

# Post-Independence Educational Development among Women in India

[Paper presented in the Seminar on "Women in Changing Society" at the Centre for Women's  
Development Studies, University of Hyderabad, March, 1987.]

*Balaji Pandey*

This paper aims to examine the policy debates on women's education and highlight some of the basic issues affecting the progress of women's education since the introduction of planned development in the country.

After India became independent the first governmental act to organise the education system in the light of independence was the setting up of the University Education Commission, headed by Prof. S. Radhakrishnan to 'suggest improvements and extensions that may be desirable to suit the requirements of the country'. The Commission covered the problems of admission, length and content of courses, the relation between teaching and research, examination, student discipline, teachers' service conditions etc. Widely acclaimed, the report of the Commission on the issue of women's education referred that:

"Women's present education is entirely irrelevant to the life they have to lead. It is not only a waste but often a definite disability".

"The present system of women's education, based as it is upon men's needs, does not in any way make them fit for coping with the problems of daily life".

"The modern educated Indian woman is neither happy nor contented nor socially useful. She is a misfit in life. She is highly suppressed, and needs opportunities for self-expression. The new education must provide this opportunity".<sup>1</sup>

The Constitution introduced in 1950 included a number of important provisions which had direct and indirect bearing on education.<sup>2</sup> After two years the country entered into a new era of planned development through the Five Year Plans.

The First Five Year Plan visualised education as the vehicle for the successful achievement of planned development. Deriving lessons from the University Education

---

<sup>1</sup> Report of the University Education Commission, Government of India, 1948-49, Vol. (i), Chapter XII, pp. 401.

<sup>2</sup> The Constitution guaranteed free and compulsory education for all children upto 14 years of age which was to be achieved within ten years of the introduction of the Constitution.

Commission's recommendations on women's education the Ist Plan stated that "*everyone realises the significance of the problem of women's education in the special circumstances of our country today and the need for adopting social measures for solving it. The general purpose and objective of women's education can not of course be different from the purpose and objective of men's education. There are, however, vital differences in the way in which this purpose has to be realized.*"<sup>3</sup>

The commencement of Ist Plan coincided with the appointment of Secondary Education Commission headed by A. Mudaliar. Mention may be made here, that the government constituted special commissions for university education and secondary education to go into the details of problems and hurdles and suggest ways and means to remove them but till now no special Commission has been constituted to enquire the problems of elementary education which is the most important stage for the educational development in terms of both quality and quantity.<sup>4</sup> The secondary education commission on the issue of girls education stated interalia "in a democratic society where all citizens have to discharge their civic and social obligations, differences which may lead to variations in the standard of intellectual development achieved by boys and girls can not be envisaged".<sup>5</sup>

A National Committee on Women's Education<sup>6</sup> was appointed by the Government in 1958 to go into the difficulties that hindered the progress of girl's education and to make recommendations in order to bring girls' educational par with the boys. The Committee had recommended several measures which were generally accepted by the Government. In essence these measures were: top priority for the expansion of girls education at the elementary stage; campaign against the traditional prejudices against girls education; appointment of women teachers; on demand separate schools for girls at higher secondary stage; incentives, special central assistance to all states till 80 per cent of girls in the age group 6-11 are enrolled; parity between boys and girls be reached as soon as possible; earmarking special fund by UGC for higher education of women; and establishment of National Council for Women's Education.

The Government appointed another Committee on differentiation of curricula for boys and girls in 1963.<sup>7</sup> The Committee proposed common curricula for both boys and girls up to primary stage. The Committee also recommended a core curricula of home-science for both sexes at the middle stage and inclusion of crafts or handiwork or productive labour on the general courses at the secondary level.

---

<sup>3</sup> The First Five Year Plan, Government of India, 1951, Chapter XXXIII, para 102, pp. 357.

<sup>4</sup> Some states have constituted Committees to look into the issue of pre-primary or primary education i.e. Karnataka in 1961, Rajasthan 1969 etc.

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Secondary Education Commission, Government of India, 1953, Chapter IV, pp. 56.

<sup>6</sup> Report of the National Committee on Women's Education, Government of India, 1959, Chapter XVI

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Committee on the Differentiation of Curricula for boys and girls, Government of India, 1964, Chapter IV.

A year later the Bhaktavaslam Committee was appointed to look into the causes for the lack of public support particularly in rural areas for girl's education and to enlist public cooperation. The Committee after going into details of the causes suggested interalia "the strategy for the development of the education of girls and women will have to take two forms. The first is to emphasise the special, programmes recommended by the National Committee on Women's Education and the second is to give attention to the education of girls at all stages and in all sectors as an integral part of the general programmes for the expansion and improvement of education".<sup>8</sup>

The Education Commission (1964-66) which discussed at great length almost all aspects of education, on the issue of women's education endorsed all recommendations made by the previous Committees on girls education. In addition the Commission recommended that "education of women should be regarded as a major programmes for some years to come and bold and determined effort should be made to face difficulties involved and to close the existing gap between the education of men and women in as short a time as possible.....".<sup>9</sup>

Based on the broad recommendations of the Education Commission the Government declared a National Policy on Education in 1968 whose aim was to achieve "economic and cultural development of the country for national integration and for realising the ideal of a socialistic pattern of society".<sup>10</sup> The policy committed for a continuous effort for the expansion and equalization of educational opportunity, sustained effort to raise quality, emphasis on development of science and technology and cultivation of moral and social values. Regarding girls education the policy stated "the education of girls should receive emphasis not only on grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation".<sup>11</sup>

Despite these efforts the Committee on the Status of women in India<sup>12</sup> in 1975 identified that in 1971, about 68 per cent of the total number of women in the age group 15-25 years and nearly 87 per cent in the age group of 25 years and above were illiterate. The significant point to be noted according to the Committee report was that although the enrollment has increased at a faster rate but the rate of increase in literacy is rather slow. On the basic issues of non-enrolment wastage, drop-out and non-retention the Committee observed that in classes I to V one girl out of every three in the age group 6-11 years is out of school and one girl out of every five in the age group 11-14 years is in the school. The drop-out rate among girls is very high. Of every 100 girls enrolled in class I only about 30 reach class V. The problem of non-retention, wastage and stagnation are therefore found to be much higher among girls. The Committee was of the view

---

<sup>8</sup> Report of Committee to look into the causes for lack of public support, particularly in rural areas for Girls Education and to enlist Public Support and Cooperation, Government of India, 1965.

<sup>9</sup> Education and National Development, Report of the Indian Education Commission, 1964-66, NCERT, 1971, Chapter VI, para 6.56 (i), pp. 241.

<sup>10</sup> National Policy on Education, Government of India, 1966,

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Towards Equality Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India; Government of India, Department of Social Welfare, 1975, Chapter VI.

that the educational gap between boys and girls is narrowing more rapidly at the higher level than at till primary and secondary level.

The year 1975 must be regarded as a watershed when rethinking on women's issues started when United Nations declared 1975-85 as women's decade. The year coincided with the publication of the report of the Committee on the status of women in India, the findings of this report provided shock to many people. Most of the recommendations made by the Committee were accepted by the Empowered Committee<sup>13</sup> and thus were incorporated into the National Plan of Action for women.<sup>14</sup>

The post '75 phase saw more official concern towards improving women's access to education. The draft sixth Five Year Plan<sup>15</sup> (1978-83) prepared by the Janata Government took a very critical view of the education structure existing so far. The plan mentioned that the benefits from the education system failed to reach majority of population due to "inadequate principle of national education policy". The plan envisaged to change in the priorities in order to bring everyone into the fold of education system. Eradication of illiteracy and promotion of adult education programmes and more emphasis on universalization were given priority on the educational front. In fact these were the issues mostly affecting girls and women.

When the Government at the Centre changed in a span of 30 months the new Government incorporated most of these issues on priority basis in the Sixth Plan Document.<sup>16</sup> Thus the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) emphasized eradication of illiteracy, universal primary education and introduction of job-orientation. The plan for the first time include a chapter on "Women and Development" which deals with the issues of education, health and employment of women. On the issues of education, efforts were directed towards higher enrollment and retention of girls in schools, income generating work for girls outside the school hours to supplement the family income, increase in the number of women teachers specially in the rural areas, construction of residential quarters for women teachers, strengthening science teaching in girls' schools and colleges, streamlining the admission policy to promote greater enrollment of women in professional courses like engineering, electronics, agriculture, veterinary science, pisciculture and forestry, expansion of functional literacy programmes specially in areas having low female literacy, special non-formal educational programme for girls in the age groups 15-20 years who could not complete formal schooling earlier, construction of more hostels for women belonging to backward classes and "instead of increasing separate women's polytechnics for imparting training in arts, crafts etc. co-educational institutions would encouraged as far as possible".<sup>17</sup> The Seventh Plan 1986-90 by and large envisages similar measures.

---

<sup>13</sup> Resume of the Recommendations of the Committee on the Status of Women in India and views of the Empowered Committee Thereon, Government of India. Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1976.

<sup>14</sup> National Plan of Action for Women; A blueprint of Action points, Government of India, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Draft 'Sixth Five Year, Plan, Government of India, 1978-83, Chapter XXVI.

<sup>16</sup> Sixth Five Year Plan, Government of India 1980-85.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

## II

### Literacy/ Illiteracy

Female literacy rate has improved from 7.95 per cent to 24.82 per cent between 1951 to 1981. The decadal growth rates and changes in the sex ratio among literates at the national level during this period is indicated in the table give below. The table indicates that while the decadal growth rate in female literacy is higher as compared to males, the trend shows a steep decline for both sexes:

**Table I**  
**Progress of Literacy - All India 1951-1981**

| Year | % of literate males to total male population | Decadal Growth Rate | % of females literate to total female population | Decadal Growth Rate | Sex ratio among literates |
|------|--|---------------------|--|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1951 | 24.95  | -                   | 7.95   | -                   | 299                       |
| 1961 | 34.44  | 70.88               | 12.95  | 102.03              | 354                       |
| 1971 | 39.52  | 43.58               | 18.70  | 76.58               | 440                       |
| 1981 | 46.89  | 44.11               | 24.82  | 63.75               | 496                       |

Source: Census of India, 1961-81

More than three decades of planned development, in addition to several committees and commissions recommendation, the data on education indicates widening gender gap in access to knowledge. The number of female illiterates show a faster rate of increase from 161.9 million in 1951 to 185.2 million in 1961, to 215.3 million in 1971 and 241.6 million in 1981 (figures are inclusive of 0-4 age group). During this period the number illiterate males increased from 137 million to 198 million. What is more disturbing is that this gender gap in literacy instead of narrowing in increasing at a faster rate although this was minimal during the colonial period. Till 1931 for every 1000 illiterate men there were 1058 illiterate women which jumped to 1138 in 1951, to 1250 in 1961, to 1248 in 1971 and to 1322 in 1981 (figures inclusive of 0-4 age group). Following table is prepared based on 1981 Census to indicate state wise percentage and sex ratio (females per 1000 men) of illiterate women.

The table indicates that more than 70 per cent of Indian women excluding the child age group of 0-4 years are illiterate. The table also indicates that the proportion of illiterate women is highest in Rajasthan followed by Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. Except Kerala in all the other states more than 60 per cent of the female population are illiterates.

**Table - II**  
**Female-Illiterates (excluding 0-4 age group)**

| States           | States Percentage Sex Ratio | Total | Rural | Urban |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| INDIA            | 7.52                        | 1427  | 1412  | 1523  |
| Andhra Pradesh   | 76.75                       | 1349  | -     | -     |
| Assam            | -                           | -     | -     | -     |
| Bihar            | 84.19                       | 1401  | 1396  | 1474  |
| Gujarat          | 63.05                       | 1559  | 1533  | 1670  |
| Haryana          | 74.17                       | 1433  | 1428  | 1465  |
| Himachal Pradesh | 63.95                       | 1597  | 1606  | 1374  |
| Jammu & Kashmir  | 81.61                       | 1227  | 1218  | 1276  |
| Karnataka        | 68.30                       | 1483  | 1458  | 1595  |
| Kerala           | 26.60                       | 1808  | 1784  | 1930  |
| Madhya Pradesh   | 81.96                       | 1405  | 1375  | 1663  |
| Maharashtra      | 60.43                       | 1697  | 1919  | 1617  |
| Manipur          | 66.26                       | 1615  | 1542  | 1954  |
| Meghalaya        | 64.50                       | 1086  | 1069  | 1303  |
| Nagaland         | 60.98                       | 1190  | 1213  | 930   |
| Orissa           | 75.79                       | 1589  | 1588  | 1601  |
| Punjab           | 61.66                       | 1154  | 1148  | 1181  |
| Sikkim           | 73.83                       | 1213  | 1242  | 986   |
| Tamil Nadu       | 60.62                       | 1723  | 1670  | 1981  |
| Tripura          | 63.68                       | 1439  | 1417  | 2077  |
| Uttra Pradesh    | 83.66                       | 1320  | 1324  | 1293  |
| West Bengal      | 65.59                       | 1370  | 1385  | 1271  |

Source: Census of India, 1981.

The states which have higher sex ratio among illiterates than the national-average are Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur and Tripura. Despite the fact that the urban areas in our country provide higher opportunity for education than the rural areas the gap in the male female literacy is wider in the urban areas of Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya,, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Tripura. Government of India's official country paper on Women's Decade observed:-

*"An analysis of illiteracy data is an important indicator of changes in women's access to the educational process and the reduction of the gender gap because it helps to prevent any attitude of*

*complacency and identifies a new problem of widening gender gap amongst the illiterate population.*

Recognition of this widening gap has resulted in some special efforts to increase the enrollment of women in adult education centres during the last few years. According to the Monitoring Report of the Directorate of Adult Education Centre in the first quarter of 1983 shows a marked improvement over the situation reviewed in 1980 when women constituted only 35.7 per cent of the total number enrolled in such centres. The position has improved further and by the end of December, 1984, the percentage coverage of adult women in these centres was 52.23 of the total coverage.<sup>18</sup>

Significantly, the table indicates that the states where female literacy is high the gender gap in access to literacy is also high. Kerala where female literacy is highest followed by Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra are some of such examples in contrast to the states where female literacy is very low. The sex ratio of illiterates is also relatively low.

## **Enrollment**

The enrollment figures indicate that the gulf between boys and girls continue at a high proportion. The table give below indicates that nearly 30 per cent girls of 6-11 years age group and nearly 62 per cent girls of 11-14 years age group were not enrolled till the end of 1984-84. The figures for boys, for the same year here a cent per cent enrollment in the 6-11 age group and nearly 34 per cent non-enrolled in 11-14 age group, What is more intriguing is the fact that the rate of girls enrollment is increasing at much slower rate than that of boys. It is important to note here that the Planning Commission targets by themselves provide for a big gap between boys and girls enrollment at the elementary stage.

An official document<sup>19</sup> indicates that by the end of 1984-85, the proportion of girls out of schools in the age group 6-11 years is nearly 50 per cent in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, nearly 40 per cent in Bihar, 36 per cent in Jammu & Kashmir, in the age group 11-14 years only in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Manipur, Punjab, Tamil Nadu Tripura and West Bengal more than 50 per cent girls are enrolled in schools. All other states have less than 50 per cent in the schools.

---

<sup>18</sup> Women in India,, Country paper, Government of India, Ministry of Social and. 1,@lomL-nls Welfare, 1985, Chapter XVI, pp. 43

<sup>19</sup> Annual Report 1983-84, Government of India. Ministry, of Education and Culture

Table III  
**Expansion of Elementary Education  
 (Percentage Enrollment)**

| Age Group/ Class<br>I | 1979<br>II | 1984-85 (target)<br>III | 1984-85 likely<br>achievement<br>IV |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 6-11/I-V              |            |                         |                                     |
| Boys                  | 100.2      | 108.1                   | 117.48                              |
| Girls                 | 65.9       | 81.5                    | 69.20                               |
| 11-14/ VI-VIII        |            |                         |                                     |
| Boys                  | 52.0       | 63.1                    | 66.90                               |
| Girls                 | 27.7       | 36.8                    | 38.19                               |
| 6-14/I-VIII           |            |                         |                                     |
| Boys                  | 82.3       | 91.7                    | 90.96                               |
| Girls                 | 52.2       | 65.0                    | 64.02                               |

Source: Sixth and Seventh Plan Year Plans, Planning Commission

### **Drop-Out and Wastage**

It is official admitted that drop-out rate among girls is much higher than the boys.<sup>20</sup> Economic, social and physical factors are the compelling reasons. Several studies have identified that poverty and involvement of girls in activities necessary for the survival of their families are the primary reasons. Such activities include domestic work - a large component of which is looking after younger siblings, and in rural areas engaged in fetching water, fuel and fodder for the family.

The enrollment data of the 3rd and 4th Educational Surveys (1973 and 1978) have been used to calculate group out and wastage rate among children enrolled in schools during this period. Results are presented in the table given below. The table indicates that 67.73 per cent of girls and 58.61 per cent of boys did not reach the middle schools stage and 61.77 per cent and 51.01 per cent of boys did not reach the secondary stage. At the all India level there has been a marginal reduction in drop-out/wastage rate for both boys and girls. It appears that the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have not only a high drop-out rate for girls but also present a high gender differentiation.

---

<sup>20</sup> National Committee on Women's Education 1958-59, Education Commission 1964-66, Wastage and Stagnation in Primary and Middle Schools, NCERT 1971, Towards Equality, 1975, Challenge of Education - a policy perspective, appendix 1985

Table IV

**Drop-out and Wastage at Middle and Secondary Level in India and States**

| States           | Middle Level |       | Secondary Level |       |
|------------------|--------------|-------|-----------------|-------|
|                  | Boys         | Girls | Boys            | Girls |
| INDIA            | 58.81        | 67.73 | 51.01           | 61.77 |
| Andhra Pradesh   | 53.33        | 71.47 | 56.84           | 70.95 |
| Assam            | 40.55        | 58.95 | 46.59           | 52.12 |
| Bihar            | 67.10        | 79.33 | 54.56           | 75.73 |
| Gujarat          | 56.71        | 60.37 | 51.47           | 54.96 |
| Haryana          | 34.29        | 52.82 | 55.11           | 65.09 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 32.93        | 58.33 | 45.15           | 65.09 |
| Jammu & Kashmir  | 42.81        | 49.10 | 48.27           | 51.13 |
| Karnataka        | 59.47        | 69.97 | 54.17           | 62.64 |
| Kerala           | 25.13        | 28.72 | 42.55           | 41.49 |
| Madhya Pradesh   | 65.48        | 78.50 | 62.97           | 70.41 |
| Maharashtra      | 53.62        | 64.52 | 47.31           | 58.27 |
| Meghalaya        | 72.27        | 75.58 | 51.74           | 60.32 |
| Manipur          | 72.11        | 75.81 | 42.33           | 41.55 |
| Nagaland         | 64.14        | 65.72 | 59.95           | 63.94 |
| Orissa           | 69.24        | 77.36 | 52.69           | 66.93 |
| Punjab           | 45.37        | 55.55 | 53.00           | 59.38 |
| Rajasthan        | 58.17        | 66.81 | 41.60           | 57.65 |
| Tamil Nadu       | 49.11        | 61.87 | 56.27           | 68.40 |
| Tripura          | 66.10        | 66.60 | 55.02           | 50.62 |
| Uttar Pradesh    | 64.42        | 73.80 | 47.04           | 77.53 |
| West Bengal      | 58.60        | 67.73 | 52.75           | 55.79 |

Note: Data opted from NCERT's third and fourth surveys and the Drop-out rate is worked out by CWDS.

**Higher Education**

The table given below indicates women in higher education between 1950-51 to 1983-84, the proportion of women's enrollment to total enrollment increased from 11 per cent to 29 per cent. The stage-wise enrollment data indicates that at the graduate level this proportion increased from 12 per cent to 31 per cent and at research level from 14 per cent to 26 per cent. The gender gap in enrollment is also bridging at a faster rate. The sex ratio of enrollment was 122 in 1950-51, 186 in 1960-61, 279 in 1970-71, 374 in 1980-81 and 410 in 1983-84. Significantly this gap is shrinking at a faster rate at the post-graduate level.

Table V

**Faculty-wise Enrollment Distribution of Women to Sex Ratio 1950-51 to 1983-84**

| Particulars                | 1950-51 |     | 1960-61 |     | 1970-71 |     | 1980-81 |     | 1983-84 |      |
|----------------------------|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|------|
|                            | %       | SR   |
| Arts                       | 67.85   | 196 | 70.21   | 326 | 64.32   | 460 | 56.14   | 605 | 54.43   | 723  |
| Science                    | 20.97   | 76  | 18.59   | 116 | 25.69   | 216 | 20.55   | 403 | 20.29   | 425  |
| Commerce                   | 0.43    | 5   | 0.48    | 9   | 1.93    | 38  | 11.83   | 190 | 11.82   | 181  |
| Education                  | 3.10    | 478 | 3.65    | 487 | 3.17    | 575 | 4.50    | 898 | 4.49    | 1457 |
| Engineering/<br>Technology | 0.40    | 1   | 0.23    | 8   | 0.13    | 10  | 0.66    | 39  | 0.68    | 44   |
| Medicine                   | 5.78    | 198 | 4.52    | 280 | 3.39    | 296 | 3.60    | 325 | 3.52    | 397  |
| Agriculture                | -       | 1   | 0.07    | 4   | 0.02    | 3   | 0.17    | 34  | 0.17    | 42   |
| Veterinary Science         | -       | 4   | 0.02    | 7   | -       | 7   | 0.63    | 33  | 0.03    | 34   |
| Law                        | 0.67    | 21  | 0.47    | 30  | 0.40    | 38  | 1.59    | 73  | 1.57    | 83   |

There is a distinct change in the patter of faculty-wise enrollment during this period. Thus while there have been marginal increase in share of enrollment in most of the faculties there has been a sharp drop in share of arts and humanities with a comparative rise in share of commerce.

While most of the other faculties have recorded a slight improvement there is a decline in share of enrollment in medical faculty. Thus while in 1950-51 the share in enrollment in medical faculty stood at 51.78 per cent it come down to 4.52 per cent in 1960-61 and declined further 3.39 per cent in 1970-71. In 1983-84 it showed only a marginal improvement to 3.52 per cent. It is important to note here that this decline has took taken place in spite of reservation of seats for women in medical, institutions.

Entry of women to higher education has been gaining ground since 1950-51. This is indicated by the rising share of women's enrollment in total enrollment in different faculties. Thus in the arts and humanities the share rose from 16 per cent to 42 per cent, in commerce from 0.6 per cent to 15.3 per cent, in medical from 16.3 per cent to 24.3 per cent, in engineering and technology from 0.2 per cent to 4.1 per cent, in law from 2 per cent to 7.7 per cent and in veterinary science from 0.5 per cent to 5.3 per cent.

### III

Despite constitutional guarantee for equal opportunity of education for both the sexes women's education continues to be plagued with bias. There has been persistent ambivalence between the traditional view who support women's education to equip them to become better wives and mothers and modern attitude who visualise education as an instrument for women's equality and development.

These two views opposite to each other has been influencing those who are responsible for the promotion of education in the country. While Radhakrishnan Commission finds women's education based upon 'men's needs' which does not make them 'fit for coping with the problems of daily life', it fails to counter the traditional view on women's education rather strengthens this view in its recommendation. It says:

"Women's and men's education should have many elements in common but should not in general be identical in all respects, as is usually the case today. A woman should learn something of problems that are certain to come up in all marriages and in the relations of parents and children, and how they may be met. Her education should make her familiar with problems of home management and skill in meeting them, so that she may take her place in a home with the same interest and the same sense of competence that a well trained man has in working at his ceiling".<sup>21</sup>

Persistence of this ambivalence between traditional and modern attitudes of which, the overriding influence of the traditional attitudes towards women's education, was observed by the Committee on the Status of Women in India. The Committee mentioned that for a proper examination the progress of women's education an understanding of this ambivalence is prerequisite because 'it has an impact on academic planning, allocation of resources and development of values in society for both men and women'.<sup>22</sup> The subsequent official and non-official documents have been critically highlighting this ambivalence and recommending measures to remove them.<sup>23</sup>

Despite government's continuous assurance to remove this ambivalence till today subjects have been specifically categorised as 'masculine' and 'feminine'.<sup>24</sup> Home science, needle work or fine arts thus regarded girls' subjects while mathematics and science considered difficult for them. Mathematics compulsory for boys up to secondary level-but for girls is optional in some states.<sup>25</sup> Girls-have been generally viewed as intellectually inferior unable to stand the rigours of science and mathematics ignoring both historical and contemporary evidence to the to the country. The results in teachers shortage of teacher for girls schools. Thus girls are in a disadvantageous position in acquiring the knowledge of these subjects, which affects the promotion of a scientific temper among them.

It has been widely accepted that the school curriculum not only hides women's contribution in the various but also projects them as being inferior to men. Various Committees on women's education have invariably pointed out that text books and other

---

<sup>21</sup> Report of University Education Commission. op.cit.pp. 394

<sup>22</sup> Towards Equality - op.cit.01 para 6.9, pp. 235

<sup>23</sup> Women's Studies and Social Science in Asia, Bangkok 1983, Part II, Country papers India, Ministerial Conference of Non-aligned and other Developing Countries on the role of women in Development, New Delhi, April 1985; Report of India Women NGOs Consultation Reviewing the Decade in India, Delhi, 1985

<sup>24</sup> Towards Equality, op.cit.

<sup>25</sup> Uttar Pradesh is one of the states

reading materials are generally dominated by urban, male basis.<sup>26</sup> The Committee on the Status of Women in India reported that the "schools reflect and strengthen the traditional prejudices of inequality through their curricula, the classification of subjects on the basis of sex and unwritten code of conduct enforced on their people".<sup>27</sup> In 1975 the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) brought out its draft document - ten year school curriculum. The document was full of sexist bias or stereotyping. In discussion when this was pointed out the final document deleted all reference to girls.<sup>28</sup>

In order to remove sexism from school text books the NCERT along with A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies sponsored a national seminar in 1975 on Identification of Values Commensurate with Status of Women for incorporation in schools text books. The seminar recommended that following objectives should reflect while producing the new school text books.

- i) "In the educational systems areas of home management should be projected as joint responsibility of all the members;
- ii) Dignity of labour must find reflection while taking care of the roles performed so that men and women develop respect for roles performed inside and outside home;
- iii) Dependence of girls and women as a traditional value must be rejected from which it follows that emphasis has to be laid on equal commitment for work at home and outside, by both the sexes;
- iv) Equality of opportunity in all walks of life must lead to the realization of the responsibility to equal participation in the development of the nation;
- v) Women should be able to attain their fulfillment by getting conscious of their rights and abilities;
- vi) Decision making process at all levels from family to society being shared by both the sexes must be emphasized;
- vii) Systematic understandings and campaigns against all practices degrading sexes in matrimony e.g. dowry and bride price must be organized;
- viii) The concept of consumerism leading to women becoming prosperity symbols must be rejected and need based consumption must be emphasized.
- ix) Women should not be projected as sex symbols and dignity of persons is to be promoted so that women become self-reliant, self-propelled and self-directed instead of being continuously protected".<sup>29</sup>

As a follow-up of this seminar the NCERT organised a series of workshops and discussion groups wherein curriculum framers, subject-experts, teacher educator., teachers, educational administrators and text book writers were involved for the preparation of teachers' handbooks.

---

<sup>26</sup> National Committee on Women's Education, Committee on Differentiation of Curricula, etc.

<sup>27</sup> Towards Equality - op.cit, para 6.109, pp. 282

<sup>28</sup> Vina Mazumdar - "Education for Equality", New Quest, 3 September 1977

<sup>29</sup> Status of Women Through Curriculum - NCERT, 1985 Appendix I, pp. 95

These handbooks were meant for curriculum framers text book writers and teacher educators in portraying the image of women in its right perspective. The subjects included in these handbooks are languages, social sciences, mathematics, science. Impact of these efforts are yet to be assessed.

A gradual shift in attitude towards women's issues started in the post '75 period. This beginning of concern towards women's issues could become possible because of the momentum generated by the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) which got strengthened by the Declaration of Women's Decade by the UN.

The establishment of women's unit in the Indian Council of Social Science and Research (ICSSR) in the year 1976 has direct bearing of the CSWI's report and UN Declaration for Women's Decade. The unit published a summary of the CSWI's report and series of selected papers with a view to reach to a wider reading public. The programme of women's studies undertaken by the unit in the subsequent years has the objectives (a) to improve policies for women's socioeconomic development; (b) to increase public consciousness and review the debate on the women's question and (c) "to develop new perspectives in the social sciences through examining basic assumptions, methodological approaches and concepts, e.g.. the family household, women's work, productivity, economic activity etc. to remedy the neglect and under assessment of 30 women's contribution to the society".<sup>30</sup>

The significance to acquire more awareness on women's issues guided the SNDT Women's University at Bombay to establish a research unit on women's studies in 1974. This pattern was followed by several higher educational institutions including universities in the subsequent years. By 1981, 41 universities, 8 advanced centers of research and 9 institutions of national importance had undertaken research on women during 1975 and 1980. Such studies included 181 projects and 57 doctoral research. 3 out of 7 central universities and at least 10 of the state universities have initiated some activities in research and teaching on women since 1980. In 1983, the University Grants Commission (UGC) issued a guideline suggesting Vice Chancellors of all universities to consider ways integrating women's issues and concerns into the teaching and research programmes of different discipline.

In spite of all these efforts during the Women's Decade, the Report of the Women NGO (National) Consultation reviewing the achievements of Women's decade in India categorically stated the existence of patriarchal influence in the education system:

"Cultural and religious traditions that resist women's and children's rights also affect the educational process manifesting themselves in sex stereotyping and derogatory attitudes to women. New values that need to be promoted for the 'peaceful coexistence of all people and reduction of social tensions and inequalities of all kinds such as the value of secularism equal rights of participation of all citizens and of social and economic justice at national and international levels, usually run counter to some of these deeply entrenched traditional, cultural identities. Similarly the new knowledge that needs to be promoted among all citizens for

---

<sup>30</sup> ICSSR - Programme of Women's Studies; A Policy Statement

'scientific temper', population, health, nutrition and other issues of survival also got obstructed by the perpetuation of traditional sexist biases and attitudes to children. The common theme that unites the need for such, values and knowledge are the rights of all deprived groups, particularly women and children, who form the majority among the powerless in all societies. Education can be a powerful tool to remove these obstructive attitudes and to develop more positive, humanist outlook among all."<sup>31</sup>

The foregoing paragraphs show that there has been four distinct issues affecting the progress of women's education:-(a) illiteracy, (b) non-enrolment, (c) wastage and drop-out, (d) ideological biases in the content and curricula. Significantly these issues have been identified by most of the official and non-official documents which- dealt -with the question of women's education after the publication of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India in 1975. Widely debated, discussed and criticised the document: Challenge of Education - a policy perspective prepared by the Government in 1985 to generate public response commented that "despite considerable acceleration in recent years because of deliberate measures to facilitate their (girls) participation they are still way behind the boys."<sup>32</sup>

The National Policy on Education 1986 is quite remarkable in the sense that for the first time in the history of educational development in the country (perhaps in the world) a separate section on "Education for Equality" has been incorporated whose Preamble reads "the new policy will lay special emphasis on the removal of disparities and to equalise educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far."<sup>33</sup>

The sub-section entitled 'Education for Women's Equality' envisages three distinct functions of the education system: (i) a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women; (ii) development of new values through redesigned curricula and text books and (iii) promotion of women's studies as part of various courses and to encourage educational institutions to take up active programmes to further women's development.

Mention should be made here that the root for such a significant policy decision goes back to the mid- seventies when campaign to perceive education's role as a vehicle for women's equality and development started as a follow-up of the Report of the Committee on the Status of women in India. Initially this campaign was started by a handful of people from academics the bureaucracy who were sensitive enough to women's issues and from women's activists group.

On the overriding issues of women's education the policy statement is a repetition of what has been said by most of the Committees on education time and again. The statement says:

"The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in elementary education will receive overriding priority, through provision of special support

---

<sup>31</sup> Report of Women NGC' (National I Consultation, New Delhi, April 1985.

<sup>32</sup> Challenge Education - A Policy Perspectives, Government of India, 1985

<sup>33</sup> National Policy on Education, 1986, Part IV, para 4.1, pp. 6

services, setting of time targets, and effective monitoring. Major emphasis will be laid on women's participation in vocational, technical and professional education at different levels. The policy of non-discrimination will be pursued vigorously to eliminate sex stereo-typing in vocational and professional courses and to promote women's participation in non- traditional occupations, as well as in existing and emergent technologies."<sup>34</sup>

Another landmark of the new education policy is the document 'Programme of Action'<sup>35</sup> prepared by the Government to specify measures the government proposes to undertake in order to implement the policy directives. The document is prepared on the basis of recommendations made by twenty three Task Forces on various subjects appointed by the Government. These Task Force were comprised of experts on education representatives of Central state and Union Territory governments.

The Programme of Action commits to eradicate illiteracy a young women belonging to the 15-35 age group by 1995, through mass scale adult education programme. For increasing enrolment and retention of girls in schools specially in rural areas where incidence of non-enrolment and drop-out is quite high, support services like day care centres will be established in all such areas by 1995. Early childhood education centres will also be promoted. Those girls who are unable to attend whole day school will be educated through non-formal education centres. As an incentive to parents to educate girls, an overriding priority is to be given to skill development linked to employment opportunities in the local areas. An emphasis has been added to the promotion of vocational skills among girls and women along with education. This has been visualised in order to equip girls and women for employment to take active part in the process of national development.

The emphasis on promoting skill along with education programmes among women will obviously provide more opportunities for more effective participation of women in national development. However the measures suggested to improve women's education seems neither feasible nor practical in view of the quantum of backlog discussed earlier. While great stress has been given on adult education programmes and non-formal education schemes, its capability to fulfill these seems quite doubtful.

Most of the adult education centres in rural areas are no functional because either they are not property equipped nor the instructors have not taken up their work seriously. Situation in women's adult education centers is more alarming. Firstly, women instructors are not easily available, secondly, if they are appointed situations are not at all conducive to regular an serious work. This has been observed and corroborated by the district level authorities. Some studies have also indicated that though some women became literate through adult education methods they lapsed to illiteracy due to lack of follow-up.<sup>36</sup> Thus the expectation of eradicating

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, para 4.3, pp. 6

<sup>35</sup> Programme of Action, National Policy on Education, 1986, Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development

<sup>36</sup> Dr. Madhuri R. Shah in her study on Bombay Slums has reported this phenomena

illiteracy, ensuring enrolment, retention, skill formation etc. through adult education centers at this juncture seems distant possibility.