachers do not impart any education, therefore they opt for religious study and send their children to *madrasa*. Despite various government efforts to provide equal access to education for boys and girls, the latter are still

disadvantaged for various reasons such as socioeconomic, socio-cultural, and school-based factors. Here the concerning issue is the dropout rate of girls. Many factors account for the discontinuation of the education of girls, especially after the primary level.

### 5.1 Perception of parents on acquiring school education

Education seems to be a key factor, which can only initiate a chain of advantages for females. However, access to education is perceived differently for males and females. Figure 1 shows the perception of parents on acquiring school education. The majority of parents (44 percent) wanted their sons to pursue and graduate from higher studies without consideration for distance between the education institute and home, whereas distance is a major issue for the dropout of girls. Thirty-seven percent of parents said that boys should study up to the level they desired, while only 13 percent of parents shared this opinion for girl-child education. Discussions with parents revealed that they did not feel comfortable sending their daughters to school if the school were remotely located, as it was unsafe for girls. Contrastingly, parents wanted their sons to study outside the village. The major responsibility of girls is to do household chores, while for boys it is income generation. According to parents education will help their son to gain good income.

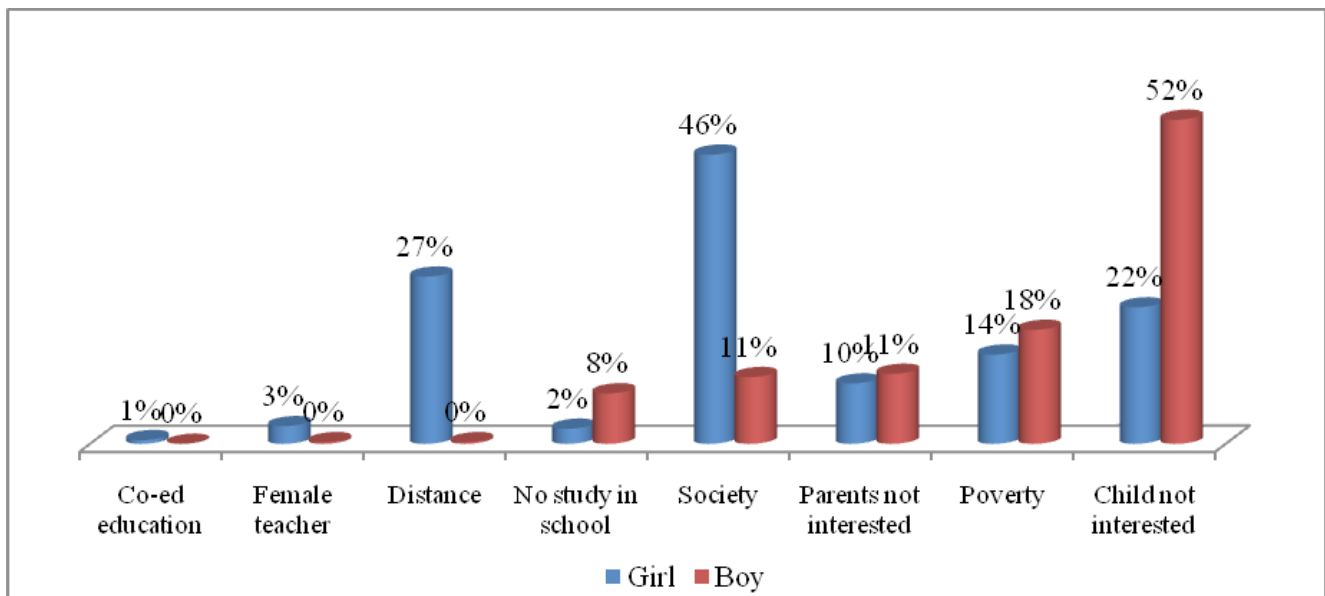


**Figure 1. Perception of parents on acquiring school education**

### 5.2 Factors for parents' perception

Evidently, gender differentiation prevails in the Indian society; as a result, distinct gender roles exist. The society does not give much importance to women's education, predominantly in rural India. It is evident in Figure 2 that a wide range of factors, including poverty, quality of infrastructure at schools, distance of the school, and gender-based violence, influence gender equality as far as access to a school and studying in a school are concerned. During the study, we found that even though schooling is free, there are costs, such as uniforms and books, which some parents have to bear before the entitlements reach the students after one third of the session is over. Other factors pertaining to lack of interest in studies stem from reasons that range from a disabling study environment at home, lack of facilities in schools, and irregularity of teachers to the low social status of some children and their families within the community, which lead to harassment in school. For girls,

along with the cost of education, their efficacy and support in household chores were given as reasons for being out of school. Girls contribute to household chores so that their mothers can work in agricultural fields. A majority of the rural community perceived educating girls as unnecessary, though they place a high value on the education of boys. Most rural households shared concerns over school distances/safety and cited them as the most critical barrier in girls' education. Some factors that constrain girls from going to school are cultural, including restrictions posed after girls reach puberty. It is likely that when children drop out of school, they are engaged in some useful activity at home in order to contribute to the household income. In the case of rural girls, a small percentage also reported a lack of proper school facilities and marriage as reasons for dropping out of school. Having identified impediments in the education of girls, what remains is the discussion of three major issues in detail.



**Figure 2: Factors accounting for parents' perceptions**

### 5.2.1 Society and Culture

Social norms define the roles that women and men have in the family and community. They create powerful incentives that guide people's attitudes and behaviors; behaviors outside the accepted social boundaries can unleash the systems of social sanction. Traditional cultural practices and beliefs of a particular religion or community massively affect the education of girls, especially in male-dominated societies. Often there is a fundamental gender bias in community attitude that plays a critical role in girl-child education. In a consensus among respondents, 46 percent in total, that lack of community support and cultural beliefs serve as obstacles in the education of girls. Only 10 percent agreed that community attitudes played a significant role in accessing the education of boys.

The role of society is one of the biggest hurdles in female education. A nation's educational progress and development relies on the positive attitude of society. Discussions revealed that the community does not like to send girls to school as, according to them, it would not reap any monetary benefit. Parents do not understand the value of educating a daughter who would get married and remain a housewife. Since parents cannot see

any direct relationship between education and economic betterment, they have very little motivation to send their daughters to school. The definite connection between education, good motherhood, and efficient house management is unrealized. According to Odomore, parents believe that Western education is occupation-driven, and therefore not appropriate for their daughters, who should attend Qur'anic schools instead because they believe their daughters will be married and would not need a job that Western education would provide. Under RTE, there is a provision for a School Management Committee; members of this committee are responsible for guiding the community and mobilizing them. Capacity building of SMC members can lead to community mobilization; but this is not in process.

### **5.2.2 Distance between home and school**

A common theme of safety and sporadic transportation facilities emerged from the quantitative as well as qualitative phases. There was a consensus that safety concerns make distance an important obstacle in the enrollment of girls. Only 65 percent of villages have a secondary school within the official guideline of five kilometers. Beyond five kilometers, walking to school takes more than an hour, particularly without roads and transport facilities leading to a fall in enrollment or regular attendance. Twenty-seven percent of respondents considered safety as a critical reason for dropping out of school, while for boys, this is not an impediment. Qualitative findings suggest that the farther the school, the higher the chances are that a girl would be exposed to different threats or risks. Many girls desirous of pursuing education above middle level, facilities for which are available away from their homes, cannot avail these due to lack of transport facility. Education for adolescent girls is a constraint due to many factors; the most prominent of them is non-availability of infrastructure and schools. Secondly, the travel time taken to reach school, fear of crime, sexual harassment, and unknown eventualities would arise, therefore the need for exclusive transport facilities for the girl child. Furthermore, school safety includes safety within and around the school. To mitigate these risks, the qualitative data show that for families to assign a male relative to accompany the girls to school creates an added logistical and financial burden on the family. Therefore, school distance encompasses safety issues as well as financial (directly, or lost time) burdens on families. A conclusion related to this constraint is that it is important to focus on overall safety, including safe travel to and from school. Under RTE, there should be a provision for schools to be within a radius of 1–3 kms but, due to other constraints, schools are not available within this radius, which effects the education of girls.

### **5.2.3 Disinterest of the child**

The interest of the child in education is an important factor for learning, which has been neglected for many years. The above factors were rated the highest and “lack of interest in studies” followed closely; the latter deserves attention in the listing of prioritized barriers to education. The lack of interest of a child in education was rated as a major factor for boys, standing at 52 percent, while for girls it stood at 22 percent. This shows that most of the boys drop out due to their own reasons, one of which is lack of interest in education; while girls mostly drop out due to societal reasons, very few dropouts due to their own disinterest in studies. A considerable percentage of parents indicated the disinterest of children in going to school because they do not get them enrolled. The disinterest of children to go to school, coupled with a lack of motivation from parent's side to send their children to school, deprive

a large chunk of children from education. This raises questions about the quality of instruction and about the school environment. The qualitative data revealed other supply-side barriers including a shortage of staff, absenteeism in teachers, teachers uninterested in teaching, overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, and teachers discriminating against certain social groups. The interest of parents, as well as the children, can be developed through mobilization, but this is not accounted for under the provisions of the RTE. There is already a provision for the SMC to sensitize the community regarding the importance of education. A bleak percentage of respondents noted the role of the SMC in improving enrollment. This trend is indicative of the lack of knowledge among community members regarding the roles and responsibilities of SMCs, which are responsible for improving enrollment in schools.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

Although more than 70 percent of the population of India lives in rural areas, rural enrollment accounts for only half of the total enrollment. Girls account for a smaller share of enrollment in rural areas as compared to urban areas. The findings presented in this paper reverberate with reviewed literature on the education of girls. There are various provisions, schemes, and policies run by the government to increase enrollment and decrease the dropout rate, but there are still various gaps in overcoming the issue of dropouts, especially that of girls. Several nationwide and state-specific schemes pertaining to education are present in Nuh district, but they tend to be disconnected, resulting in numerous pitfalls in the education system. These pitfalls are decelerating the progress sought in the educational scenario. Participants reached a consensus on the major barriers in the education of girls as being distance, social norms, and the disinterest of the child as well as parents. These findings suggest a systematic policy approach to overcome these barriers and a prioritization of the provisions under existing schemes and policies. A majority of the rural population is illiterate. They are not even aware of the rights provisions under government schemes and policies. Instead of policies focusing on the supply side, such as increasing the number of schools, policies should focus on the demand side. They must focus on the ground realities of villages, mobilization, and behavior changes to break free from the patriarchal nature of society and the perceptions of parents and children. There is a need to guide the rural community, make them aware, and mobilize them in order to encourage active participation in changing the landscape pertaining to the education of girls.

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**Stories of Survival from Nupi Maanbi: Notes to Teachers/Caretakers in  
Relation to Transgender School Going Girls in Manipur  
Sunny S. Gurumayum\***

**Abstract**

Enhanced by feminist scholarship, the category of gender is understood to be socially constructed. Gender behavior is said to be acquired during childhood socialization mostly through schools. Growing up in a strong patriarchal setup, the Nupi Maanbi (transgender/transsexual women born mostly male) is identified as a boy child by schools located within Meitei society. So in everyday school life, they are forced to follow codes of conduct associated with being a boy on the hopes of creating a man. However, since the time of their consciousness/birth, many Nupi Maanbi self-identify themselves as a girl child regardless of their biological sex. Through this trajectory, I argue that policing of gender behavior — by assuming sex as unchanging — is seen to be ineffective in creating the socially desired gender expression in children. This paper listens to Nupi Maanbi and transgender women, stories told by them about their communities. By listening to many diverse, unclear, and imperfect stories: childhood stories, violence, and resistance in relation to school, I (re)think gender and sexual identities in Manipur. Through their narratives, it is clear that Nupi Maanbi and transgender women identified subjects have often been a victim of the school. Narratives of social discrimination flood my notepad. Their desires are policed and controlled; their experiences not validated. It is the case that Nupi Maanbis from Meitei society are oppressed.

This paper has three sections. The first part deals with the framework of looking at my subjects – the Nupi Maanbi. It clarifies some of the terms used which are essential to frame my study – sex, gender, and sexuality. The second part is based on my fieldwork and interviews with various Nupi Maanbi from Meitei society, Manipur. Their memories are mined through their narratives of childhood. Following almost a predictable, universal voice of the transgender community all over the world, the Nupi Maanbi also recollect a childhood of growing up non-normatively sexually inclined in a heteronormative society. The narratives are painfully, but perhaps predictably violent. Yet, to read these stories as stories of victimhood is limiting. I read them as stories of survival. The last part changes space in fieldwork and follows Meitei gay and transgender subjects to a migrant location, New Delhi. I question them about what could have been done to avoid violence. This section is more like a future planning kind of conversation, about how to raise/teach children in a non-sexist way. This is about what life could have been, rather than what it actually was. In that way, this is a fieldwork of the future rather than memory. By unpacking the universe of the Nupi Maanbis of Meitei society, this paper celebrates non-sexist child rearing and teaching practices.

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**Introduction**

“They are lucky they were born in Manipur and not in other parts of India,” told one of a heterosexual respondent in one of my interview. Here, the ‘they’ he — the respondent — is talking about are Nupi Maanbi or transgender/sexual women. Statements such as this and alike are one of the most common narratives Meitei men believe and produced while talking to them about transgender subjects in Manipur. I have been told —

time and again — that Nupi Maanbi/transgender woman are well tolerated.

Through narratives and interview, it is clear that Nupi Maanbi and transgender women identified subjects have often been a victim of the school. Many of them were thrown out of their school simply because they were ‘homo’. Most often it is this institution, that is, their respective schools, from which they experience mental and physical violence. School are also the institution where they have to negotiate gender expression and identity.

Desires of Nupi Maanbi are policed and controlled; their experiences not validated. It is the case that sexual minorities from Meitei society are oppressed. But to hold this ‘true’ without unpacking Meitei society and subjects hides multiple oppressions. For example, tribal transgender women from Manipur are perhaps far more likely to experience forms of violence than Nupi Maanbis. In other words, in my own experiences of ground realities, and listening to transgender women from Manipur, tribal transgender women are at far more risk of violence than Nupi Maanbis in Manipur.

This paper hopes to fill existing gaps in childhood studies by opening up a dialogue to teachers and caretakers alike. This research is meant to be a signpost and furthermore open up interesting questions filled with exciting possibilities in the area of education and gender studies.

### **“Who are the Nupi Maanbi?”**

Sadokpam Ranjeeta Devi in her article ‘Re-defining Sexual Minorities: The Nupi Sabis of Manipur’ writes: [N]upi Sabi, an amorphous term which can mean the following: a) cross dressers or transvestites for the theatrical acts only. Their sexual orientation is according to the social norms and they can be termed as heterosexual. Most of them are professional actors and earn their living acting, directing and playwriting. Most of them are married with wives and children. I think the author tries to write that most of them are married and are living with their wives and children. Homosexuals by orientation, who play the roles of the women characters and do not necessarily only act for a living (sic) (Sadokpam 2012: 45). (sic)

The terms Nupi Maanbi and Nupi Sabis are often used interchangeably. The literal translation of the Nupi Maanbi from Meitei language to English translates as ‘female/girl (*nupi*) look-a-like (*maanbi*)’. I used the term Nupi Maanbis to escape the theatrical side of the story. In other words, Nupi Maanbis are not necessarily actors. Most of them are self-identified transgender or transsexual women. There term Nupi Maanbi is also used as a polite vernacular or a more sophisticated substitution for the term ‘homo’:

My friend’s brother called me a Nupi Manbi in front of his family when I went to have dinner with them. The next day he called me ‘homo’ in front of his straight friends [name withheld].

Nupi Sabi or Nupi Maanbi are all academic nonsense. It’s just for newspapers and articles. We all are just homos under the eyes of Meitei society. Which is okay, I am a homo [name withheld].

Nupi Maanbi is thought to be homosexuals by default. However, I imagine that this stereotype is only because of their feminine disposition and have nothing much to do with the sexual activity they engage in. During sexual intercourse, men who take the penetrative role (informally known as ‘tops’) do not always identify as homosexual. In the West men who have oral or anal sexual activities with other men are termed as ‘gay’. On the contrary, this scenario does not always apply to non-Western cultures. Even Meitei society does not acknowledge ‘tops’ as

‘homos’. While the passive partner, informally known as ‘bottoms’ are stigmatized for being feminine — and therefore homosexual — the penetrative partners are not. The men who take penetrative role are considered merely horny. So, even during same-sex intercourse, one partner is ‘homo’ and the other is heterosexual. There are many Nupi Maanbi who self identifies themselves as homosexual. They are conscious of their sexual orientation. Nevertheless, reflecting on the existence of anal penetration between men in early Western societies: the Greeks sanctioned acts of anal penetration between men, it was nothing like contemporary homosexuality (Drover, 1987). Similarly, the existence of various sexual practices in non-western cultures is taken as evidence that homosexuality exists across all cultures. Here we should not be institutionalizing foreign culture. Homosexuality is not to be taken like the forms of homosexuality of the modern West. Hijras of India, Bakla of the Philippines and the Fa’afafine’s of Samoa are such examples. Beyond popular mass media and global discourse on sexual politics, there exist bodies which are not wholly consumed by the rubric of modern identity. Following Chris Barker, the question “Who are the Nupi Maanbi?” is understandable. However, when we ask who ‘are’ the Nupi Maanbi we are being manipulated by the everyday grammar of the English language and this question comes filled with assumptions of representationalism (Barker, 2004). Language can only be used as a tool for achieving certain purposes. This is to say that language will never fully represent the Nupi Maanbi.

### **Framing Violence: Childhood Narratives of School**

Violence — linguistic and physical — becomes a category to look at lives of the Nupi Maanbi. Most of the interviewees/respondents were self-identified as transgender, transsexual and/or cross-dresser. I have tried to frame the category of violence in the lives of the Nupi Maanbi through memories in relation to school. The reason why I am looking at violence is hardly to get into the voyeuristic recounting of the terrible things in these lives. I hope, perhaps fondly and naively, that by listening to the Nupi Maanbi talking about their past childhood experience, I will work towards creating a better future for younger children growing up in Meitei society. I also know that while listening to their stories, including stories about childhood, I see myself. Due to my similar cultural background and gender expression, I can also somehow project myself into their situation. Here, I ground the definition of violence on the experiences of the Nupi Maanbi. This is best understood at the process of collective subjectivity. I believe that collective subjectivity helps in forming social definitions. By listening to their personal stories and analyzing them, I believe better debates and policies could be framed. Meitei society has space for Nupi Maanbi but because of the strong patriarchal setup, many Nupi Maanbi use to face discrimination on a daily basis as growing children:

When I was young I got beaten up by my father because I was effeminate. Clearly, it did not work \*giggles\*.  
[name withheld]

Girls and boys use to tease me as homo in school. I use to feel very sad. Later on in life when I got my homo friend’s life got better. It was when I meet them that I started to keep my hair long and wear phanek (sarong) and I fully became myself. [name withheld]

When I was young I always wanted to be a female. I knew I was a girl. The world told me I was not but I knew deep down inside that I was. Nothing was going to stop me from living my real life. [name withheld]

Most of the narratives generated a presence of physical abuse from their family and it would be easy to assume

that most Nupi Maanbi was denied love and nurture from their parents. The framework where I would locate this finding will be of child abuse. However, the conversations were always rooted in forgiveness:

I was always loved by my parents. They tried hard to help me, at least they thought so. They did not know much about homosexuality. Now every TV shows have a gay person but back in our days, it was taboo.[name withheld]

I was called a homo by my physics teacher in class when in high school. I remembered I cried on my way home. I think he used to beat me up with a stick. In Manipur there was and there still is a culture of beating students up. This is bad. But it's okay. I hope he has become a better person now. \*laughs\*. [name withheld]

Rather than seeing them as victims, I would like to read these stories are rooted in survival. In other words, they have survived the violence done to them and have lived beyond them. The Nupi Maanbi I interviewed has transitioned from victims to survivors. However, this is not the case for every Nupi Maanbi for sure.

The question of community is also important in understanding the formation of 'homo' beauty parlors. Many of the Nupi Maanbis were not so financially fortunate while growing up. All of the Nupi Maanbis interviewed were OBC's (Other Backward Classes). All the participants grew up in poor families and were deprived access to many health care needs which facilitate in completing their transition into "passable transsexual women":

When I was young, we were not lucky or knowledgeable enough about hormonal replacement therapy and surgeries. My younger generation is so much luckier in a sense. [name withheld]

I always wanted to have a real breast. I did not know how to get them. Today the market is more accessible. However, it is still too expensive. [name withheld]

Many of the Nupi Maanbis do not make sense of their experiences in a gay discourse. In other words, their experience remains more or less similar to transgender bodies of the West:

I am not gay. I am not a boy. To categories me as gay, I consider that uneducated. I am transgender.[name withheld]

Like many other societies, in Meitei society also, non-reproductive forms of sexuality are seen as inferior. In other words, heteronormativity pervades Meitei culture. It very often is expressed as feelings of rejection and missing of the emotional intimate:

We are seen as a time pass for horny boys and men. This makes me feel sad.[name withheld]

I have boyfriends but they have left me for girls. At the end of the day, they will go and marry a girl. This is a sad fact.[name withheld]

As a child some Nupi Maanbis were thrown in the universe of the 'homo' (slang for homosexual):

I was teased as a 'homo' throughout my childhood. I did not even know what it meant. I knew it had to do with me being 'sissy'. Later in life, I found that it also meant I had same-sex erotic feelings. I was told I was homosexual before I even knew what it was.[name withheld]

For me, the term 'homo' meant I was a sissy boy. It had nothing to do with me linking boys. [name withheld]

For one to be 'homo' one needs to be a feminine man. In Meitei society, one gender expression determines if one is a 'homo' and not one's sexual behavior. These narratives are not to prove that Nupi Maanbis are 'victims', powerless and are incapable of violence. Rather, this implies that violence is gendered. These interviews revealed the gendered nature of violence. Most of the violence the Nupi Maanbis face as children

were because of their gender expression which is feminine. They were targeted ‘simply’ they were effeminate boys, the key words here being ‘simply’. Interestingly, it seemed that the parents of the Nupi Maanbis tried to ‘change’ or ‘protect’ their ‘sons’ from transiting into a Nupi Maanbi:

The first time I was beaten up badly because of wearing a phanek (sarong). They thought it was very bad for a guy to do it. I was also the only son. They told me that they were being protective and helping me. [name withheld]

I went to a Christian Catholic school. They had strict rules for boys being boys and girls being girls. They tried to shape me into a boy, they failed horribly. \*laughs\*[name withheld]

I forced myself to fall in love with girls at one point of time when I was younger. I was in school back then. I thought that it was a good thing to do. I have also heard about some Nupi Sabis working in Courtyard Theater being married and have kids. But I could not do it. I had to be true to myself.[name withheld]

Going to school was a major task for most of the Nupi Maanbi growing up:

My school was hard since I was told not to keep my hair or my nails long. I was forced to wear pants and no make-up. I hated school.[name withheld]

The teachers where horrible! It is as if they don’t have souls. I was beaten once because I was ‘too’ feminine. [name withheld]

The boys use to tease me. They still do. I tell myself to not get affected but I do. I am only human.[name withheld]

Society, family, institutions (school) and the individual have tried shaping the gender of the Nupi Maanbi. They have tried their level best to make a man out of them. However, it did not work as such. These narratives should not be confused with the attempt to acknowledge a ‘true’ gender expression and identity one is born with. In other words, there is no essential gender identity that determines our gender behavior. This is gender performances that one molds after one’s culture expression of what it means to be masculine or feminine. Gender identity is a process, always a becoming (Beauvoir 1949; Butler 1990).

## **Towards Inclusion**

Feminist, like Sandra Bem have challenged the emphasis on biological factors and claims society as destiny and developed a theory known as androgyny theory (Bem, 1981). By keeping sex as fixed they recognize gender as a social construct. It recognizes the existence of both male and female in an individual. This theory adopts that masculinity and femininity are both beneficial to both boys and girls.

In raising and teaching children there is a need to reject essentialism. In other words, children are categories that are and will be affected by social developments. While interviewing the Nupi Maanbi about their childhood experiences, this is what they had to say:

I wish my family understood that even if I had been born a boy, I always wanted to live as a girl. I did not have an amazing childhood, but I learned from my past. I was always teased as a homo. It still happens but I try to look at the brighter side of life.[name withheld]

As a kid, I wished my family and our society were more sensitive towards issues regarding transgender women. It is a bit different now and it is getting better. I had found my transgender friends at a young age so I was lucky. Most transgender kids are not. [name withheld]

I always wanted to play with dolls with my female friends growing up. I was not allowed to do so. They thought if I hang out with girls, I would become a homo. So I was restricted to do so many things which I loved as a kid. That is not good. I am not transgendered because I hang out with girls, I was born like this. [name withheld]

Listening to the Nupi Maanbi narrate about their childhood, there is a need to incorporate non-sexist child rearing by parents and caretakers. While asking self-identified feminists on the questions of child-rearing among my peers in the university, this is what they had to say:

I find it horrible to decorate rooms of children blue or pink, depending on whether if it is a boy or a girl. The child should be able to decide his/her gender on its own. We should just be there to support it.[name withheld] What nonsense is this entire clothing store which separates gender so drastically? Boys section and girls section is very discriminatory! The child should be able to wear whatever he or she wants to wear. Clothing is an expression of one's personality and the child, regardless of any gender or sex, should be able to express it freely.[name withheld]

One's gender expression is not one's sexuality. To police one's gender behavior or identity does not mean his/her sexuality is automatically regulated. Gender, sex, and sexuality are interrelated but are not the same. There is no direct relation between any one of them. In other words, it could be inferred from the study of the Nupi Maanbi that to police a male child to follow masculine gender expression will not lead to him being masculine. More importantly, it will not lead to him being heterosexual. The series of interviews, with my peers in the university setting again, with gay subjects identifying as feminists, about raising children in a non-sexist manner produced thought-provoking ideas:

I would call my child 'baby', regardless of any genitals attached to the baby's body. When the baby grows up, the baby can decide. [name withheld]

Making sure that the baby wears gender neutral clothes is a way to raise children in a non-sexist way. I think I am up for that as a parent. The child can choose eventually. [name withheld]

In these interviews, there is a sense among feminist that communication is the fulcrum of social change. In other words, the child is referred to as a 'baby' or in many cases 'it' and transformed into 'genderless' body. There is also an underlying meaning that gender is a 'choice' one chooses. This agency of 'choosing' has been commonly associated with free will and creativity. However, this choice will be easier for some children than others. In other words, because the social resources are distributed to different agents in Meitei society, some children have more choices than others. Also, choosing does not mean children have used their 'absolute free will'. Their choices are influenced by the very way they are positioned as subjects. This is not to say we don't choose our gender. However, this is to say that people cannot escape from the social construction of gender.

## **Conclusion**

It is not necessarily the case that the Nupi Maanbi are born with a 'true' gender and sexual identity: i.e. feminine and homosexual. However, it is the case that the Nupi Maanbi are born with a body and it is Meitei culture that defines what is feminine and sexual in society. Most importantly, there is no direct relationship between biological sex, gender expression, gender identity, and sexuality. One's gender expression or identity does not determine one's sexuality. They might influence each other but there is no direct relationship with each other.

I can see this while I am conducting strides on the Nupi Maanbi. For example, some Nupi Maanbi are married to females (and have children) regardless of their feminine gender expression. The idea that heterosexual is 'normal' or that all males should be masculine is a product of culture and society.

School plays a crucial role in one's gender self. It is an important site where violence is used to shape one's gender expression and sexual orientation. Teachers rarely reward a male child playing with feminine toys/games. Social institutions (like schools) control and police one's gender. To police one's gender is to control the freedom of individual expression. There needs to be freedom from unnecessary control of gender. The young adult should be able to decide, identify and 'do' one's gender under the protection and guidance of their teachers.

Children and youths fight to express themselves in new possible ways. They should be raised in ways that they know their assigned sex does not restrict their gender expression or identity. If a female child wishes to express masculine gender role, they should be able to express it without fear. If a male child wishes to identify as a girl, she should be able to. The teachers/caretaker should be providing them safety, care, and protection. Through education and understanding the individual child's experiences, hopes and dreams it is our collective obligation to help children live gender effectively. They should be comfortable in their own skin. The doors of possibility should be kept open. Love, respect and self-determination are the key.

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# Breaking All Fetters with the Sword of Education: Interpreting Bama's *Karukku* as a Lighthouse for Dalit Feminism

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## Abstract

*Karukku* is a poignant discourse that brings to light the shameful and ugly secrets of our mainstream Indian society, which has thrived on flawed unjust doctrines of subjugating its most diligent and hard-working sections in the name of caste based hierarchy. But the book does not limit itself to merely be a treatise on casteist atrocities and a woman's solidarity with the other members of her marginalized community, its moves ahead to become a manifesto of self-emancipation for the victimized Dalits across India. Through this book, Bama calls forth her fellow folks -the Dalits , and particularly the Dalit women to re-discover ,re-define , re-affirm and re-establish their identities as well as their rightful place in the Indian social order through educational and entrepreneurial initiatives, thereby resisting their victimization at the hands of hegemonic powers. My article not only delineates upon these multiple dimensions of this masterpiece of Dalit-Feminist Literature, but also argues that this book must be read as a thought-provoking piece of 'Resistance Literature'. Further, this article will also make an attempt to trace the intersecting trajectories between 'Dalit-Feminism' and 'Postcolonialism' that can be identified at an insightful close reading of Bama's *Karukku*.

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India has forever been a fertile ground for Literature and this country has produced literary gems since ages. But ironically, though literature of a country generally resonates the sentiments of its countrymen at large, in the case of India, it too has remained hegemonized by the elites and a vast number of the country's masses have remained beyond the periphery in literary expression until very recent times. A major ground-breaking occurrence in the field of post-independence Indian Literature has been the emergence of Narratives by Dalit Writers, who have slowly but steadily started carving out a niche for themselves in the Indian literary space, since last few decades. One such book worth noticing is the first published autobiography by a Dalit Tamil woman named Bama Faustina , who published her book originally in Tamil in 1992. This book gained substantial appreciation in literary circles after Lakshmi Holmstrom translated it into English and the translated version got published around the dawn of the new millennium in the year 2000. The translated version of *Karukku* won the Crossword Prize for Literature, and this further propelled the recognition of Bama Faustina as an exponent of Indian Dalit-Feminism.

Defying any specific classification in terms of genre, this book is too unconventional to be called either an autobiography or a fiction, although it seems to be both. By resorting to realistic documentation as a viable method of protest against unjust exploitative conventional social order, Bama not only records her individual frustration and predicament as a Dalit Christian women who was bound to bear humiliation and rejection at every step of her life, but she also authentically testifies the collective experiences of an entire subaltern community of India i.e. the Dalits ; thereby microcosmically revealing the horrors of rigid caste based social structure, which has thrived for innumerable generations, upon flawed unjust doctrines of subjugating its most diligent and hardworking sections in the name of caste based hierarchy. 'Karukku' is a word of Tamil

language which denotes palmyra leaves that have sharp edged blades on either side, like double-edged swords. The imagery of Karukku as the title of this book is suggestive of the wounds inflicted through humiliating caste discrimination upon the conscience of Bama and the millions of Indian Dalits like her. But the same sharp-edged Karukku also represents symbolically a sharp edged weapon to cut through the dominant system. This metaphorical dichotomy of sharp-edged 'Karukku leaves' that allude to wounds and remedy alike, make them the befitting title for Bama's narrative. Though many other writers have voiced Dalits' sufferings in their literary works, Bama's *Karukku* has emerged as a beacon of inspiration for Indian Dalits, apart from contributing to the evolution of a 'Dalit Literary Canon' in India.

With the aid of a series of anecdotes, Bama succeeds in drawing a lively pen-portrait of her native village and pithily captures in words the milieu in which she grew up as a Dalit girl. Bama was born as a Tamil Dalit Christian in Puthupatti village situated in Virudhunagar district of Southern Tamil Nadu in the year 1958; nearly a decade after India gained sovereignty as a nation and liberated itself from servitude of foreign yoke. But like numerous other villages across the length and breadth of India, this village too was plagued with the social evil of casteism, a discriminatory system in which the Dalits had no experiential idea of words like 'freedom' and 'human-dignity'. Bama's narrative is neither linear nor chronological, rather in a jig-saw puzzle style, the focus of the narrative keeps on shuttling between the past and the present life of Bama Faustina, thereby revealing bit by bit, the numerous glimpses of manifold incidents, which have taken place during the different phases of her life. She helplessly recounts a bitter childhood experience when she was humiliated by a baseless accusation from her own school-teacher of stealing a coconut, even though she had not committed any theft; the only reason behind teacher's suspicion being that she belonged to the so called lower 'pariah' caste. She also gives a thread-bare account of the all pervasive casteist abhorrence that she confronted on a day to day basis during her college days and nearly every day her sensitive young heart got intensely pained by it. Even while commuting through public-transport, Bama was agonized to notice that most upper caste ladies avoid sharing seats with Dalit women. Such prevalent stratification both inside and outside her village made her grieve that "I would not get rid of this caste business easily, whatever I studied, wherever I went" (p.19, *Karukku*). Unlike most autobiographical texts which limit to register subjectivity alone, Bama's *Karukku* gives the impression of rather being a *testimonio* in which the boundaries between individuality and universality get altogether blurred and the narrative simultaneously gives voice to personal as well as shared collective concerns. Eminent critic Pramod K. Nayar in his essay entitled '*Bama's Karukku: Dalit Autobiography as Testimonio*' defines Testimonio as "the voice of one who witnesses for the sake of an 'other', who remains voiceless" (Nayar 84). *Karukku* qualifies in every respect to be considered a Testimonio that faithfully records the shared experiences of 'Dalits' across India and also gives voice to their muffled sentiments and aspirations. In this process of penning down her individual predicaments through this memoir, Bama identifies herself with the entire Dalit community, which almost becomes an expansion of her own self. In a way, through *Karukku*, the collective-consciousness of an entire community finds expression. It would therefore be appropriate to read *Karukku* not just as Bama's autobiography but rather as a collective biography of Indian Dalits in general and Dalit-women in particular.

Questioning the ethical legitimacy of such actions rooted in the concept of class based "varna" superiority versus inferiority, Bama writes with angst: "How is it that people consider us too gross even to sit next to

when traveling? They look at us with the same look they would cast on someone suffering from a repulsive disease. Where ever we go we suffer blows and pain”(p.24, *Karukku*). In a stream of consciousness narrative mode, the book also functions as repository of Bama’s reflections over her grandmother’s servitude who used to work as a servant for the upper-caste Naicker families in her ancestral village , where even the Naicker children would address her elderly grandmother by name, and command her like young Masters, while in a customary fashion, Bama’s grandmother used to respectfully address the upper-caste little boys as “Ayya”, that means Master. If these labour class Pariah i.e. Dalit women asked for drinking water, the upper-caste Naicker women would pour out water from a height of around four feet, as if to avoid the pitcher from getting defiled by their touch. Even while offering food to these Dalit women, the upper caste Naicker lady used to drop the leftovers into their vessel as if they were some inferior species of beings. All through the course of her life, Bama had been a witness to innumerable such incidents of dehumanizing discrimination and atrocities. What disillusioned and frustrated her all the more was that these Dalits, including her own grandmother, had become so conditioned in the conventional caste system, that they had internalized a sense of being inferior to the hegemonic classes, thereby accepting such dehumanizing stratification as a natural world order. Venting her disapproval of such widely prevalent treatment that belittles the human-dignity of her compatriots, Bama hurls upon readers a series of evocative unanswered questions in her book: “Are Dalits no human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a sense of honour and self-respect? Are they without wisdom, beauty, dignity? What do we lack? They treat us in whatever way they choose, as if we are slaves who don’t even possess human dignity” (p. 24, *Karukku* ). These pertinent questions, interrogating the legitimacy of caste-based stratification, remind us of a similar set of questions raised by Frantz Fanon’s seminal book *Black Skin, White Masks*, in the context of discriminations validated by notions of racial superiority which is steeped in such widespread beliefs that Blacks are naturally endowed with baser souls that makes them rightly deserve lower echelon in the social ladder and being Black is synonymous with being Ugly. A closer look at the mechanisms that propel such prejudices based on racial superiority makes it evident that similar mechanisms had been put into practice for dehumanizing the Dalits in India, more so due to fact that the Sanskrit term ‘Varna-vyavastha’ literally denotes a system based on Colour based demarcation of high and low. The Indian ‘Varna- Vyavastha’ has been for all practical purposes instrumental in endowing disgraceful derogatory and dehumanized status to those that were categorized as ‘Shudras’( that were later identified as Dalits ), more or less analogous to the concept of being Black in the Western scenario. In the case of Indian Dalits , the mechanism of subjugation has worked at physical, financial and mental level alike. Enslaving the psyche of these marginalized sections, the hegemonic powers perpetuated doctrinal dictums which conditioned these subalterns to think of themselves as lower creatures. The mainstream Indian society that had functioned on the doctrines of “Varna- Vyavastha” , identified its proletariat labour class as “shudras” and the concept of purity-pollution validated exclusion and exploitation. Consequently, these Shudras who were called Dalits in the post-independence era had become psychologically conditioned to remain in the lower stratum of society. The Dalit women were doubly marginalized on the axis of subordinate gender in addition to their lower rank based on caste-identity. Underscoring this conspiracy of subjugation at mental level, Bama writes in her book *Karukku* : “Because Dalits have been enslaved for generation upon generation, and been told again and again of their degradation, they have come to believe that they are degraded, lacking

honour and self-worth, untouchable; ..." (p.28, *Karukku*). Bama exemplifies her argument by referring to her own grandmother's servile attitude devoid of any self-esteem, towards the upper-caste people who treated her in derogatory manner. As a child Bama was told by her subdued grandmother that these upper caste people were the Maharajas who feed the untouchable lower caste folk and without these upper caste masters the lowly servants could never survive; and even more alarming was the fact that she had become acclimatized to harbor the conviction that this status-quo was permanent and un-alterable. Such passages from *Karukku* can be better comprehended in the light of Frantz Fanon's psychological approach delineated in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon's observations and arguments pertaining to the concept of psychic -subjugation have been referentially delineated by John McLeod while discussing the relevance of 'identity-formation' the consequences of low self-esteem in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism*. All through the era of expansion and consolidation of colonial regimes across the globe, such rhetorical discourses were circulated consistently which intended to convince the colonized subjects to perceive themselves as the 'other' in stark contrast with the 'civilized' colonizers; thereby legitimizing all discriminations, atrocities and dehumanizing treatment by the 'White' Masters. What the colonizers did to make the colonized multitudes subservient, was to systematically enslave them psychologically by instilling into them a sense of inferiority and acceptance of their own location at the lower rungs of the social order. Once their self-confidence was drained out, their will-power to resist exploitation naturally wanes off and they became vulnerable prey for the dominant sections of society. This very same conspiracy of mental subjugation was instrumental in pushing the Dalit sections to the fringes of mainstream Indian society, where they lay dormant for centuries, without even challenging the discrimination that eventually dehumanized them and in the course of subsequent generations, these marginalized subalterns eventually succumbed to the imposed perceptions and consequently internalized their own identity as lesser-beings or creatures who could not claim to be counted among 'Human Beings'.

But Bama's *Karukku* does not limit itself to merely be a treatise on casteist atrocities and a woman's solidarity with the other members of her marginalized community, it strides ahead to become a manifesto of protest as well as self-emancipation for the victimized Dalits across India; thereby contesting to establish itself at the forefront of Resistance Literature written in India during the post-independence era. The word 'Resistance' is derived from the Latin root-word "resistere" meaning to take a stand against. Conceptually, the idea of Resistance becomes an effective weapon for the subaltern or marginalized sections of any particular society to react against hegemonic power structures and subversive norms. Quite early in life, Bama had realized that intellectual advancement is the key to elevate oneself on socio-economic ladder; hence she herself made all possible attempts at educating herself in spite of several odds and then with this 'Weapon of Education' she incessantly fought against all adversities of life, and ultimately succeeded in being able to throw away the yoke of subjugation and the shame of inferiority. Aiming at liberation of Dalits from age-old dogmas and asserting the 'dignity of labour' rightly deserved by the Dalits in India, Bama's book is gem in post-independence 'Resistance Literature'. The word 'Resistance' is derived from the Latin root-word "resistere" meaning to take a stand against. Conceptually, the idea of Resistance becomes an effective weapon for the subaltern or marginalized sections of any particular society to react against hegemonic power structures and subversive norms. Literature can be a viable instrument at the hands of the subaltern to subvert the hegemony. To oppose exploitative power structures or to question the validity of a dominant tradition at linguistic level is ultimate

end which Resistance literature aspires to achieve, and *Karukku* is no exception in this regard. Through her semi-autobiographical book Bama calls forth her fellow folks - the Dalits, and particularly the Dalit women, to trust their inner strength which has become stronger through prolonged subversion and take the first step to re-discover, re-define, re-affirm and re-establish their identities as well as their rightful place in the Indian social order through educational and entrepreneurial initiatives, thereby resisting their victimization at the hands of hegemonic powers. Hence this book qualifies to become a titular metaphor for Dalit empowerment. As an anti-oppressive discourse, *Karukku* tries to foreground the inferior position unjustly assigned to Dalits and create a platform to fight this dehumanizing exclusion. Similarly, the psychologist Frantz Fanon too holds the opinion that liberation of colonial servitude means not just inception of fresh political and economic systems with new modus operandi, but change is simultaneously required at the level of perceptions, convictions and psychological mindset as well. Hence, Bama's strong plea to the people of her own community to realize, assert and claim their rightful place in the Indian social order and emancipate themselves from age-old conventions through educational pursuits, seems to be conceptually in concurrence with the quintessence of postcolonial discourses:

We must not accept the injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is fate, as if we have no true feelings; we must dare to stand up for change. We must crush all these institutions that use caste to bully us into submission, and demonstrate that among human beings there are none who are high or low. Those who have found their happiness by exploiting us are not going to let us go easily. It is we who have to place them where they belong and bring about a changed and just society where all are equal. (p.25, *Karukku*)

A close reading of *Karukku*, contextualizing it in a broader ideological conjuncture, reveals several intersecting trajectories between the ethos of Postcolonialism and Dalit Feminism, that lay sedimented as undertones within this multi-layered text. In sync with the broader conceptual ethos of Postcolonialism and its essence of being synonymous with the empowerment of the subaltern, Dalit literature appears to be functioning as a catalyst in bringing forth the marginalized Dalits from their peripheral location to the 'Centre' of the mainstream social order. Bama tries to make an assertion of hitherto neglected voices and experiences of the Dalits, just like the efforts of Postcolonial writers to write back to the centre. Dennis Walder's observation that "at the centre of that rewriting from the postcolonial perspective, is the reclamation of the voices and the experiences of the 'other'..." (Walder 32) seems applicable in the case of Dalit Literature alike. The spark of resistance against dominant ideologies and the determination to overturn hegemonic social perceptions runs as an undercurrent throughout this text, and this feature of *Karukku* makes it thematically analogous to the attributes of postcolonialism. The eminent critic Professor Jasbir Jain's views that Postcolonialism is fundamentally not associated with a specific era alone, rather it is "an attitude of mind, a state of positioning within power relationships" (Jain 21) find resonance in Bama's pursuit of challenging, resisting and subverting the existing Power-equations of Indian social fabric.

With the objective of re-structuring and re-conceptualizing 'Dalit-Woman's Image' at variance with conventionally dominant perceptions, Bama's *Karukku* also functions as a treatise celebrating 'Dalit identity', placing in high esteem the resilience, grit and spiritual strength of Dalit women by faithfully documenting an ordinary village girl's extraordinary struggle to re-construct herself and thus this book becomes an inspirational feminist discourse for all those women across the world, who bear the brunt of discrimination

rooted in prejudiced narrow-minded world-view. It clearly sends a message that Education and Self-reliance are vital to uplift social status and achieve empowerment. The life-struggle of Bama testifies the assumption that education plays the role of a catalyst in women's development by enabling women transform themselves into free thinkers, and enlightened through the medium intellectual advancement they become bold enough to stride ahead for liberating and uplifting themselves. Education opens up new vistas for self-discovery, free-thinking and builds up the confidence in an individual to assert one's right to living with dignity. Bama's own life exemplifies this social phenomenon. Bama believes that if the latent spirit of Dalits like her is kindled through transformative education, they will collectively be successful in breaking away their shackles, which they have ignorantly internalized for generation as their unalterable destiny. Towards the later part of her book, Bama expresses her conviction that with gradually-growing awareness through transformative education, these subservient multitudes of India will dare to rise against oppression and make sincere efforts for self-emancipation.

In its multi-dimensional spectrum, *Karukku* can indeed be considered to be a semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical, semi-testimonio and semi-inspirational text, that deserves to be recognized as a seminal book in the canon of Dalit-Literature; but in addition to all this, it also seems fit to be considered at par with the literary masterpieces of Black Feminism. In terms of theoretical concept, counter-hegemonic resistance is the common ideological axis on which both Dalit-Feminism and Black-Feminism spin alike, in spite of having evolved in altogether different geographical as well as historical contexts. Dalit Feminism and Black Feminism both evolved out of the ramifications of exclusion from the mainstream and are intrinsically analogous in aiming at re-structuring, re-formulating, re-conceptualizing and re-framing the existing stereotypical social hierarchy. Taking into consideration, the role played by autobiographical discourse in charting out new self-definitions to counter pre-defined notions of inferior identity, *Karukku* by Bama Faustina performs more or less the same action as was played by the autobiographies written by Black women. As Elleke Boehmer points out in his book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, that during the era of colonial repression autobiographies written by Black African and Afro-American female writers first began to get published and such autobiographies allowed them to re-model Black-identity grounded in experiences of endurance and overcoming. Such autobiographical texts projected Black-identity in a new light and with a fresh perspective and thereby resisted or subverted the conventional stereotype notions associated with Blacks. Further, these life-stories were also looked upon as an instrument of forging political solidarity amongst Black women trapped in similar situations across the globe, thus making Black Autobiographies to become the collective chronicles of Black-experiences. Distinguished Black Feminist writer Patricia Hill Collins makes a point that the in process of writing her book entitled *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, she was making an attempt to regain her voice and seek self-definition which could replace the external definitions imposed upon her by dominant discourses. Her contention is that "Black women's self-definitions enabled them to assert in documented form, the indigenously African conceptions of self and community, which instilled a new-found confidence as well as a sense of self-pride that propelled these Black Women to fight for their Right to Human Dignity. In the Preface to the Second edition of her book which helped in the formulation of Black feminist theories, she explicates the objective that motivated her to write: "I initially wrote *Black Feminist Thought* in order to help empower African-American women. I knew that when an individual Black woman's consciousness concerning how she understands her everyday

life undergoes change, she can become empowered. Such consciousness may stimulate her to embark on a path of personal freedom, even if it exists initially primarily in her own mind. If she is lucky enough to meet others who are undergoing similar journeys, she and they can change the world around them” (Collins ix). Bama too attributes the genesis of *Karukku* to her larger vision of emancipating the Dalits in general and the Dalit women in particular. The need to formulate unique epistemological standpoint for Black as well as Dalit women, on the basis of their shared experiences of dehumanizing discriminations, is equally felt by Bama Faustina and Patricia Hill Collins. Furthermore, Bama’s inferences regarding the relevance of Education as a viable ladder for Dalit women to achieve self-emancipation and eventually elevate herself to a respectable position in society, find congruent resemblance in the notions of one of the earliest proponents of the concept of Black Feminism, Anna J. Cooper, who underpins the relevance of transformative education for empowering Black women in her book *A Voice From the South*. This book by Ms. Cooper reiterates the transformative role that Education plays in enabling Women to tackle life with greater dexterity apart from “transmitting the potential forces of her soul into dynamic factors that has given symmetry and completeness to the world’s agencies” (Cooper 57). Such affinity in fundamental convictions between Bama’s *Karukku* and Black Feminist Literature prompts the readers to interpret Bama’s narrative not just in the limited context of Dalit perspective, but in the universal context of Women Empowerment.

Written in the hour of despair for catharsis of personal turbulence by Bama Faustina at a stage of her life when all seemed bleak, *Karukku* has turned out to bring salvation not only for its own author, but has gained over the years, the stature of a scripture for the Indian Dalit women in particular, and all victims of hegemonic oppression in general. What makes this groundbreaking radical literary discourse all the more special, is the fact that it not only raises pertinent questions and underscores concerns pertaining to the victimization of womenfolk on the basis of gender, caste or class, but also hints at viable solutions to confront and overcome those problems. Most emphatically, it underpins the relevance of ‘Education’ as a vital tool for women to achieve empowerment, liberty and the right to live with human dignity.

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## Women's Link

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