

Women's Studies in Education

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Education has been regarded as a significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in society. It not only develops the personality and capabilities of individuals, but also qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions and thereby improves their socio-economic status. A direct expectation from educational development in a society is the reduction of inequality among individuals. Such a goal was therefore included as a basic right of every human being in the universal declaration of human rights.

Traditional Indian society was characterised by a highly stratified caste structure, which renders an extremely complex, diverse institutionalised system of inequality. Access to formal education was exclusive and restricted to the upper castes. The education system conspicuously debarred women except in the case of those from higher castes, where some women could achieve ordinary levels of education leading to literacy. In such an arrangement, the family took the responsibility of training women for the predominant roles of housewife and mother (Narullaha and Naik 1971).

During the British rule, the state-run educational system attempted to replace the stratification based on caste to one based on class. However, in the process, the internal differentiation of power, based on caste lines, remained intact as the upper castes took up roles as upper *classes* in the changed scenario (Carnoy, 1974). While there is considerable documentation on the inequality in the field of education across various caste groups, very little attempt has been made to record the horizontal differentiation that existed between men and

women. Thus, in the changed context, no serious attempt was made to promote women's education. Further, gender inequality cut through caste/class as a sub-category and impacted on the position of women in society.

After independence, the Constitutional guarantee of equality changed the conceptual thinking on the educational development of women and urged women to play multiple roles in the polity, economy and society. The role of education in preparing women to take on this new responsibility achieved new significance. In line with these pronouncements, the government through its policies, attempted to address gender gaps. The objectives of the periodic five-year plans reiterated the principle of equality, thus announcing a political consensus for creating conditions which would lead to the progressive removal of all forms of discrimination against women. Alongside, the western liberal education, the social reform movement within the country and the struggle for political freedom gave rise to forces which began advocating changes in the position of women. Despite these efforts, evidence point to a situation that the process of change has been slow and far short of expectations.

The subject of women's status in India is riddled with contradictions. On one hand, the Constitution not only grants equality to women but also provides for affirmative action and for positive discrimination by empowering the state to make special provisions for women. India bestowed on women the right to vote much before this right was given to women in other advanced countries. India also has the distinction of being one of the few countries which through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional

Amendment ushered a sizeable number of women into the political echelons of power at the decentralised governance level. Notwithstanding this, women are grossly under-represented at the higher levels of decision-making in government. Women occupy less than 8 per cent of parliamentary seats and comprise of not even 3 per cent of the administrators and managers. The country records an alarming decline in the sex ratio over the decades. Now at 933:1000¹ it has to account for nearly 25 million women who are missing. India also houses one of the largest numbers of illiterate women of the world. Even after fifty years of independence, there are still more than 50 per cent of girl children who are outside the formal educational system according to the Gross Enrolment Ratio figures. The dropout rates for girls is as high as 40 per cent at Primary school showing even lower participation of girls in Primary education.

In the light of the above contradictions, and particularly the dismal picture in relation to education, it becomes important to review the status of women with reference to their educational needs and opportunities. In this attempt, it becomes imperative to adopt a powerful framework that perceives women's education more as a rights issue. The approach of women's studies in education in this context assesses the extent to which the critical issues are examined and what the implications are for women's overall educational status.

RELEVANCE OF CEDAW FRAMEWORK

The most prominent instrument for the advancement of women's rights is the Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)². The progress of women in the field of education is best understood against this framework of equality as it is the most comprehensive context using the rights perspective. The CEDAW

convention is based on three fundamental principles:

- i. Principle of equality,
- ii. Principle of non-discrimination, and
- iii. Principle of state obligation

CEDAW promotes substantive equality in the place of formal equality. Substantive equality basically requires women to be treated equally not in accordance to male standards but with due consideration for the biological and gender differences between men and women. Substantive equality adopts the corrective approach as against the protectionist approach. In other words, women are not protected from doing certain things in their own interest but the environment is modified so as to make it safe and conducive for women's initiatives.

The principle of non-discrimination recognises that inequality is socially constructed. Hence, care has to be taken not only to remove the discrimination that is direct, but also address any act of exclusion, restriction, distinction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect of nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or the exercise of women's rights in all aspects.

Thus, in accordance with the equality framework adopted by CEDAW, the state is obliged to provide the means as well as to ensure the results. The provision of means would entail creation of opportunity through laws, policies, programmes by which women can achieve equality. In other words, it is the obligation of the state to ascertain that these steps would lead to an equality of results. If the desired results are not achieved, the provisions of opportunity need to be revisited.

The paper is organised using the framework, as follows. Section I deals with the Evidence of Disparity in Education; Section II looks at Problems in Women's Education, State Interventions and Effects on Educational Research in Women Studies; Section III

¹ Source: Census of India 2001, Provisional Population Totals.

² It was adopted in 1976 by the UN general Assembly and India is one among the 100 countries that has ratified this treaty. India ratified CEDAW in 1993. The convention consists of a preamble and 30 articles. While article 1-16 of the convention define what constitutes discrimination against women, articles 17-30 lay down the agenda for national action. The CEDAW convention is an international bill of rights of women advocating equality between men and women and obligating member nations who have ratified this convention to act against this discrimination or inequality, with affirmative action.

discusses the Gaps and Areas of Concerns, and makes Observations and Conclusions.

SECTION I

Evidence of Disparity in Education

The National Policy on Education drafted almost a decade ago in 1986 states that, "In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. *The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women*"³. The real picture, however, is far removed from the relative advantage assured to women in the policy document. This is clear from the continuing discrepancies between the participation of male and female persons across all levels of education. Data over the decades have revealed that the participation of girls in formal education has improved. However, in spite of a substantial increase in the absolute number of literate women as well as girl children in schools, the persistent gender gap between the male and female is disturbing. The increase in absolute numbers must not be seen in isolation but as a measure of disparity, and hence comparative data on male and female participation must be treated as the central point of discussion.

Having stated this, it is imperative to say that a large constituency of women are encompassed in the following two categories namely "illiterates" and "girls outside school" either as non-enrolled or not retained within the formal education system. These two levels gain significance for two reasons. First, they pose serious hurdles to the progress of women's education in general and second, the emergence of basic education in recent years as a rights issue. However, evidence examined in this section will cover other levels of education while the focus would remain on literacy and primary education which are treated as serious bottlenecks for women's advancement.

Adult Literacy

According to the World Education Report 1998,

the *literacy facts at a glance* show that slightly less than one third of the world's non-literates aged 15 years and above are in India. The overall literacy rate improved from 16.67% in 1951 to 65.4% in 2001, which is a positive trend indeed. There is however a need to move beyond the generalised figures to measuring the performance, vis-à-vis bridging the gap between men and women which is emphasised in the CEDAW framework. The literacy rates for males and females as per the provisional figures in 2001 are 75.8% and 54.2% respectively. The corresponding figures five decades ago (in 1951)⁴ were 24.95% and 7.93% respectively. A comparison of the gap between men and women, which is the core of concern, is that it was about 17% in 1951, and rose to 21% in 1991. The non-reduction of the gap poses serious questions about the provision of equal educational opportunities for women. Despite the national endeavour in creating learning opportunities for women through mechanisms of positive discrimination, gender disparity persists with uncompromising tenacity, more so in rural areas and among the poor. This is a not only a matter of national concern but also a matter of national conscience.

At another level, the regional variation of female literacy rates highlights the fact that in the 21st century there are six states that record a female literacy of less than 50%, with states like Bihar and Jharkhand recording it as low as 33.6% and 39.4%. This variation also operates among some backward districts in different states. Given the fact that India is a country rich in its diversity and culture, there is a need for region specific studies which would identify factors operative in a particular population segment which restrict women's opportunity to become literate.

The studies that have examined adult literacy constitute a miniscule percentage when compared to other levels of education. These studies have by and large explored the experience of the total literacy programme paying more attention to the operational aspects and evaluating the overall impact. Most of the studies have been quantitative in nature and have located reasons that are broad and

³ Emphasis ours.

⁴ The literacy rates in 1951 included the 0-6 years population which was excluded from census of 1981 onwards.

peripheral. There is an over emphasis on socio-economic factors and the lack of motivation at the community level.

There is a need for a paradigm shift in current research so as to question the absence of agency and view the programme not in isolation, but within a larger interplay of the major institutions of class, caste and religion. The implications of a literate population in a democratic country have to be considered in order to understand that the influence of powerful forces may be acting as barriers to the success of the programme. A sociological approach to the interface of community values and the adult literacy programmes is required. *Qualitative studies in this direction will provide better insights. The programme ought to be more demand driven rather than supply oriented. That the deprived section of the population is unable to create a demand, has been responsible for the programme not obtaining its goals. Thus, generating demand from the community so as to create an active civil society must receive more attention rather than working with the programme in isolation. Studies need to explore the linkages that should be in place for running successful programmes. These qualitative studies and successful adult literacy projects must directly feed into policy to change the complexion of the national literacy endeavours. Other informal efforts to improve literacy skills have to be documented and best practices must inform the overall Total Literacy Programme.*

Pre-primary Education

Education at the pre-primary level can be broadly classified into a small percentage of private run pre-primary schools called *kindergarten* restricted to urban areas and a large number of state run centres concentrated in rural areas called the *anganwadis* attached to the Department of Women and Child Development. The *anganwadi* centres function more as meal distributing outlets and caretakers with very little emphasis on education. The function of food distribution and medicines reflects the control of these centres by the ICDS programme which has a strong health component. The *anganwadi* workers, in general, have very little training, receive poor

remuneration and are overworked. They are largely viewed as data generating agents when the performance of the programme is measured. The multiple jobs to be executed by them really leaves them with little time or energy to devote to the educational development of the children in their care. In other words, these centres run as poorly managed pre-schools. These centres, by design, function during the forenoon. The limited timings of these pre-school centres, and their non availability in the evenings, directly effect the attendance of poor girls in primary schools. However, in the given circumstances, it is difficult for these centres to simultaneously respond to the directions of the Department of Women and Child Development as well as that of the Education Department drawing their samples from urban areas. Studies at the pre-primary education level have, to a great extent, concentrated on the psychological development of the child, specially on the cognitive aspects.

Primary Education

The 83rd Amendment to the Constitution has resulted in the introduction of Article 21A, which promises the right to free and compulsory education for children in the age group of the 6-14 years. Although this has, in a sense, diluted the gains made by the Unnikrishnan judgement, it has nevertheless made the right to education a fundamental right. The catch though in this Amendment is the rider introduced which says "... in such a manner as the state may, by law, determine". This landmark judgment in the history of the country has serious implications for girls' education, as they constitute the majority of the out-of-school children. Their exclusion from early childhood education covering the below 6 years group will act as a major barrier for the girl children accessing this fundamental right.

The data on girls enrolment within the total enrolment in primary schools (I to V) shows an increase from 28.1 per cent in 1951 to 43.6 per cent in 1998. Although the trend depicts a narrowing of the gap, the fact that more than half the girls in this age group are still out of school is a matter for serious concern.

There has been a distinct progress at other levels of education, be it middle, higher

secondary or higher education where the rise in per cent for the corresponding years i.e., 1951 to 1998 is 24 per cent as against 15.5 per cent for the primary schools. A comparison of the percentage of girls' enrolment to the total enrolment across different levels of schooling also indicates that the crucial stage is enrolment at the primary level. Once this hurdle is crossed, the variation in enrolment across the other levels is relatively small.

Most studies of primary education have examined the functioning of schools with an emphasis on inputs and outputs, drawing their sample from an urban population. There have been some studies related to the poor performance of the weaker sections and the related issues. Among them, a few have referred to factors that affect the performance of girls, particularly pointing to poverty and other poor socio-economic conditions. The last decade has also seen a major shift in studies in the area of primary education which focus on the hidden cost (Tilak 1996) as well as the operational factors further to poverty and sibling care (Verma et.al.1993). Causes of elimination and deprivation at the school level are showing a complex map (Bhatta 1998, Banerji 1997, Anitha 2000, Vasavi 1998, World Bank 1997, PROBE 1999).

In all these studies, factors related to poor participation of girls and the deprived sections have been viewed as a process of discrimination, deprivation and elimination, which shifts the onus from individual households to larger, powerful institutions. Promoting a parallel stream of education such as private English medium schools is no answer. If the deprived sections have to access formal education privately, this highlights the states abdication of social responsibility. In fact, the withdrawal of the dominant sections from state run schools has had an adverse impact on educational quality.

It is important to realise that while most studies that fall under this category provide a paradigm for examining state supported education from another angle, there is a need to explain factors specific to girls. The limitation of the conventional paradigm which blames patriarchy alone has to be recognised. The factors with respect to girls may go beyond what is identified by the research studies carried out for the deprived sections as a whole. The

limitation of the role of patriarchy interfacing with that of caste and class needs to be studied and translated into action. This process is to be contextualised within the socio-cultural diversity of our country.

Secondary Education

Conventional research has by and large been directed to secondary and higher education. Nevertheless in accordance with the pattern with respect to other levels of education, a high percentage of research studies have been devoted to the area of participation and achievement. Students' participation studied at this level has located factors within the school system and families. The school related factors identified have been infrastructure and physical facilities such as teaching aids and laboratories. The home factors range from socio-economic conditions, parental education, number of children and caste affiliations. A few studies looked at causes influencing achievement and there were others which examined the correlation of achievement of children with working mothers. As a category in the field of sociology of education, working mothers have emerged as a sub-sample. Studies reveal that adolescent girls of working mothers were less stressed and aggressive (Nath and Samal 1995). Research also showed that girls possess higher self esteem in comparison to boys (Priscilla, S. and Karunanidhi 1998). The self esteem of daughters of working mothers was higher than those of the daughters of full time housewives (Alka, David 1992).

Higher Education

As has always been the case, higher education continues to be a priority for both policy and research studies in the country. However, at this level, while gender has been occasionally introduced as an independent variable, most researches on women's education have been restricted to access and participation. These studies have identified reasons such as socio-cultural norms, values and prejudices which restrict the participation of girls in institutions of higher learning (Chanana, 1993; Subramanyan, L.1998). Benefits of higher education have always been viewed as employment

capability. While the number of women employed in the public sphere has increased, their work is often relegated to suit their so called feminine skills and they function at lower ends of the occupational ladder (Indresan, J. 1995; Tilak, 1980). Several studies, of the last decade, about women in employment have been in the domain of psychology, with a major emphasis on self esteem, identity formation, and work or academic habits (Mathur 1997; Nuzhat Perveen, 1999).

In an interesting article, Neelam Kumar (2001) examined the relation of gender and stratification in Science. One of the few studies in this area, it attempted to offer empirical evidence of gender inequities in the academic hierarchy as an important aspect of social organisation of Indian science. Although the occurrence of gender hierarchy is universally recognised and evident from the mere difference in the numbers of male and female scientists in any organisation, the phenomenon is not always fully explained. A few studies carried out in this subject have assigned reasons such as career interruption due to marriage and child bearing responsibilities. Some have also pointed out that the long years of investment in education coincide with the conventional age of marriage for girls (Chanana 2001). Some have suggested that women are unable to meet the rigorous standards and stress of science oriented professions.

Scholars have noted a gender differentiation in terms of academic rank, and studies have shown that women's professional progress in science is slower than men's. Neelam Kumar's study has focused on scientists of equal productivity to capture the systematic measure of gender-based differentiation. The study corroborates the operation of gender discrimination in terms of distribution of women within Indian scientific institutions. It can be explained that discrimination based on gender are not solely organisational problems operating within the scientific community but reflect the values prevailing in the wider society which is governed by hierarchy (Ramsubban 1977) and particularly patriarchy. The study indicates that some of the discrimination may be operational within peer review processes and that inequalities persist at institutional level to affect promotions. Referring to individual trajectories of women scientists, the study demonstrates

that women, in spite of academic excellence in terms of publications in international and national journals of repute, continued to work as assistant/associate professors at 45 years of age.

These being individual cases and the research being exploratory in nature, it needs to be validated by other studies which identify factors leading to gender bias. These studies must be directed towards policies to eliminate the gender gap in academic promotions in Indian scientific institutions. The same needs to be said regarding other institutions of higher learning, specially those which are predominately male in their composition such as management and engineering units.

SECTION II

Problems in Women's Education

Women's Studies in Education faces serious obstacles in introducing gender studies in relation to major areas of specialisation. To begin with, the majority of studies in the field of education have been in Psychology where the dominant concern has been the measurement of behavioural aspects that make little reference to female behaviour. The underlying reason for this trend is largely attributed to the fact that the major thrust was to capture variations or establish relationships across categories that have been class-based. Most of the instruments used or developed have been western in their orientation and were aimed at examining factors that affect performance in the form of achievement scores. These studies were geared to the needs of the dominant groups, the clientele of urban-based English medium schools who were keen to join the global development.

In this scheme of thought, girls' education had little significance for it was not a part of the dominant, English speaking and western oriented liberal priorities. Moreover, most references were to secondary and higher education which had limited enrolment of women. Occasional studies have treated gender as an independent variable, but findings stop at stating the presence of difference without going into the reasons contributing to this. In all this, the interplay of class and caste in influencing the outcome has rarely received

any attention. These studies do not see women as a relevant category for analysis or for understanding the progress of education in this country.

Gender desegregated data has been consulted at literacy imparting schools and elementary schools where studies have repeated the usual rhetoric. The numbers cited do not contribute to fresh thinking and the trend has remained more or less the same. The studies, mostly qualitative during the past decade, have tried to shift the understanding of the poor performance of India in primary education to factors other than the poor socio-economic background of the children. They highlight conditions in school which operate as push factors and result in the elimination of the poor. Girls form the largest segment of this category and often have similar experiences to report. The process of elimination of girls needs further examination and could be more complex when compared to other disadvantaged groups as the patriarchal forces within these dominant structures also bear influence.

The studies that have been carried out in relation to women have restricted themselves to the participation of women. While they record the lower numbers they do not substantially analyse the reasons. There must also be a paradigm shift in understanding the process of non-participation where the focus of analysis must not be individual students. One should see the interplay of major institutions which happen to be the custodians of unequal power relations and which reflect a gender bias. There are a few isolated studies that point to the institutional impediments creating conditions excluding the deprived sections from formal schooling (Banerji, 1997 and Nambisan, 1996). The role of schools in the process of discrimination and deprivation have been highlighted by qualitative studies (Anitha, 2000). The investigators have not seen schools as institutions in isolation but as active agencies working in tandem with powerful affiliations such as caste and religion (Vasavi, 1998 and Bhatta, 1998). More studies of this nature, where girls are treated as a category, need to be undertaken to understand the process completely.

As Prof. Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze (1990) have pointed out, the actual economic reasons

can explain the disadvantages in relation to boys, but for girls the process of withdrawal has to be explained by a combination of factors like parental apathy, socio-cultural norms, direct and indirect costs, market failure to reflect and capture the benefits of girls' education and the low participation of girls in the system. All these have had a cumulative effect on girls' education. Thus, the ideology that governs the learning of girl children is a product of major institutions such as family, caste, religion and culture, which shape values and are transmitted through the educational system. Understanding this complex process essentially requires in-depth field studies located within this paradigm that recognises patriarchy as a central component.

State Interventions

The evidence of disparity highlight the contradictions in relation to the progress of women's education. An analysis of the contributory factors presents a complex picture. In the light of the above, it becomes important to review the Constitutional provisions as well as policies adopted to promote women's education. Further, the nature of researches carried out in this area will determine the extent of importance that state initiatives have received from academic enquiry.

The Indian Constitution was drafted around the same time as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and was strongly influenced by the latter. Unlike most countries, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, and sections on Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles.

At the international level, India has also unreservedly endorsed the Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995). India has also ratified various international human rights instruments, notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1993, as a mark of its commitment to human rights and the advancement of women.

The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India points out that the Government was aware of the inequality

between the sexes in the Indian population. The Committee raised basic questions about the socialisation process inherent in the hierarchical society, the resources, power and the asset distribution patterns and about diverse cultural values in the country. The Report stressed the need for special measures to transform the society to assure equality guaranteed by India's Constitution and the legal edifice into de-facto equality.

The findings of this Report resulted in a paradigm shift in the country's approach to women's issues from welfare to development as demonstrated in the plan documents from the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognised as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 states in unequivocal terms that "the raising of women's status cannot be singularly achieved by improving their position in one sphere,.... institutional mechanisms, appropriate resource allocations are pre-requisites for the implementation of an effective programme".

The policy with reference to education ensures equal access to education for women and girls. In its effort to promote opportunity for women, the document states that special measures will be taken to universalise education, eradicate illiteracy and eliminate discrimination against girls. Efforts will be made to reduce gender gaps at all levels of education by paying special attention to girls and women belonging to the deprived sections of the society. All forms of discrimination against the girl child shall be eliminated by undertaking measures both preventive and punitive within and outside the family. A substantial increase will be made in the investments related to the needs of the girl child like food, nutrition, health and education. Girls will be motivated to take up science so that there will be an increase in the representation of women in higher education in science and technology.

A remarkable difference in relation to other policy documents is the generation of the gender development Indices to support better planning, programme formulation and appropriate resource allocation. More policy related researches on education need to be undertaken. Gender desegregated data and these indicators

will fill in information gaps in vital areas reflecting the status of women.

Effects on Educational Research in Women Studies

In "Towards Equality Report", education is recognised as a major instrument of social change. Understanding the "*ambivalence between the traditional and the new attitudes on women's education is essential*" for only then one can examine, "*the progress of women's education in this country, because it has an impact on academic planning, allocation of resources and development of values in society for both men and women*".

As stated above, all policy documents articulate the government's concern to promote the education of women and children who constitute one half of the human resource of this country. Notwithstanding this, the educational status of women is poor as revealed by the gender gaps. This has a profound impact on the development of the country and can be broadly examined at two levels.

- i. Unequal representation of women at all levels of education.
- ii. Poor representation of women at decision-making levels.

Education as a right has always been the privilege of the powerful, whether it is the higher castes, upper classes, urban or men for that matter. After five decades of independence, India is still plagued by the problem of housing the largest number of illiterate women in the world. For the past five decades, the gap in the literacy rates of men and women still persist and has not shown an indication of reducing. The recent statistics show that more than 50% of girl children are not enrolled in primary schools. More than two thirds of girls are denied the right to education from grade 5 onwards. The thirty odd percentage who access higher education are concentrated in female oriented courses, ones in which the employment opportunities are lower and the remuneration comparatively less than those accessed by men.

At all levels of educational institutions the representation of women in decision-making bodies is negligible leading to little impact on gender issues. The need for critical numbers of

women in decision-making bodies has been identified and illustrated in connection with reservation for women in decentralised governance. Lack of education even in terms of basic literacy operates as a major impediment in their participation in other fields of employment or public life. Their poor literacy has also acted as a serious handicap for women accessing their right to participation in the political field bestowed on them through the 73rd and 74th amendment to the Constitution. The gains in educating a woman are multifold and would significantly contribute to the development of a country both directly and indirectly.

SECTION III

Gaps and Areas of Concerns

On the one hand, the Indian state is a signatory to a number of international instruments including the CEDAW and has a Constitution which is governed by the principle of equality. In keeping with the above reality, the government of free India has adopted policies and programmes to promote women's status. On the other hand, studies have revealed the relatively low status of women in Indian society. Raising woman's status entails improving her relative access to and control over resources in comparison to men (Batliwala *et.al.*, 1998). Education has been identified as an important resource that can contribute to a higher position for women.

It is not possible to view women's education in isolation. The influence of other societal structures is multifold in keeping a secondary status for women. The nexus of many collaborating power centres has an impact on other less autonomous institutions like education which are used as agencies to maintain the status quo. The processes involved are complex and need to be studied periodically by researchers in education.

In the past, the participation of women in formal education was restricted on the premise that women as homemakers had to operate within the private sphere. The public-private divide was used as an important mechanism to exclude women from public space. Women are considered to be the custodians of family honour

and integrity. Hence, the family controls female sexuality by restricting women's mobility and their visibility in the public arena inclusive of the field of education. This placed severe constraints on the schooling of girls. Formal education requires girls and women to move into public domain and interact with men and often engage in activities that are not under the close supervision of the family. The stated goals of education also emphasise preparing girls to perform roles other than those of mother and wife. These conflicting expectations enable the education system to function in a de facto manner such that while it appears to promote women's education, the content of the educational process and more importantly the transaction reflects the expectation of the more powerful systems such as family and caste (Paranjpe, Sandhya 1997).

Apart from schooling factors, the family through caste and religious institutions accommodates and indirectly promotes social practices such as child marriage, *pardah*, *sati*, dowry etc, that also has a negative bearing on the participation of girls and women in education. It is widely believed among communities and established through research—that higher a girl is educated, more is the demand for dowry. Thus, families, especially among the poor, are forced to restrict the education of their girls for fear of not being able to meet the dowry demands.

The response of the state with the educational requirements of the deprived sections including the girls is not encouraging. Introducing parallel streams of education in the name of privatisation and introduction of English medium schools attracting predominantly the better off sections including the boys have had a negative impact on the quality of schooling in state-run schools. The withdrawal of the dominant sections of society who traditionally demanded education from the state has weakened the delivery mechanism of the school by becoming supply driven. The poor quality of instruction was unable to retain the first generation of learners. Furthermore, the dual system of education has accentuated the gap that always existed between the rich and the poor as much as between the boys and girls.

Thus, education provided in the state run schools do not prepare students, particularly

girls from the poorer households, for the new employment opportunities created by globalisation and market forces. Further, globalisation has created two kinds of employment opportunities, one for the English medium educated individuals in the form of information technology and management. The other, a huge unorganised labour market with poor facilities and meager wages to absorb the children from the state run schools. This negates the equalising effect intended by opening formal education to the deprived sections particularly women. In other words, parallel systems of education no longer bridge the gap between the two sexes or classes but continue to perform the role of maintaining the status-quo.

Attempts have been made countrywide to revamp the quality of education through the external aid supported DPEP, UNDP projects in several states. Data coming in from most places give a mixed picture. Analysis of these experiences along with upscaling of the positive experience is urgently required to stall further deterioration of the quality of these schools. While factors that help in the participation of girls are identified, more in-depth studies are required to capture the diverse realities of our country.

In this connection, the activities of the school call for a closer analysis from a gender perspective. The roles performed by boys and girls either in relation to the immediate syllabus or the larger curriculum show a gender bias. This could be either covert or direct in its appearance in school. The key argument in support of the above proposition is that the teacher and her/his style of teaching, which is central to the educational process in primary schools, and the students themselves are products of the same society. Thus, the socialisation undergone by them will mediate the values of the patriarchal society of which they are an integral part. Their transaction in the schools will reflect the ideology and attitudes of the larger societal structures namely those of religion, caste and the family.

The obstacles operating in the participation of girls in the so-called masculine disciplines requires further analysis. While studies point to the low participation of girls not many of them probe further to answer the question - why? For

example, the nature of the course in science and technology requires longer hours of lab work. In other words, when girls opt for these courses they need to spend several hours away from the home in public domains. Hence, the family in conjunction with the educational institutions subtly eliminates them through creating notions about the inability of girls to handle scientific apparatus, and alleging lower levels of persistence and concentration than boys. As a consequence, girls are discouraged from selecting the dominant stream of science education. In all this, the inability to handle scientific apparatus may be an individual shortcoming which is independent of the sex, but our socialisation process will impel us to link it to gender.

At another level, norms practiced in these disciplines may also act as a deterrent to female participation. Girls through the socialisation process are led to believe that they have poorer abilities or skills in relation to science and mathematics, which are crucial for performance in these disciplines. Also, the dominant stream in that discipline has been established to assess abilities of students in the male group. The absence of women in this select group is conspicuous. Thus, the norms expected do not reflect, and in particular, fall short of abilities found among female students. However female aptitudes may have intrinsic value for the advancement of science.

Alongside, social degeneration such as increased incidences of violence and sexual harassment proves as a further deterrent. Parents and teachers often discourage girls from choosing specialisations which require them to spend time outside the home. Thus in most cases, it appears that women withdraw and stay away from these courses. Research studies have not moved beyond the peripheral reasons identifying what contributes to the non participation, or withdrawal of women from disciplines of science.

The convergence of gender based division of labour, family beliefs, educational institutions and employment circumstances reinforces the division between boys and girls as natural. Thus women and men are led to believe that jobs offered to them reflect more their ability or inability and not the gender bias prevalent in patriarchal societies.

In spite of this bleak picture, there are areas of optimism which need to be explored further. More recently, there is an increase in the presence of girls in pure sciences. Their proportion has increased from 1:13 in 1951 to 1:2. In other words, in 1951 for every one girl there were 13 boys, which has improved in favour of girls to almost half of the students in science disciplines being girls in 1996-97. The increased number of girls should not be viewed in isolation representing a positive trend. The past decade has shown a change in the patterns of employment due to the impact of globalisation and privatisation.

Firstly, the trend called by Chanana (2001) as feminisation of science has to be placed in the context of the recent change in market forces. The emergence of newer areas of specialisation in information technology and management has relegated the importance of science to a secondary position. Employment in the IT industry and management-based industries has become more attractive and remunerative which has had an influence on the choice of specialisation. Girls have occupied the gaps created in the enrolment for pure science disciplines.

Secondly, there is a need to use desegregated data to identify disciplines that have actually become feminine within the overall science faculty. The employment potential of these disciplines, along with the position women in the professional hierarchy, need to be studied to generate a more realistic picture. One should understand the nuances of the change.

Thirdly, one should examine the returns to education of women in science. Factors operating that affect their performance vis-à-vis men need to be explored to derive a better understanding of their position in the discipline. In this context one should also examine the overall impact of wastage and stagnation of women in these male dominated disciplines. Unless these findings are placed in perspective enumerating the causes of withdrawal, it may be difficult to promote girls in science education. Studies are wanting to elicit subtle reasons that affect the performance of women in male dominated disciplines. Some factors while appearing to be non-biased must be tested for gender neutrality. This is not to question the integrity or capability of the performance criteria

but to point to the possibility of cultural bias in favour of the men due to the overbearing presence of men during policy formulation. The norms thus framed in the absence of women may not reflect aspects that capture performances of women. The lack of critical number of women in decision-making bodies impacts the policies adopted by these agencies negatively in the name of promoting women in science and technology.

Finally, a conglomeration of cultural factors operate which have the powerful impact of dissuading girls from pursuing careers that are predominantly male. For instance, the age at marriage as low as 18-20 years, still is a crucial factor. Most of these disciplines require longer years of study thus pushing up the age at marriage. The rise of social evils such as dowry and the increase in incidences of violence against women restricts the choice of subjects for the girls. Employment at the time of marriage increases the marital value of girls in the large burgeoning middle class families. Thus a basic degree with some technical skills is found to be more in tune with the prevailing age at marriage. The predominant male disciplines offer employment after longer years of study and are closer to the age of marriage of boys, which is always higher. However such hypotheses require closer investigation both at the micro and macro level to corroborate the trends.

Indian society still reflects the predominance of the traditional role of females as wives and mothers. The social role of girls remains accentuated in the educational years. Hence pursuing a career does not necessarily redefine her traditional familial responsibilities. Because of this, women are at a disadvantage resulting in relatively lower performance in career in comparison to men. This is further underscored by norms that are male. As a result women occupy less powerful positions in the hierarchical structure of their career ladder leading to a lower representation of women in decision-making positions. As mentioned earlier the absence of women in these decision-making bodies perpetuates the existing inequality.

Observations and Conclusions

In conclusion, the review of researches in the field of women's studies in education shows

mixed trends. There are certain areas of research studies where a new paradigm of thinking has been initiated which is very encouraging, for example, the participation of women in male dominated professions such as pure sciences. Though these studies are exploratory in nature, and few in number, they have raised several important questions, giving direction to new areas of enquiry.

Although most studies from among the abstracts available have followed the earlier trend of concentrating on psychological dimensions in relation to women's studies, a new sub-category of working women has received attention. The impact of working women on children's self esteem, study habits and their performance have emerged as an important area of research.

A few studies from among the recently completed researches have devoted attention to the sociological aspects of girls' informal education. They have referred to factors that operate within the formal education systems which are instrumental in the process of elimination, discrimination and exclusion. This has enabled the debate of non-participation of children, especially the girls and deprived sections, to move from individual household factors like SES to institutional factors. However more focused studies with similar framework are required to understand girls participation at all levels of education.

More studies need to be undertaken to examine the parallel streams of education, one by the state run schools and the other by private English medium schools. The state run institutions now cater to the education of the majority of the girls. The linkages of these different streams of education to the employment opportunities opened by globalisation and liberalisation need to be studied to explore the implication for gender equality.

Women's studies in the field of education must emerge as an independent area of research. The current developments and debates must find reflection. Theoretical concerns and mediating differing realities, a prime concern of feminist research, must make inroads into educational research. Thus contextualisation of research, opening scope for dialogue and discussion must replace the urge for looking for one true story, typical of androcentric viewpoints. In other words, research must lead to the reformulation of knowledge that respects the realities and life experiences of individual women (Anitha & Anita, 2001). In this endeavour a change in the methodology of conducting research is desirable, where life histories, individual and collective experiences and engaging women in the mode of research must be encouraged.

There is need for more interdisciplinary work in education with gender emerging as a prime area to study the structural and institutional factors that push out girls from participating in formal education at all levels. The identification of such factors will point to the genuine reasons responsible for the slow educational progress of women. They will also directly feed into the policies that aim at promoting girls education since factors other than the peripheral ones will explain the variation in the participation of boys and girls.

The importance of adopting the substantive equality framework to examine the advancement of women in the field of education will enable one to identify features that operate at all levels starting from access, to retention and finally to the equality of results. The emphasis that any attempt to reach equality necessitates both equality of access, removal of barriers as well as equality of results goes a long way in promoting women's status.

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