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Gender Equity in Education: A Review of Trends and Factors

Madhumita Bandyopadhyay
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List of Acronyms

AIES	All India Educational Survey
BMI	Body Mass Index
DISE	District Information System for Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HDI	Human Development Index
KGBVS	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme
LJ	Lok Jumbish
MS	Mahila Samakhya – Education for Women's Equality project
NCAER	National Council of Applied Economic Research
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non Governmental Organisations
NPE	National Policy on Education
NPEGEL	National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level
NSS	National Sample Survey
PMIS	Project Monitoring Information System
POA	Programme of Action
PROBE	Public Report on Basic Education in India
SC	Scheduled Castes
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TAS	Terminal Assessment Survey
WRITE	Women's Residential Institute for Training and Education

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This paper aims to review the present situation of the participation of children in elementary education in India, with a special focus on gender equity. We acknowledge the CREATE project for providing us an opportunity to contribute this paper to the *Pathways to Access* series. We express our sincere thanks to Professor Angela Little for her critical comments on the draft of this paper. We also acknowledge Professor Keith Lewin and Professor R. Govinda for guidance, encouragement and valuable suggestions while writing this paper.

Preface

Gender disparity has been a major issue in India's pursuit for achieving the goal of universal elementary education. In order to overcome the problems faced by girls, several measures have been initiated across the country. What impact have these made as reflected in the available statistics? This is one of the questions that the review examines. The paper also presents a comprehensive review of research studies on participation of girls in schooling. It highlights that the participation of the girl-child is affected significantly due to social attitudes towards their education and by other forms of gender and social discrimination in Indian society.

Madhumita Bandyopadhyay and Ramya Subrahmanian through their inter-linked analysis of gender and social inequality present new perspectives in understanding the continued educational deprivation that the girl-child in India faces. They also point to several successful experiences within the country, which hold lessons to take forward the agenda of making education more inclusive and gender sensitive.

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Summary

This review paper draws on recent data to map the access and participation rates of girls relative to boys. The paper makes the following broad points:

a) While female enrolment has increased rapidly since the 1990s, there is still a substantial gap in upper primary and secondary schooling. Increased female enrolment is, however, compromised by persistently high rates of drop-out and poor attendance of girls relative to boys. Girls also constitute a large proportion of out-of-school children.

b) Gender inequalities interlock with other forms of social inequality, notably caste, ethnicity and religion, with girls from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Muslim minorities particularly, constituting the population of out-of-school and drop-out children.

c) There are also considerable inter-state variations in gender parity. While the greatest surges in female enrolment have been achieved in the most educationally disadvantaged states such as Bihar and Rajasthan, these states still have a long way to go to catch up with the better performing states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh.

d) The rapid increase in girls' schooling can, arguably, be attributed to the policy focus on alternative schools and transitional schooling forms such as bridge schools and residential camps, which are meant to be temporary measures aimed at integrating out-of-school girls into formal schools. Little is known about the impact of participation in these schools, not just on girls' learning and empowerment, but also on the end result. It is unclear whether these girls go on to complete formal schooling.

e) Some micro studies suggest that girls are over-represented in the public schools and learning centres provided by government, demonstrating continuing 'son' preference whereby boys are educated in schools managed by non-state providers which are of (perceived) better quality, and girls sent to public schools of (perceived) relatively poor quality. However, these micro studies are not conclusive, and in the absence of large data sets on the profile of students in the non-state sector (notably private schools), it is hard to draw firm conclusions, particularly as the non-state sector is also diversifying rapidly to include different kinds of fee structures. This dimension would require further research and investigation.

f) These trends suggest that though much has been done in policy terms to increase female access to schooling, notably through improving access to primary schooling by rapid expansion of schooling infrastructure, there are still major policy challenges to be met in terms of improving the quality of schools and ensuring better opportunities for girls at higher levels of education, notably upper primary and secondary school. Dealing with demand-side constraints relating to the schooling of adolescent girls, which has particular implications for participation in upper primary and secondary schooling, is particularly critical. The gender-sensitivity of the infrastructure of schooling – notably provision of toilets, water and better security – is a particular dimension that requires attention.

> Improvements required in the quality of schooling, notably the content and transaction of learning materials, implies a stronger focus on mainstreaming gender in curriculum development and teacher-training aspects of policy making in India that remain fairly opaque (the former) and ineffective (the latter).

Finally, the above factors point to a continuing failure of Indian educational interventions to take serious stock of gender inequality in education. While DPEP was successful in merging supply and demand side interventions, leading to a surge in female enrolment, the lack of attention to gender-sensitive institutional reforms and quality education have resulted in difficulties in sustaining these high levels of demand for female education. Recognising that gender inequality in education cannot be delinked from wider issues of women's status and (in)ability to assert their needs and rights is a critical step that has been made in the National Policy on Education (1986). However, sustaining this viewpoint at all levels of administration, not just amongst senior bureaucrats, is essential for change to trickle across and down to the school level.

Gender Equity in Education: A Review of Trends and Factors

1. Introduction

This paper provides an account of gender equity in schooling in India, with a particular emphasis on educational access. It aims to highlight educational access issues affecting both girls and boys in India and the types of initiatives needed to secure meaningful and sustainable access for all. The paper has been commissioned by the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) and draws on CREATE's Zones of Exclusion model (see Appendix One)[1]. Specifically, this paper refers to the gendered aspects of access in six zones of exclusion in Indian context (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2007): children who have never been to school and are termed as 'never enrolled' (Zone 1); children who enter primary schooling (grades I through V), but drop out before completing primary (Zone 2); children who enter primary schooling but are 'at risk' of dropping out (Zone 3); children who complete primary but fail to make the transition to upper primary (grades VI through VIII) (Zone 4); children who enter upper primary schooling but who drop out before completing the cycle (Zone 5); and children who complete elementary schooling (in the Indian context, 'elementary' refers to primary and upper primary levels, or from grade I through grade VIII) but do not enter secondary schooling. Developed as a review of existing literature and data, the paper provides both qualitative and quantitative accounts of gendered access to schooling.

In the first section, the paper provides background narrative to the gendered contexts of education in India. There then follows quantitative information on educational access according to gender. Both data and research literature are analysed to highlight the interlocking nature of educational inclusions and exclusions, viewing gendered access alongside issues such as education of children belonging to scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and Muslims, disability, poverty and child labour. Supply-side issues are also discussed in terms of educational provision and gendered schooling practices. Initiatives designed to address gendered inequalities are then highlighted and critiqued. Finally, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made for future research.

[1] See www.create-rpc.org.

2. Background to Gender in Education in India

India accounts for 30% of the world's total illiterate population and around 70% of these illiterates are women. As per 2001 Census data, women constitute 48% of the total population in India, but around 46% of women are still found to be illiterate. Problems of gender disparity and discrimination begin with access to schooling. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) at the primary and upper primary levels was 0.9 and 0.8 in 2003 respectively (GoI, 2004). According to DISE (2006), this remained more or less same in 2005-06 (for primary GPI was 0.92 and for upper primary 0.84). Once girls are able to get enrolled in school, they are rather more likely than boys to continue their education with more success (UNESCO, 2004). Access and retention problems deepen at higher levels of education with the GPI at lower secondary and upper secondary levels dropping to 0.73 and 0.67 respectively (UNESCO, 2004).

Female education has long been acknowledged to have strong correlations with other dimensions of human and social development. As Mehrotra (2006) notes, low levels of education significantly affect the health and nutritional status of women. For instance, in the case of India, he notes that chances of suffering from the diseases caused by malnutrition decrease steadily with increased levels of education. Height and Body Mass Index (BMI) vary with level of education and illiterate women are reportedly at more risk of having lower height and BMI (leading to higher deficiency of iron and other nutrients). Similarly, he noted that while 56% of illiterate women suffer from anaemia, the percentage declines to 40% in the case of the women who have completed at least high school (Mehrotra, 2006: 914).

Despite strong economic and social evidence of the high returns to female education, most communities continue to under-invest in female education relative to male education. Even as the thresholds of schooling completion increase, with significantly narrowing gender gaps in primary education in particular, discrimination against girls in secondary and higher education remains an issue. Economic and social privilege also affect gendered patterns of access, with girls in secondary and higher education predominantly drawn from higher income and social groups, endowed with higher social status.

Reasons for parental under-investment in female education are diverse and well-known (see Subrahmanian, 2005). The deeply embedded undervaluation of female labour, identified primarily with the reproductive or household sphere, underlies the belief in many communities that educating females bring low returns, as skills required in the reproductive sphere require domestic socialization and not many years of schooling. The gender division of labour continues to reward women less in the workplace (Kingdon, 1998b). This has resulted in relatively lower female education and work participation reflecting the ideological bias against considering women as household bread-winners. Low valuation of female labour in the market place and association of female labour with fulfilling domestic responsibilities including child rearing has led to a deep-seated cultural association of women with the institutions of marriage and family. Jha and Jhingran's (2002) detailed study of schooling in communities across 10 districts of India

shows the continued belief in the importance of marriage for girls at an early age, and of maintaining asymmetries between men and women in educational attainment as a marker of relatively greater male social status.

While gender inequalities intensify with poverty, caste inequalities and geographical location (particularly in underdeveloped rural areas), particular gender-differentiated ideologies cut across all social groups, explaining why in all social groups, girls lag behind boys in access to and participation in education. These include specific views on the appropriate roles to be played by women in family and society, and the underlying controls placed on female mobility and chastity. These gender-specific ideologies are responsible for the continued wide gaps in female secondary schooling enrolment. Further, responsibilities for securing domestic water and fuel place tremendous time burdens on women, often shared with younger girls in the family who could otherwise be in school or at rest or play. Investments in water supply, sustainable energy and renewable sources of fuel all can have significant impact on female education.

Sexual harassment and violence also continue to be major constraining factors preventing parents from freely sending their girls to school. Public spaces in India continue to be relatively hostile to the presence of women, and rarely function in a way to make women feel secure and confident. Transporting girls to school and back safely, especially where secondary schools and universities are far away from their homes, is a critical policy measure that has received scant attention. Similarly, while initiatives to teach girls self-defence or cycling have been widely hailed as critical components of gender-sensitive education, they have not really been taken up and promoted widely through the education system.

Ideologies that shape female and male identities in Indian society are mutually reinforcing across institutions, such as the family, workplace, and community (Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 1999) leading to vicious cycles of under-investment in females. Female education has suffered as a result of this, though it is well-known that breaking the cycle of multiple deprivations can be significantly furthered through ensuring quality education for girls and boys. Education has the potential to contribute to alternative socialization, challenging conventional gender ideologies, levelling the playing field between males and females in relation to skills, credentials and qualification, and allowing women the use of knowledge to empower themselves in diverse ways. For example, a study in Calcutta has shown the positive impact that education has on the ability of women to resist and resolve situations of domestic violence (Sen, 1999).

However, gender ideologies are open to change, and the recent structural shifts in Indian society and economy in an era of economic liberalization and globalization have created new aspirations and opportunities, which are likely, in turn, to have had an impact on the demand for female education. Evidence of these changing dynamics, it can be argued, is found in the ever increasing demand for female elementary education. The changing demand for girls' education, and particularly for primary schooling, has been noted even in highly conservative societies such as feudal Rajasthan (Ramachandran, 1998). Given that education in India is strongly associated with securing occupational mobility

(Sudarshan, 2000), these changing dynamics are important to study in relation to their links to the kind of demand for different types of schooling being fuelled. Sudarshan (2000) argues that the two driving motivations for education in India are linked to aspirations for salaried occupations and to the marriage market, where wide gaps between the educational qualifications of males and females are considered to constitute a risk to the stability of the marriage. Structural changes in both these types of market, for employment and marriage, are likely to have attendant changes in the demand and length of female schooling (Subrahmanian, 2003a).

Empowering adult women is a critical aspect of the kinds of structural change required. Ramachandran (2003b) reports on the factors that enable or constrain female schooling through a 'snakes and ladders' analysis, where a significant set of factors pertains to the home environment, and particularly the relationship between the parents, the mother's commitment to and interest in her child's (daughter's) schooling, and the mother's long hours of work. Empowering adult women, as the Mahila Samakhya– Education for Women's Equality project's experience has shown (see section 7.2), has a powerful effect on aspirations and opportunities for daughters, as mothers are able to reflect and identify priorities, collectively with other women tackle the constraints imposed on females in their communities, and work towards solutions to ensure that their children are not subject to the same constraints that they faced themselves. Equally, addressing issues of maternal and reproductive health provides important linkages to female education. Recent evidence shows that where quantity of children declines, quality of their lives is likely to increase, with fertility decline taking place even among illiterate women with a positive impact on daughters' schooling (Mari Bhat, 2002)[2].

Ramachandran's (2003b) 'snakes and ladders' analysis equally points to the supply side factors that push girls out of school. The lack of female teachers, concerns about safety, and social norms that promote early marriage for girls are powerful contributory factors. The failure of the supply side in providing accessible quality schooling is attributed to the gap between parental desire for some female schooling and action in terms of sending girls to school (Ramachandran, 1998). Supply side actions relate not only to the provision of education, they point also to the importance of concerted public action to promote equity in food distribution within the home, prevention of early marriage, improved water and sanitation, encouragement of well-remunerated work opportunities for women outside the home, crèches and other forms of support for working mothers and attention to the safety of public spaces.

Policy documents like the report of the Kothari Commission (GoI, 1964-66) and the National Policy on Education 1986 (GoI, 1986) and its POA in 1992 (GoI, 1992a) have put enormous emphasis on promotion of gender equity in education by reducing the gender gap in access, retention and transition from one stage to other. However, despite such policy recognition of the importance of female education, dedicated programmes within Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and efforts at 'gender mainstreaming' within the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), data shows a continuing gender gap in

[2]This is contrary to the earlier evidence that educated women were more likely to control their fertility than uneducated women. See Mari Bhat (2002).

relation to attendance and drop-out. As this review paper goes on to argue, the increased enrolment of girls is widely attributed to the increasing number of 'informal' or 'non-formal' education programmes, and associated with a public sector that is considered widely to have failed in terms of delivery of quality education. If the increasing enrolment of girls is taking place in an environment of fragmented provision and poor quality public delivery, then the question remains of the value and success of current policy and programmatic interventions in relation to closing the gender gap in a sustainable way.

Unfortunately, this question cannot be easily answered because of the dearth of evaluation studies of the impact of post-1990s education programmes on closing gender gaps. As Ramachandran (2004a: 36) notes:

> A large volume of data has been generated for the DPEP districts and the programme. However, there is hardly any critical reflection on issues that determine class transitions or primary school completion rates. The complex social and gender equity issues that frame primary education are hardly addressed, especially those relating to household decision-making on education, nor is data that is generated concomitantly disaggregated by gender as well as social groupings.

With the exception of the Mahila Samakhya project (see section 7.2), which has a clearly articulated and carefully defined approach to addressing gender inequality through women's empowerment, assessments of the government programme and institutional performance on gender have been measured narrowly, primarily through quantitative assessments of change. Changes in data are used to hypothesise about the changing patterns of gendered access to education. However, few qualitative studies have been carried out to test hypotheses about what drives change in female education, and what lies behind the changing nature of demand for female schooling. Hence, as below, this review of literature draws upon quantitative data in the main to present an overview of issues in female education in India.

3. Quantitative Evidence of Changing Patterns of Gender Parity and Equality in Education

3.1 Trends in Literacy

In recent years, India has reportedly shown considerable improvement at each level of education for boys as well as for girls. Drawing on data from the national Census, many studies and reports have indicated that there has been significant improvement in literacy levels, and particularly in the reduction of female illiteracy, during the decade 1991-2001. The gender gap in literacy has also narrowed during that time, although there was still a gap of 22 percentage point between the genders according to the 2001 Census, in comparison to a 25 percentage point gap ten years earlier. The last decade has experienced the highest decadal increase in literacy (12.6 percentage points) since Independence, with an increase in this period from 2.2% to 64.8%. For the first time, the country has also experienced faster growth in female literacy, which increased by around 15 percentage points (from 39-54%) as compared to that of males (64-75%). There has been a spectacular increase in the percentage share of the literate population over the fifty years since Independence (Census of India, 2001). While in 1951 only 25% of males and 8% of females were literate (GOI, 1997b), in 2001 their percentage shares had moved to 76% and 54% respectively. Along with this huge increase in the literate population, the absolute number of illiterates also declined substantially during 1991-2001 as compared to the earlier decade of 1981-1991. The literacy rate improved by 8.6 percentage points from 1981-1991, while the increase was 12.6 percentage points during the next decade.

Table 1 Trends in Literacy Rates in India (Percentages)

Year	Source of Data	Male			Females		
		Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
1981	Census	49.6	76.7	56.4	21.7	56.3	29.7
1987-8	NSS (43rd)	48.4	72.3	-	25.9	55.9	-
1991	Census	57.8	81.1	64.1	30.6	64.1	39.3
1992-3	NFHS- I	62.9	84.1	68.8	34.5	67.5	43.3
1993-4	NSS (50th)	63.7	85.3	74.5	36.6	68.7	52.7
1998-99	NFHS-II	69.5	87.5	74.5	43.7	72.2	51.4
2001	Census (all ages)	71.2	75.6	86.4	46.6	73.0	54.0
2001	Census (7+ & above)	-	-	75.9	-	-	54.2
2004-5	NSS (61st)	64	81	-	45	69	-
2004-5	NSS (61st) (7+above)	73	89	77	50.4	75.9	57

Sources: Census of India (1981); Census of India (1991); Census of India (2001); GoI (1992b); GoI (1997a); GoI (2006b); IIPS (1995); IIPS (2000).

Table 1 indicates that, in spite of the considerable improvement in general literacy rates, a big gap persists between male and female literacy rates. Although the data suggests that there has been a significant increase in male as well as female literacy levels, at present only three quarters of the male population is functionally literate, while about half of the female population remains illiterate. Between the National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) I and II, i.e. 1993 and 1998, there was a significant increase in male as well as

female literacy levels. In NFHS I, 57% of females and 31% of males aged six and above were illiterate, while in NFHS II this had decreased to 49% of females and 26% of males. According to the 61st National Sample Survey (NSS) 2004-5, 81% of urban men and 69% of urban women were found to be literate, which suggests substantial gender gaps in literacy rates according to location. Literacy levels are higher for younger population groups than older population groups. For example, while only 21% of women over the age of 50 were literate, nearly 75% of girls 6-14 years were literate at the time of 61st survey conducted by NSSO (GoI, 2006b). This suggests two important points. First, improvements in literacy levels can be attributed to the expansion of primary education during the 1990s; and secondly, increasing female literacy rates, have helped fuel demand for the primary education of all children and have had a particular influence on girls' education.

3.2 Trends in Elementary Schooling

Along with improvements in literacy, India has witnessed a significant increase in primary as well as upper primary enrolments. The recent data (GOI, 2007a) suggests that there has been a considerable increase in the participation of girls in school because of an increase in enrolments and decline in drop-out rates over the years. The numerical strength of girls as well as boys has increased rapidly during the last few decades and in particular since 1990. Table 2 indicates that around 97.4 million children were enrolled in primary schools in 1990-9191, with numbers increasing to 130.8 million in 2004-2005. In terms of upper primary, numbers have increased from 34 million to 51.2 million during same period. The gap between the number of boys and girls has also reduced during this period. In terms of absolute numbers, however, girls' enrolment has been consistently lower than that of boys over the same period, both at primary and upper primary levels.

Table 2 Enrolment 1990-91 to 2004-05 (in millions)

Year	Primary (Grade 1-V)			Upper Primary (Grade VI-VIII)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1990-91	57.0	40.4	97.4	21.5	12.5	34.0
1995-96	60.9	46.2	107.1	22.7	14.8	37.5
1998-99	62.7	49.0	111.7	23.9	16.5	40.4
2002-03*	65.1	57.3	122.4	26.3	20.6	46.9
2003-04	68.4	59.9	128.3	27.3	21.5	48.7
2004-05	69.7	61.1	130.8	28.5	22.7	51.2

Sources: GoI (2007a); * denotes data taken from NCERT (2005)

According to Census of India (1951 and 2001) girls' share was only 28% of total enrolment at the primary stage in 1951, but rose to nearly 44% in 2001. During the same period, of total enrolled children, the share of girls in upper primary schools rose from 16% to 41%. The NSS and NFHS data indicates similar trends, with girls' enrolment at the primary and upper primary levels increasing at a faster rate than that of boys. This trend still continues (see Table 4). The 7th AIES data (NCERT, 2005) show an increase of 26.2 percentage points in total enrolment in primary schools and of 37.5 percentage points in upper primary schools during 1993-2002. It is much higher in case of girls, particularly in rural areas. During the same period of 1993-2002, the enrolment of girls in

all areas grew by almost 37% in grades I-V and by 52.5% in grades VI-VIII[3]. In rural areas, their enrolment increased by 42.4% in primary schools and 66.2% in upper primary schools over the same period of time.

The Seventh AIES (NCERT, 2005) also revealed that girls accounted for 47% of total enrolment in rural primary schools, and nearly 43% in rural upper primary schools. Between 1993 and 2002, the girls' share in total enrolment for grades I-V increased from 43.2% to 46.8%, while it increased from nearly 42% to around 47% in rural areas. Similarly, at the upper primary level (grades VI-VIII), all girls' share in total enrolment increased to around 44% from less than 40%, while for rural girls the percentage of enrolment increased to 43% from 36% during the same period of time (1993-2003).

According to the data given in Selected Educational Statistics, 2004-05 (GOI, 2007a) the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at the primary and upper primary levels has shown a fluctuating trend (see Table 3).

Table 3 GER from 1990-91 to 2004-05 for Primary and Upper Primary Level

Year	Primary (1-V)			Upper Primary (VI-VIII)			Elementary I-VIII		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1990-91	114.0	85.5	100.1	76.6	47.0	62.1	100.0	70.8	86.0
1993-94	90.0	73.1	81.9	62.1	45.4	54.2	80.2	63.7	72.3
1995-96	97.1	79.4	88.6	67.8	49.8	59.3	86.9	69.4	78.5
1998-99	100.9	82.9	92.1	65.3	49.1	57.6	87.6	70.6	79.4
1999-00	104.1	85.2	94.9	67.2	49.7	58.8	90.1	72.0	81.3
2000-01*	104.9	85.9	95.7	66.7	49.9	58.6	90.3	72.4	81.6
2003-04*	100.6	95.6	98.2	66.8	57.6	62.4	87.9	81.4	84.8
2004-05*	110.7	104.7	107.8	74.3	65.1	69.9	96.9	89.9	93.5

Source: GoI (2007a); *denotes provisional data

Table 4 Average Annual Growth Rate (%) of Enrolment at Primary (I-V), Upper Primary (VI-VIII) and Elementary (I-VIII) Levels

Period	Primary Level			Upper Primary Level			Elementary Level		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1990-91 to 2000-01	1.2	2.1	1.6	1.6	3.4	2.3	1.3	2.4	1.8
1997-98 to 2001-02	1.0	1.4	1.8	2.4	4.3	3.2	1.4	2.2	1.6
2000-01 to 2002-03	0.7	7.2	3.6	2.0	8.5	4.7	1.1	7.5	3.9

Source: Govinda and Biswal (2006: 14)

[3] It is well known that the enrolment of girls is increasing more steadily with higher growth rates than that of boys, particularly during the period of 1990-91 to 1998-99. The growth rates for girls at the primary stage (grades I-V) were twice as high as that for boys and more than double at the middle stage (grades VI-VIII). In absolute terms the enrolment of girls increased by over seven million as compared to boys, whose numbers have increased by four million at the primary stage (Nayar, 2000).

Table 4 (above) shows enrolment growth for boys and girls since 1991 at the primary, upper primary and elementary levels. It indicates higher growth rates in girls' enrolment and growth rates in girls' enrolment higher at the upper primary level, than the primary level.

3.3 Inter-state Disparities

The school enrolment of girls takes a varied form across the states. In many states there has been a significant improvement in girls' enrolments during six years between NFHS I and NFHS II (see Table 5). In particular, significant increases in girls' enrolment took place in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. These states had lower initial enrolments in 1992-93 and still require significant increases in enrolment to reach UPE. Some states had higher levels of enrolment initially, but still increased enrolment levels between 1992-9. These included Haryana, Maharashtra, Punjab, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. A World Bank report (World Bank, 2003) stated that in India:

> … gender, regional, community and income disparities are still serious issues in elementary education participation and attainments. However, all these disparities are deepened by the state level differences since the states which are at the lower end of the educational attainments are the ones where the disparities were also a serious problem (World Bank, 2003: 1).

Table 5 Improvement in School Enrolment of Girls Aged 6-14 Years in Selected States

	Enrolment Rates		
State	**1992-93 (NFHS –1)**	**1998-99 (NFHS-11)**	**Point Increase in Enrolment Rate 1992-93 and 1998-99**
Andhra Pradesh	54.8	70.5	15.7
Assam	66.0	75.0	9.0
Bihar	38.3	54.1	15.8
Gujarat	68.4	72.8	4.4
Haryana	74.7	85.5	10.8
Karnataka	64.4	77.6	13.2
Kerala	94.8	97.4	2.6
Madhya Pradesh	54.8	70.8	16.0
Maharashtra	76.6	86.9	10.3
Orissa	62.0	75.1	13.1
Punjab	77.8	90.0	12.2
Rajasthan	40.6	63.2	22.6
Tamil Nadu	78.7	88.5	9.8
Uttar Pradesh	48.2	69.4	21.2
West Bengal	62.9	76.7	13.8

Source: IIPS (1995) and IIPS (2000), also in Reddy (2004a)

Table 6 State-wise Current Attendance Rates (%) in Educational Institutions per 1000 Children in the 5-14 Age Group, 2004-2005

State	Rural Area			Urban Area			All Areas		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Andhra Pradesh	90.2	82.4	86.5	91.1	91.1	91.1	90.5	84.6	87.6
Arunachal Pradesh	72.0	66.7	69.5	88.6	91.4	89.8	74.2	69.6	72.1
Assam	87.5	86.8	87.1	90.0	84.3	87.0	87.7	86.5	87.1
Bihar	69.1	57.4	63.9	80.5	76.4	78.5	70.0	59.3	65.2
Chhattisgarh	85.4	75.0	80.1	89.0	86.7	87.9	85.8	76.4	81.0
Delhi	97.0	90.8	94.2	88.5	91.3	89.8	89.5	91.3	90.3
Goa	93.7	96.4	95.0	93.7	93.8	93.8	93.7	95.4	94.6
Gujarat	87.0	77.9	82.8	92.4	91.0	91.8	88.7	81.8	85.6
Haryana	90.5	81.2	86.1	92.3	87.8	90.5	91.0	82.7	87.2
Himachal Pradesh	96.1	93.6	94.9	98.0	93.6	95.9	96.2	93.6	95.0
Jammu & Kashmir	90.9	82.7	86.9	97.8	86.0	92.0	92.6	83.5	88.1
Jharkhand	78.1	69.2	74.1	90.8	92.8	91.8	79.9	72.8	76.7
Karnataka	87.6	84.0	85.9	95.0	93.1	94.1	89.8	86.6	88.3
Kerala	96.2	98.3	97.2	98.7	99.3	99.0	96.8	98.5	97.6
Madhya Pradesh	80.3	69.9	75.5	90.8	87.4	89.2	82.5	73.6	78.4
Maharashtra	87.2	87.4	87.3	93.1	91.5	92.3	89.3	88.9	89.1
Manipur	92.2	91.1	91.7	97.8	96.3	97.1	93.7	92.5	93.2
Meghalaya	83.4	89.2	86.1	97.1	88.7	92.8	85.0	89.1	86.9
Mizoram	92.4	93.2	92.8	99.0	98.7	98.9	95.2	95.5	95.3
Nagaland	94.8	92.4	93.6	92.9	92.4	92.7	94.1	92.4	93.3
Orissa	82.7	75.3	79.1	88.2	87.5	89.7	83.7	76.8	80.2
Punjab	89.6	88.3	89.0	90.0	87.8	89.0	89.7	88.2	89.0
Rajasthan	85.3	68.1	77.1	82.4	80.3	81.3	84.7	71.0	78.0
Sikkim	92.9	96.6	94.8	92.3	82.5	87.9	92.9	95.4	94.1
Tamil Nadu	97.6	93.9	95.8	97.5	95.8	96.7	97.5	94.6	96.1
Tripura	85.6	91.0	88.2	86.8	91.1	89.0	85.7	91.0	88.2
Uttarakhand	88.9	85.0	86.9	91.4	88.2	90.0	89.5	85.6	87.6
Uttar Pradesh	80.6	73.0	77.1	78.9	80.3	79.6	80.3	74.3	77.5
West Bengal	83.1	81.4	82.2	84.8	87.1	86.0	83.4	82.4	82.9
A & N Islands	96.4	99.0	97.6	98.4	95.5	96.9	97.2	97.6	97.4
Chandigarh	84.1	91.7	87.0	95.9	93.8	95.0	94.2	93.5	93.9
D & N Haveli	93.7	72.2	83.6	96.6	86.3	91.1	93.9	73.3	84.2
Daman & Diu	99.2	99.8	99.6	94.1	95.6	95.0	97.5	98.4	98.0
Lakshadweep	90.2	89.2	89.7	99.1	96.0	97.7	94.5	92.7	93.7
Puducherry	96.5	96.6	96.6	98.3	98.7	98.5	97.7	98.1	97.9
All India	**83.5**	**76.7**	**80.3**	**89.0**	**87.9**	**88.5**	**84.7**	**79.2**	**82.1**

Source: GoI (2006b)

State wise attendance rates as recorded by the NSS, 2004-05 are highlighted separately for male and female children of 6-14 age group (see Table 6, above). According to this data, girls in certain states (e.g. Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh) are less likely to be enrolled in school than girls in some other states (e.g. Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram), and state of residence seems to be the most significant determinant of educational access. In the majority of states girls have lower enrolment rates than boys. There are significant gender gaps in educational participation in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa, which are historically known for gender discrimination. In some higher-enrolment states, girls have higher rates of enrolment than boys (e.g. Goa, Kerala, Delhi, and Meghalaya).

While the variations in attendance rates of boys and girls across the states can be seen in Table 6, based on the data provided by Sixth AIES (NCERT, 1998) and Seventh AIES (NCERT, 2005) Table 7 also reveals considerable variations in percentage increase in enrolment rates for boys and girls from one state to other. Some states have made substantial increases in enrolment rates for primary (e.g. Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Uttaranchal, and Jammu and Kashmir) and upper primary (e.g. Chhattisgarh, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) levels.

Table 7 Percentage Increase in Rates of Total Enrolment and Girls' Enrolment in Major States between 1993 and 2002 at Primary and Upper Primary Levels

State	Percentage Increase			
	Primary (Grades I-V)		Upper Primary (Grades VI-VIII)	
	Total Enrolment	Girls' Enrolment	Total Enrolment	Girls' Enrolment
Andhra Pradesh	21.7	31.6	64.4	9.3
Assam	6.0	12.4	8.3	15.7
Bihar	49.4	83.0	17.0	45.5
Chhattisgarh	26.4	38.2	81.6	114.6
Gujarat	13.5	16.6	29.3	32.6
Haryana	16.3	16.7	36.6	50.7
Himachal Pradesh	2.4	2.5	23.7	30.7
J&K	51.7	61.1	71.3	91.4
Jharkhand	28.7	48.6	20.9	44.8
Karnataka	3.2	7	38.4	50.3
Kerala	-14.5	-14.5	-7.8	-9.9
Madhya Pradesh	27.0	39.8	60.9	86.9
Maharashtra	1.2	2.9	41.9	52.3
Orissa	11.4	19.5	30.0	44.1
Punjab	-10.6	-7.7	9.3	15.3
Rajasthan	55.1	107.1	63.6	122.1
Tamil Nadu	2.4	2.2	9.1	12.9
Uttar Pradesh	86.6	133.7	57.0	108.5
Uttaranchal	31.2	41.3	41.2	64.0
West Bengal	22.0	30.5	48.4	48.4
All India	**26.2**	**36.9**	**37.5**	**52.5**

Source: NCERT (2005)

Table 8 Gender Inequalities at the Primary and Upper Primary Levels

States	Primary			Upper Primary		
	Number of Girls per 100 Boys*		Gender Parity Index**	Number of Girls per 100 Boys*		Gender Parity Index**
	2001-02	2004-05	2005-06	2001-02	2004-05	2005-06
Andhra Pradesh	97	98	0.98	84	90	0.91
Arunachal Pradesh	83	85	0.90	83	82	0.88
Assam	82	96	0.97	77	89	0.95
Bihar	61	69	0.80	50	54	0.64
Chhattisgarh	89	92	0.95	72	76	0.85
Delhi	92	96	0.89	84	95	0.88
Goa	92	92	0.90	89	89	0.88
Gujarat	79	77	0.89	86	73	0.79
Haryana	88	89	0.91	81	81	0.93
Himachal Pradesh	93	91	0.91	91	91	0.90
Jammu & Kashmir	81	92	0.85	76	80	0.81
Jharkhand	74	80	0.90	65	70	0.79
Karnataka	90	94	0.95	89	90	0.93
Kerala	95	96	0.98	91	91	0.93
Madhya Pradesh	81	89	0.95	62	77	0.79
Maharashtra	92	93	0.90	87	90	0.88
Manipur	91	101	0.99	87	109	0.97
Meghalaya	100	101	1.02	105	109	1.08
Mizoram	85	91	0.94	96	96	0.96
Nagaland	92	92	0.96	98	92	0.98
Orissa	71	88	0.93	64	84	0.86
Punjab	89	84	0.86	88	88	0.88
Rajasthan	56	99	0.88	42	58	0.62
Sikkim	98	93	0.99	109	112	1.13
Tamil Nadu	96	92	0.93	94	91	0.92
Tripura	91	93	0.91	88	89	0.95
Uttarakhand	101	86	0.98	91	92	0.95
Uttar Pradesh	57	95	0.91	41	70	0.83
West Bengal	93	93	0.98	74	86	0.96
A & N Islands	91	84	0.97	90	88	0.88
Chandigarh	88	86	0.83	92	86	0.86
D & N Haveli	79	88	0.89	62	65	0.69
Daman & Diu	91	89	0.86	85	88	0.86
Lakshadweep	86	94	0.91	82	79	0.74
Puducherry	91	88	1.07	93	92	1.05
All India	**79**	**88**	**0.92**	**72**	**80**	**0.84**

Source: * denotes data from GoI (2003a) and GoI (2007a); ** denotes data from DISE (2007).

While we have looked at increases in access on the whole, gender disparities in enrolment still exist, particularly in states seen as 'educationally backward', with long-standing gendered divisions in society (see Table 8, above). Gendered disparities in access seem particularly apparent at the upper primary levels in certain states (e.g. in Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh), and some states have not yet reached GPIs of 90 at the primary level (e.g. Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chandigarh).

3.4 Staying On: Attendance, Drop-out and Repetition

Data collected in different surveys suggests that there is a significant gap between enrolment and attendance rates of children. According to the 1991 Census of India, while 112.8% of boys were enrolled in school, only 56.6% were attending; and while 87% of girls were enrolled, only 45% were reported to be attending school. Similarly, data from the NSS in 1993-94 suggests that while 118.1% of boys and 92.7% of girls were enrolled in schools, only 75% of boys and 61.3% of girls were attending (Reddy, 2004: 2). According to the NSS in 1998, the Gross Attendance Ratio (GAR) was lower than the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for grades I-V by about 20% (Sinha, 2003).

Parental preference for male children remains a strong characteristic determining household preferences and behaviour relating to the education and life opportunities of children. In almost all states poor parents from marginalized sections make choices in favour of their sons while deciding about their children's education. Retention of both boys and girls in school remains an area of concern despite recent improvement in enrolment situation. Ramachandran (2001: 10) notes that:

> the proportion of girls in higher grades declined in several states, notably in Bihar (from 43% in Grade I to 37% in Grade V) and Uttar Pradesh (from 43% in Grade I to 37% in Grade V), in 1999-2000. The drop-out rate of girls in grade III is quite significant.

Similarly, Aggarwal's study (2000b) suggests that drop-out as well as repetition of grades is more prevalent among girls, and their share declines as they progress from one grade to another. In 2000, drop-out among girls was between 3-5%. Table 9 highlights the trend in drop-out rate of girls and boys at the primary and upper primary levels. It indicates that while girls now have lower drop out rates at primary level, they remain higher if upper primary is taken into account.

Table 9 Drop-Out Rates (%) at Primary and Middle Stages from 1980-1981 to 2004-2005

		1980-81	1990-1999	1999-2000	2000-01	2004-05
Grades I-V	**Boys**	56.2	40.1	38.7	39.7	31.81
	Girls	62.5	46.0	42.3	41.9	25.42
	Total	58.7	42.6	40.3	40.7	29.00
Grades I-VIII	**Boys**	68.0	59.1	52.0	50.3	50.49
	Girls	79.4	65.1	58.0	57.7	51.28
	Total	72.7	60.9	54.5	53.7	50.84

Source: GoI (2007a)

High drop-out rates, along with those who never enrol at all, explain the persistently high rates of out-of-school children. Ramachandran (2001:1) has mentioned that 'it can be reasonably assumed that 65-70% of out-of-school children are girls, with significant rural urban difference' (i.e. with more rural girls out of school than urban girls). The Tapas Majumdar Committee Report (GoI, 1999) estimated the number of out-of-school children to be about 60-70 million. However, data from national surveys reports a decline in the number of out-of-school children over the years. The Sixth AIES (NCERT, 1998) found that around 38.5 million children in the 6-10 year age group were out-of-school in 1993. This number substantially declined to 22 million by 2002 as indicated by the Seventh AIES (NCERT, 2005). According to NFHS I in 1992-93 (IIPS, 1995), around 67.5% of 6-14 age children were attending schools, while at the time of NFHS II in 1998-99 (IIPS, 2000) this percentage had increased to 79%. Thus, there has been considerable decrease in the population of out-of-school children in recent years. These statistics indicate the increasing demand for education, leading to the increase in enrolment of children and the expansion of schools.

It is also apparent from existing studies and reports that there are gender differentials in the nature of this expanding enrolment of boys and girls. Examining the situation with respect to the age group 5-14, the 61st NSS data (GoI, 2006b) found that as many as 174 for every 1000 children (17.4%) were not attending any educational institution, and more females than males were found not attending school. In the 6-11 age group, 14% of girls were found to not currently be attending school, against only 10% of boys of same age group. Many girls receive education in non-formal schools, bridge courses and residential camps, all of which are transitional methods of imparting learning. One of the reasons may be the location of the centres. Being located within habitations, parents often find it easier to send their daughters to these schools, as opposed to formal schools, located further away. While these centres have reportedly had a far reaching impact on girls' learning (Ramachandran 2004b), the equity dimensions of these developments require serious consideration in terms of links to formal schooling and impact on girls' employment opportunities.

4. Education of Girls Belonging to Disadvantaged Groups

4.1 Education of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) Girls

According to Government of India data for 2004-05, enrolment of SC and ST children has increased (see Table 10) at both the primary and upper primary levels (GOI, 2007a). However, the gender gap continues at both levels, with more boys than girls from SC and ST groups in schools. The increase in numbers of both boys and girls has been particularly substantial during the last decade. In 2004-2005 there were almost 25 million SC children in primary school, compared to 15 million in 1990-1991. Similarly, in 2004-2005 there were almost 14 million ST children in primary school, compared to almost 8 million in 1990-1991.

Table 10 Enrolment Trends of SC and ST Children

Year	SC Enrolment (in 000)						ST Enrolment (in 000)					
	Primary			Upper primary			Primary			Upper primary		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1990-1991	9,737	6,057	15,194	2,747	1,413	4,160	4,958	2,911	7,869	1,131	576	1,707
1994-1995	10,889	7,543	18,432	3,330	1,883	5,213	5,454	3,605	9,059	1,377	871	2,248
2000-2001*	12,059	9,136	21,195	4,066	2,628	6,694	6,330	4,665	10,995	1,879	1,205	3,084
2003-2004*	12,764	10,365	23,129	4,737	3,343	8,077	6,776	5,741	12,517	2,135	1,526	3,662
2004-2005*	13,762	10,995	24,757	5,100	3,597	8,697	7,367	6,369	13,737	2,395	1,776	4,171

Source: GoI (2007a); * denotes provisional data.

This improvement in enrolment has had a positive impact on the GER of SC and ST children at the primary level, but the GER at the upper primary level showed a marginal decline between 2003 and 2005 (see Tables 11 and 12). Although by 2004-2005 the GER at the primary level had exceeded 100 for SC and ST boys and girls, at the upper primary level it is still substantially lower. At primary and upper primary levels, the gender gap in enrolments of these groups continues.

Table 11 GER of SC Children

Year	GER of SC Children								
	Primary/ 6-11 age group			Upper Primary/ 11-14 age group			Elementary/ 6-14 age group		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1990-1991	125.5	86.2	106.4	68.7	35.8	52.7	100.6	63.5	82.5
1994-1995	106.0	79.5	93.4	68.9	42.0	56.0	105.9	75.3	91.1
1998-1999	107.7	79.5	96.8	75.0	53.0	65.0	97.6	75.4	86.9
2001-2002*	103.1	85.1	93.0	80.3	57.7	69.6	95.7	74.6	85.5
2003-2004*	93.12	82.3	88.30	79.39	63.35	71.86	88.95	77.15	83.35
2004-2005*	123.3	106.6	115.3	77.9	61.5	70.2	106.5	90.3	98.8

Source: GoI (2007a); * denotes provisional data.

Table 12 GER of ST Children

Year	GER of ST Children								
	Primary/ 6-11 age group			Upper Primary/ 11-14 age group			Elementary/ 6-14 age group		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1990-1991	125.4	81.4	104.0	53.9	26.7	40.7	99.0	60.2	80.0
1994-1995	112.3	76.2	93.6	54.5	36.4	45.7	103.2	72.6	88.5
1998-1999	112.0	81.0	97.0	68.0	43.0	55.0	98.0	69.0	83.7
2001-2002*	106.9	85.1	96.3	82.1	57.3	70.3	99.8	77.3	88.9
2003-2004*	94.66	87.77	91.37	84.00	66.62	75.76	90.58	81.10	86.06
2004-2005*	128.1	115.5	121.9	73.9	59.5	67.0	108.5	95.8	102.4

Source: GoI (2007a); * denotes provisional data.

Comparing the data available in different reports of All India Education Surveys (AIES) conducted over the decades by NCERT, Bhatt (2005) found that although the enrolment of all students in grades I to V increased by 58.40% between 1973 and 1993, the enrolment of Scheduled Caste students increased by 137.5% (or from 8 million to 19 million) during the same period of time. Comparing data from the AIES in 1993 and data provided by the Ministry of Education for 1998-1999, Bhatt (2005) estimated that from 1993 to 1999 the percentage increase in total enrolment was 14.38%, while for Scheduled Castes it was only 2.44%.

Table 13 (below) highlights comparative differences between the gendered breakdown of enrolments for SC groups versus general enrolments, and rural versus urban enrolments of SC groups. The table highlights how the percentage share of girls in primary education from SC groups, is much lower than that of boys.

Table 13 Percentage of Enrolment of General vs. Scheduled Caste Girls and Boys in Primary Schools, 1978-1993

		General Enrolment			SC Enrolment		
AIES Survey		**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**
1978	Rural	63.8	36.2	75.7	67.3	32.7	79.7
	Urban	55.3	44.8	24.3	59.1	40.9	20.3
	Total	61.7	38.3	100.0	65.6	34.4	100.0
1986	Rural	60.5	39.5	76.6	62.8	37.2	78.8
	Urban	54.8	45.2	23.4	56.4	43.6	21.2
	Total	59.2	40.8	100.0	61.5	38.6	100.0
1993	Rural	58.0	42.0	74.7	59.5	40.5	78.3
	Urban	53.3	46.7	25.3	54.0	46.0	21.8
	Total	56.8	43.2	100.0	58.3	41.7	100.0

Source: Bhatt (2005)

Ramachandran (2001: 9) describes how issues with the enrolment of SC and ST girls are of more concern in certain states. The enrolment situation of SC girls is of concern in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, while the enrolment of ST girls is low in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Bihar. Ramachandran (2001: 2) further states that, 'a MODE/UNICEF (1995) study observes that the percentage of children who have never been to school is higher among SC and ST groups' (Ramachandran, 2001: 2). The educational disadvantages of these groups are firmly embedded in wider inequalities of poverty and deprivation. Children receive discriminatory treatment in school, are sometimes asked to sit separately, and are not permitted to drink from the same source of water as other students. Such deep-seated discrimination can constrain the effectiveness of special measures targeted at these historically disadvantaged groups. For example, the national Midday Meal scheme, which has the potential to unite socially divided groups, is in many states unable to effectively deliver the required outcomes, because of discrimination in the implementation of the programme (Thorat and Lee, 2005).

4.2 Access to Which Type of Schooling?

Research suggests that a large number of female and SC/ST children attend government schools (including formal and non-formal), while children from upper castes and boys are more likely to attend private schools (PROBE 1999; Aggarwal, 2000a; Mehta, 2005; Kumar et al, 2005). Kumar et al (2005) found that government schools in West Bengal, like many other states, mainly cater to under-privileged children, including SC groups, ST groups and girls. The study revealed that while the ratio of boys and girls in selected government schools was 54:46, it private schools it was 59:41. In recent years there has been a move towards both private and unrecognized schools, for those groups who can afford them. The expansion of the private unrecognized sector is both a reflection of the great demand for education amongst diverse populations as well as a reflection of the lack of adequate facilities in government schools. This sector is diversifying into a wide range of fee-charging schools, many of which may also be affordable for poorer households. This indicates that parents, irrespective of their socio-economic background, demand quality education and better educational facilities to help their children learn.

4.3 Girls Belonging to Religious Minority Groups

There are very few detailed studies of the schooling of Muslim girls in India, although data shows their relative educational deprivation compared with girls and Muslim boys. A recent study by Jeffery et al (2007) focused on the schooling of Muslim girls in the Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh, and found that the majority of Muslim children are educated in religious schools (madrasas and makhtabs) rather than being educated in government schools. Uttar Pradesh is widely known for gender inequality in educational attainment, and Muslim girls in this state tend to be educationally disadvantaged. The lack of schooling facilities near places of residence, the absence of female teachers and the lack of a gender-friendly environment within schools affects the education of Muslim girls. Socio-cultural factors also play a role in shaping cultural expectations of schools as institutions appropriate for the participation of girls. In the villages of Bijnor district where the authors conducted their research, they found that 'Muslim girls were all but absent even in the primary schools' (Jeffery et al, 2007: 69). Moreover, many Muslim girls are not allowed to be educated once they reach puberty.

When Muslim girls are enroled, it is often in madrasas. In Bijnor, Jeffery et al (2007: 75) found that:

> The enrolment of Muslim village girls in formal education in madrasas increased particularly strikingly in the 1990s indicating parental responsiveness to changes in the accessibility of educational facilities. Many rural madrasas teach as many as or more girls than boys, teaching them either in different buildings, or in separate classrooms. Occasionally, small boys and girls are taught in the same rooms but at separate benches. Girls are likely to be more regular attendants and continue studying until they are about 12, or when they reach puberty. Other children, mostly boys, from wealthier rural households attend a madrasa for only a few years before they are sent for formal schooling. Often the school they attend is not equipped with adequate facilities to provide quality education.

The study found a marked difference in the schooling experiences of Muslim boys and girls. While 13% of Muslim girls attended co-educational English medium schools, the share of boys in such schools was around 20%. The authors note that 'although boys from all religious communities outnumber girls in this form of schooling, for Muslims the disparity is more marked, with nearly three times as many Muslim boys as Muslim girls getting English-medium schooling' (Jeffery et al, 2007). In private Hindi medium schools, the second fastest growing category, there are almost exactly the same number of Muslim boys and Muslim girls, but they constitute less than 30% of the total number of students. Jeffery et al (2007) suggest an increasing segregation of religious communities by type of school, a point which highlights the importance of studying the socio-political context of the educational exclusion of religious minorities in India's complex plural social structure.

4.4 Working Girl Children

The incidence of child labour persists in India despite progress in educational enrolment and despite some measures taken by government to eradicate child labour. Padhi (2004: 388) points out a close association between child labour and poverty. He observes:

> ... the regional pattern of child labour follows that of the regional pattern of 'secondary' job opportunities available to the poverty ridden marginalized households, which have limited capabilities to participate in good employment opportunities.

He argues that marginalized households under market-driven development are compelled to put their children into the labour market rather than sending them to school and, 'it is doubtful whether education, abstracting from the marginalisation of the households, can improve the labour status of children' (Padhi, 2004: 377).

According to the 2001 Census, there are 12.5 million working children in the 5-14 age group out of a total child population of 252 million in India. As many as 10.7 million working children are in the age group of 5-14. Bhan (2001: 12) notes that estimates of child labour exclude the domestic work done by girls because it is not counted as an economic contribution and hence not included in the estimates. He argues that changing economic opportunities and the growing informalisation of labour is forcing young women and girls into the informal sector, and that this helps to account for the increase in numbers of female child workers. Table 14 suggests that more boys than girls in both in rural and urban areas reportedly never attended school because they had to supplement their household income. This is more pronounced in the older age group; while more girls than boys typically have reported that they did not attend school because of domestic chores. 'Other' reasons seem more important to never-enrolling for most children.

Table 14 Distribution of Children aged 5-14 years Who Have Never Attended an Educational Institution: Gender, Location and Broad Reasons for Non Attendance (2004-2005) (per 1000)

Reasons	Category and Age															
	Rural Male (by age group)				Rural Female (by age group)				Urban Male (by age group)				Urban Female (by age group)			
	5-9	10-14	5-14	6-11	5-9	10-14	5-14	6-11	5-9	10-14	5-14	6-11	5-9	10-14	5-14	6-11
School too far	67	37	55	63	60	26	43	54	28	8	18	31	38	7	22	11
Had to support household income	5	66	30	17	4	35	19	11	12	94	52	38	7	21	14	10
Education not considered necessary	103	156	124	173	161	184	172	234	81	86	83	138	85	117	102	135
Had to attend domestic chores	5	22	12	11	16	73	44	40	7	7	7	9	6	63	36	27
Other	776	289	579	631	702	253	482	532	805	222	520	602	786	278	519	659

Source: GoI (2006b)

Ramachandran (2003b and 2004b) emphasizes the impact work burdens have on the learning outcomes of girls. While girls who attend school are recognized to be highly motivated, long working hours at home result in poor attendance and hence, poor learning outcomes. Care of cattle and collection of fuel wood are domestic chores that are largely the responsibility of older children, disproportionately carried out by girls, and invisible to statistical counts of the incidence of child labour. Migration of adults also has a significant impact on the schooling of children; with children accompanying parents and being drawn into the labour market or becoming involved in the care of younger children (Smita, 2007; Wadiker and Das 2004). Disruptions to schooling as a result of migration require much greater attention than received at present, though there are some attempts to address this[4].

4.5 Disabled Girls

Available data indicates the prevalence of serious discrimination in the education of disabled children, and particularly girls.

Sharma and Sharma (2003: 26) revealed that while girls with disabilities constitute 54% of the total population of disabled children, the participation of disabled girls in school is much lower than of disabled boys. In 1991, 472 boys with disabilities were found to be receiving education compared to 303 girls (Sharma and Sharma, 2003). The situation has reportedly been improving in recent years, but there is continuing cause for concern.

[4] E.g. Action Aid's Residential Care Centres in high-migration source districts in Orissa and destination districts in Andhra Pradesh. See Gardener and Subrahmanian (2005) for a case study of these Centres.

Table 15 highlights the gendered participation levels of children with disabilities in schools since 2003. In urban areas, the GPI in the school participation of disabled children in grades I to VIII increased from 0.71 in 2002 to 0.80 in 2005. In rural areas, the GPI for this group increased from 0.64 to 0.66 over the same period of time.

Table 15 Enrolment of Children with Disabilities in Primary and Upper Primary School, 2003 to 2005

Classes	All Areas			Rural Areas			Urban Areas		
	Girls	Total	GPI	Girls	Total	GPI	Girls	Total	GPI
2003									
I-V	311,024	781,314	0.66	270,569	684,054	0.65	36,786	88,868	0.71
VI-VII/ VIII	75,554	199,850	0.61	58,396	158,366	0.58	16,164	39,028	0.71
I-VII/VIII	386,578	981,164	0.65	328,965	842,420	0.64	52,950	127,896	0.71
2004									
I-V	558,481	1,346,186	0.71	491,903	1,187,677	0.71	64,807	154,123	0.73
VI-VII/ VIII	161,655	412,297	0.64	130,961	341,577	0.62	30,368	69,668	0.77
I-VII/VIII	720,136	1,758,483	0.69	622,864	1,529,254	0.69	95,175	22,3791	0.74
2005									
I-V	410,860	1,017,392	0.68	357,482	892,191	0.67	52,766	123,612	0.74
VI-VII/ VIII	158,600	381,951	0.71	102,314	260,260	0.65	56,044	121,144	0.86
I-VII/VIII	569,460	1,399,343	0.69	459,796	1,152,451	0.66	108,810	244,756	0.80

Source: DISE (2006)

Policy failures are implicated in the exclusion of disabled children from schooling. This area receives little investment, and human resources and infrastructure are underdeveloped. Given their position in society, disabled girls are often doubly disadvantaged in terms of educational access.

5. Important Factors Effecting Gender Equity

5.1 School Availability

Improvements in educational access in India were quite spectacular during the 1990s. A comparison of data from AIES surveys (NCERT, 1999 and 2005) indicates improvements in the availability of government schools over that decade. There was a 14.19% increase in the number of primary schools and 51% increase in the number of secondary schools. Despite these improvements, even at the time of Seventh AIES in 2003, out of total 1,231,391 habitations in the country, 13% do not have a primary school within a 1km radius; while 22% lack an upper primary school within 3km (NCERT, 2005). Many of these habitations are predominantly inhabited by marginalized groups, particularly SC and ST populations. In the State of Jharkhand (which has a high proportion of ST groups), children in 23% of habitations were unable to access primary school within 1km distance; while in 39% of habitations an upper primary school is not available within 3km (NCERT, 2005). To address the demands of poor people, the state has opened 14,000 Alternative Schooling centres under EGS/AIE Scheme (Govinda and Biswal, 2006) in the state. These are single teacher schools, without buildings. Teachers in these schools lack professional qualifications. Many other states also have opened such schools to accommodate growing number of children particularly in remote areas.

The expansion of educational facilities within walking distances from habitations seems to be an important factor in increasing girls' enrolment. Data suggests that numbers of schools have increased significantly in the past years. NSS data from 1986-1987 shows about 10% of all children not attending school due to non-availability of schooling facilities, while in 1995-1996 only around 2% of children were not attending school for the same reason (GoI, 2006b). There was not much variation in case of boys and girls not attending school because of distance. NFHS II data from 1998-1999 depicted more or less the same picture (IIPS, 2000). Although long distance to school has been one of most cited reasons for never enrolling and dropping out, the score attached to this particular factor in the survey was in fact much lower than factors such as costs and child labour. Having said this, the non-availability of schools near residences does seem to have a greater impact on girls' education. In NFHS-II, 3.4% of urban and 5.2% of rural females were not enrolled in school because of distance. The survey also reported that about 7.5% of girls in rural areas and 1.2% in urban areas had to drop out because of lack of access to schools. The score is lower in the case of boys: 1.4% for rural and 0.3% for urban boys. This suggests that non-availability of schools still affects girls' education in rural areas.

5.2 Value of Education

The perception of the importance of education for girls seems to affect enrolments, particularly in rural areas. Of girls in the 5-14 age group, 23% of those living in rural areas had never attended an educational institution because education was not considered necessary, as opposed to 15% of their urban counterparts (GoI, 2006b; see Table 14). This is compared to 16% of rural boys and 12% of urban boys aged 5-14 years who were found to have never attended school for this reason (GoI, 2006b; see Table 14). Thus it

seems evident that girls and children living in rural areas are less likely to go to school than urban boys because of the value placed on education. It seems work still has to be done on mobilizing communities around the importance of girls' education, particularly in rural areas.

5.3 Dropping Out

It is also evident from the 61st Round NSS that a large number of children are dropping out before completion of a basic education cycle (GoI, 2006b; see Table 16). Very few children reported distance to educational institution as a reason for dropping out. Around 40% of urban and rural male drop outs aged 10-14 years had left school because they were required to support household income. Girls aged 10-14 years were more likely to drop out because of household chores (11% for rural and 17% for urban girls). Around 11% of urban male drop outs and 10% of urban female drop outs aged 10-14 had to leave school because their education had not been considered important. Around 7% of boys and 9% of girls who dropped out of school in rural area had to leave the school for the same reason.

Table 16 Distribution of Children Aged 5-14 Years Who Have Dropped Out From School: by Gender, Location and Reasons for Dropping out (2004-05) (per 1000 children)

Reasons	Category and Age															
	Rural Male (by age group)				Rural Female (by age group)				Urban Male (by age group)				Urban Female (by age group)			
	5-9	6-11	10-14	5-14	5-9	6-11	10-14	5-14	5-9	6-11	10-14	5-14	5-9	6-11	10-14	5-14
School too far	1	1	3	2	0	2	16	8	0	0	0	0	0	3	5	3
Had to supplement household income	4	16	171	72	2	10	70	36	6	44	231	116	12	21	57	36
Education not considered necessary	5	21	73	33	16	35	92	53	15	35	116	64	9	24	98	56
Had to attend domestic chores	0	1	12	5	1	14	109	54	5	7	15	10	4	32	177	95
Other	34	65	170	89	37	62	142	88	40	96	221	129	54	78	176	118

Source: GoI (2006b)

6. Continuing Challenges

6.1 Gender Stereotyping in Schools

While improvements in educational access have made some impact on improving girls' access to education, there are fundamental systemic issues that constrain progress towards gender equality in education. For example, gender stereotyping in textbooks and learning materials persists. Velkoff (1998) argues that men continue to be the main characters in textbooks and to be depicted in higher positions than women, while women's achievements are rarely recognized. Sadgopal (2003), describing the national government guidelines and syllabi developed by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) states that the

> conception of … pre-vocational activities for the upper primary stage … includes sex stereotyped activities such as maintaining cleanliness at home, keeping sources of water in the school and the community safe and clean and amazingly helping parents in looking after younger children and old family members ... In view of the deep-seated gender bias in the curriculum framework and the lack of any deliberate programme/activities for gender equity and women's empowerment in education policy, it is easy to guess as to who would be assigned such sex-stereotyped pre-vocational activities.

In addition, Pandey (2006) notes that the behaviour of teachers within the classroom has been criticized for perpetuating gender stereotypes, with boys being favoured in many classroom activities.

6.2 Gender Differences in Learning Achievement

Studies are inconclusive about the role of gender in influencing learning outcomes. Reddy (2004b: 27) claims that, 'amongst the important pupil characteristics that were correlated with achievement, gender was an important issue'. Studies also suggest this varies according to state and subject. In research by Shukla et al (1994) boys were found to be performing slightly better than girls in states such as Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, while in Kerala and Tamil Nadu no difference could be found in the performance of boys and girls. Similarly, gender difference in achievement level was not significant in West Bengal (Roy et al, 1995), in Kerala (Varghese, 1999) and in Maharashtra (Pal and Natrajan, 1997). Govinda and Varghese (1993) found gender difference in achievement levels more pronounced in rural areas than urban areas in Madhya Pradesh where boys were found performing better than girls.

Table 17 shows the proportion of children completing primary and upper primary schooling with grades of higher than 60%. Marks vary according to state and gender. In some states (for example, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Maharashtra) more than 50% of children achieve grades of 60% or more at the primary level, but this occurs in fewer states at the upper primary level (Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat). In states such as Assam, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, fewer than

25% of children gained marks of 60% at the primary level. At the upper primary level, fewer than 25% of children in eight states gained marks of more than 60%. The performance of girls is lower than boys in states such as Assam, Haryana, Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttaranchal and West Bengal at both the primary and upper primary levels. Having said this, girls seem to perform better than boys in states such as Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu at both the primary and upper primary levels.

Table 17 Percentage of Boys and Girls Gaining Marks of More Than 60%, by State

State	Boys Grade IV/V	Girls Grade IV/Vs	Boys Grade VII/VIII	Girls Grade VII/VIII
Andhra Pradesh	59.9	59.1	52.6	54.8
Assam	21.2	18.5	14.7	13.1
Bihar	32.1	31.9	23.9	24.0
Gujarat	53.9	54.3	59.1	63.3
Haryana	29.9	30.1	16.4	17.5
Himachal Pradesh	44.9	46.6	17.0	19.0
Jharkhand	22.9	22.6	20.0	20.2
Karnataka	59.4	60.5	44.3	49.0
Kerala	38.9	42.9	35.9	41.2
Madhya Pradesh	23.7	23.1	19.0	22.0
Maharashtra	63.2	62.4	25.3	27.0
Orissa	10.5	9.5	12.2	11.9
Rajasthan	52.5	51.2	47.0	48.5
Tamil Nadu	44.6	47.6	25.0	26.7
Uttar Pradesh	39.3	38.3	32.5	36.7
Uttaranchal	40.2	36.1	24.2	24.0
West Bengal	40.2	38.4	23.3	21.4

Source: Sinha (2003) cited in Reddy (2004b: 3)

Studies indicate that there can be gendered differences in performance according to grade and subject area. In Bihar, Hasan (1995) found boys in grade II performed better than girls, but in grade IV there was no difference in achievement. In some studies, girls were found to receive lower marks than boys in mathematics (Aggarwal, 2001 in Delhi; Jayalakshmi, 2001 in Kerala), while girls tended to achieve more in languages (e.g. Jayalakshmi, 2001 in Kerala). Some studies point out to the lower performance of girls from SC and ST groups, as opposed to boys from these social groups (Aggarwal, 2000a; Shukla et al, 1994; Aikara, 1997; Hasan, 1995).

Learning outcomes are also influenced by a range of factors, including quality of educational facilities, teacher attendance, home environment, socio-economic contexts, parental education, family size, attendance, household duties, nutrition, and attendance at pre-school (Kingdon, 1998a; Bashir, 1994; Govinda and Varghese 1993; Roy et al, 1995; World Bank, 1997; Ramachandran 2003a; Reddy 2004b; Govinda and Varghese 1993; Aggarwal, 2000a; Hasan 1995). Jain and Arora's (1995) study suggests that gender differences in the performance of students narrowed with an increase in the socio-economic status of children. Girls also tend to have to take on more household duties and sibling care than boys, potentially affecting achievement levels. Some studies have

suggested that gender differences in achievement level can be bridged if adequate attention is provided to girls, both within the home and the classroom.

Research suggests a range of factors work to improve student achievement. These include the availability of adequate facilities including teaching and learning materials and textbooks; good school management; quality teaching; low teacher pupil ratios; and community participation (see Shukla et al, 1994; Aikara, 1997; Singh, 1996; Bashir 1994). Many Indian schools lack these facilities and qualities to enhance learning. Recent DISE data (see Mehta, 2005) indicated that many schools lack: buildings (3.8%); drinking water (58%); common toilets (58%)[5]. Around 13% of schools have a single teacher; 36% of schools are without any female teachers; around 11% of schools have a single classroom; 7% have a high pupil:teacher ratio; 10% of schools do not have a blackboard; and 50% of schools do not have a head teacher. While the lack of facilities affects both boys and girls, girls are more likely to attend government schools where these problems are worse, and they are therefore like to be more severely affected.

[5] Only 28.24% of schools in 539 districts all over India have separate toilet for girls (Mehta, 2005).

7. Policy, Programme and Institutional Efforts to 'Mainstream' Gender Issues in Education

Ramachandran (1998) provides a comprehensive list of the types of interventions for improving female access to education that have been detailed in various policy and programme documents over the years. Box 1 shows a mixture of approaches such as, for example, building more schools, improving management structures and administrative efficiency, increasing accountability, and curriculum reform. The most established policy and programme interventions in India are those that try to improve access to schooling, through non-formal or alternative schooling programmes (such as bridge courses) and constructing schools. Access reforms that have required inter-departmental coordination (such as improving school sanitation through building toilets and supplying water) have been far less successful. Reforms that demand 'root and branch' changes in the ways in which institutions 'think' about gender inequality have rarely been attempted, apart from some cursory efforts to make textbooks more gender sensitive. Efforts to address biases in curriculum *transaction* have been entirely missing.

Box 1: National Strategies to Bridge Gender and Social Gaps in Elementary Education

Issues addressed	***Strategy***
Ensuring access	* Mobilisation of community for enrolment of girls and working children in particular
	* Formation of Village Education Committees (VECs) with 30% to 50% female members to supervise, ensure retention and provide support
	* Formation of Mother-Teacher Associations (MTAs) to encourage girls' participation and to monitor schools
	* Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) Schools to augment access in un-served habitations
	* Linkages with Early Childhood Care centres to free girls from responsibility for sibling care; however in 2006 a high level decision was taken to formally transfer all responsibility of early childhood education to the Department of Women and Child Development
	* Provision of more female teachers
	* Create opportunities for out of school girls to get back to schools through short term residential and non-residential bridge courses
	* Introduce a residential upper-primary schooling programme - Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyala - to enable girls who may have dropped out to complete the upper primary cycle in a residential school
Ensuring retention	* Incentives in the form of mid-day meals, free textbooks, uniforms, dry rations (rice or wheat), etc.
	* Awards and recognition for VECs and MTAs, as well as for individual girls
	* Gender sensitisation of teachers and educational administrators to make them more responsive to constraints faced by girls (work burden, sibling care, etc.)
Making the system more responsive	* Formation of Village Education Committees, School Development and Management Committees, etc.

	* Establishment of gender unit for training and ongoing support
	* Disaggregating education data by gender
	* Regular monitoring of girls' participation and achievement in class
	* Regular monitoring by district, state, national and joint donor committees/missions
Encouragement and incentives	* Mid-day meal – hot cooked meal for all children up to the elementary level
	* Scholarships and merit-linked awards for girls and children from SC and ST communities
	* Free uniforms, textbooks, stationery, etc. for girls and for children from SC and ST communities
Getting out-of-school children back to the school	* Bridge courses – residential and non-residential begun as part of DPEP and SSA
	* Residential accelerated learning / condensed courses (Mahila Shikshan Kendra / Balika Shikshan Shivir) initiated under the aegis of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat as well as under Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan

Source: Ramachandran (1998)

The push for greater attention to gender inequality can be traced back to the mid 1980s, when several innovative programmes for promoting educational access were started both by government and NGOs, often in partnership. Ramachandran (1998) identified six externally-aided programmes that had a significant impact on thinking and practice in India's public education system. These were:

- 1987 – British ODA supported the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project and the Swedish supported the Shiksha Karmi Project, Rajasthan
- 1988 – the Netherlands supported the Mahila Samakhya – Education for Women's Equality project in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat
- 1990 – UNICEF supported the Bihar Education Programme and the World Bank supported the Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Programme
- 1992 – the Swedish supported Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan (now funded by DFID)

NGO models have experimented with a variety of innovative attempts to stimulate demand for education for girls. Several of the core strategies used are summarized by Ramachandran (2003b) in Table 18 below.

Table 18 Issues, Strategies and Reported Impacts of Gender Programmes

Issues addressed	Strategy adopted	Reported Impact
Ensuring access: Enrolment of girls, especially from disadvantaged communities	DPEP: – Mobilisation of the community for enrolment; – Formation of Village Education Committees with 30% to 50% female members to supervise, ensure retention and provide support; – Mother-Teacher Associations: Encourage girls' participation and monitor school; Education Guarantee Scheme Schools: – Intended to augment access in un-served habitations; – Linkages with Early Childhood Care centres to free girls from responsibility for sibling care; Provision of more female teachers	– Evaluation studies / missions of DPEP reveal that girls' enrolment has gone up, but may be difficult to attribute it directly to these strategies. – Programme evaluation of EGS also reports significant improvement in girls' enrolment, in particular in villages where an ECE centre was attached to the school. – The provision of more female teachers is a generic strategy adopted in most projects. No one-to-one correlation has been made with girls' enrolment.
Ensuring retention: Continuation of girls in schools	– Incentives in the form of mid-day meals, free textbooks, uniforms, dry rations (rice or wheat), etc.; DPEP – Awards and recognition for VEC/MTA as well as girls; – Gender sensitisation of teachers and educational administrators to make them more responsive to constraints faced by girls (work burden, sibling care, etc).	– Impact assessment studies of mid-day meal reveal positive trend in retention in school of girls and boys from poor households. – Difficult to establish one to one correlation between award VEC/MTA and gender sensitisation
Improving quality and making education relevant: Content and process of education	Adopted in DPEP and other EFA projects: – Improve school environment - make learning joyful; – Gender review of curriculum and textbooks; – Attractive teaching–learning material; – Academic/pedagogic support to teachers.	– While these strategies were an integral part of DPEP, there is still no concrete evidence to show that communities find the content and process more relevant than it was prior to DPEP.

Making the system responsive: Especially to gender and social equity issues	DPEP – Establishment of gender unit for training and ongoing support; – All education data to be disaggregated by gender; – Regular monitoring of girls' participation and achievement; – Regular monitoring by district, state, national and joint donor committees/missions. Lok Jumbish: - Appointment of gender coordinators and/or ensuring that at least 30% to 50% of supervisory staff are female	– Gender mainstreaming strategies of DPEP succeeded in bringing gender issues centre stage in primary education. Given periodic review and monitoring by donors as well as independent researchers, availability of gender-disaggregated data could be attributed to these strategies. – Lok Jumbish demonstrated that availability of women as supervisory staff made a significant impact on the ground.
Teacher motivation: Especially for female teachers to work in rural and remote areas	Parateachers in GPS and EGS/AS: – Appointment of local person as teacher; – ensuring that at least 50% of parateachers are women Lok Jumbish – Creating forum for women teachers to come together and share experiences and also support each other and also address problems faced by women teachers working in rural areas.	– The AS and EGS schemes have reported positive impacts from recruiting local women as teachers. This was made possible because recruitment of contract teachers / parateachers was done through local bodies. – Lok Jumbish experience of creating a forum for female teachers had a positive impact on their participation in training programmes. However, this effort could not be sustained beyond 1999 – therefore it would be difficult to make any conclusive statement on the efficacy of this strategy.
Encouragement:	– Scholarships and merit-linked awards for girls; – Awards for teachers; – Awards for villages with 100% enrolment of girls.	– The direct impact of these measures is difficult to ascertain, however teachers and educational administrators say that such awards help boost the morale of students, teachers and the community.
Getting older out-of-school girls back to school: Bridge courses Short duration camps Open school system	– Bridge courses, residential condensed coursed (e.g. Mahila Shikshan Kendra / Balika Shikshan Shivir) initiated under the aegis of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat and Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan	– This has now been acknowledged as one of the most successful initiatives to get out-of-school children back into the mainstream and also to provide older girls an opportunity to complete primary and/or upper primary levels.

Source: Ramachandran (2003b)

From this summary, it is evident that many different strategies have been used with varying degrees of success and with different impacts in terms of sustainability. However, most of these measures have not been institutionalized systematically within the education system. Rather, *ad hoc* approaches tend to be in operation, with no consistent patterns of implementation across diverse states and districts. Ramachandran's (2003b) work also points to the lack of monitoring and impact assessment mechanisms.

Concerns about such interventions are linked to wider institutional issues, including the push for decentralisation, the need to develop capacities and skills amongst female leaders, and efforts to 'mainstream gender'. These issues in the Indian education system are discussed briefly below, with the caveat that they will require more careful study to draw robust conclusions.

7.1 Decentralisation of Education

Decentralisation of education delivery has been the *mantra* of public service delivery in India for the last several decades. The creation of an infrastructure of 'user committees' in the form of Village Education Committees (VECs) has now become the mainstay of education programmes, and whilst the evidence for their success is variable and largely critical, it is clear that the potential of these committees in pushing for greater accountability and quality needs to be maximized (see Ramachandran 2004a). Criticisms largely pertain to the bureaucratic ways in which these committees have been set up, with significant elite capture of seats reducing the possibility of representation from excluded groups and women; and to the low level of interest by school functionaries in utilizing community help for more than the annual enrolment drive required to get children into school (Subrahmanian, 2000; Subrahmanian, 2003b). In particular, the limited spaces for women's participation (despite quotas) and the lack of encouragement for women to speak in front of traditional authority figures (village heads, teachers), reduces the positive effect that these committees could have on gender issues at the school level. Token attempts at 'gender sensitisation' have yielded little in terms of their contribution to sustainable changes in gender relations. Comparisons with genuine community-cantered processes of empowerment for women, such as Mahila Samakhya's women's collectives (or *sanghas*), reveal the lack of interest in making women's participation meaningful. In the latter, support for women's learning at their own pace and embedded in their everyday lives has yielded significant shifts in the ways in which women engage with their communities and the response they are able to therefore gain to their concerns and demands. However, in DPEP there is no mechanism to monitor whether the quota for women within VECs is translating into meaningful participation for women. Ramachandran (2004a) further notes that there are no available guidelines for ensuring the effective participation of women and representatives of other disadvantaged groups in VECs.

Decentralisation in Indian education also suffers from the continuing reliance on local bureaucracy to take the lead on delivery, with insufficient funds allocated to decentralized bodies to be able to independently and flexibly pursue localized policies and interventions. While lower levels of bureaucracy have been given a greater degree of autonomy to implement programmes, this autonomy remains circumscribed within strict

guidelines, which in turn result in disincentives to respond quickly and flexibly to local problems (Subrahmanian, 2000). This results in a continuing standardization of responses despite a stated commitment to locally responsive planning. Micro-planning, an initiative started in DPEP with the aim of generating knowledge about local problems in order to find local solutions, has not been the powerful tool envisaged because of the lack of restructuring of administrative and political incentives to respond in a timely way to local concerns.

Lessons must be drawn from areas where women's collectives have been brought into the delivery process and have been able to demand accountability. At present there are no detailed case studies that can yield institutional lessons for the education system as a whole. Success depends much on the local context, and particularly the presence of active civil society organizations and proactive administrators. The significant difference made by Mahila Samakhya women's *sanghas* to the non-discriminatory (on the basis of caste) implementation of the mid-day Meal Scheme is a case in point (see Thorat and Lee, 2005). Crook and Manor (1998) also pointed to the significant impact of decentralization in Karnataka where local communities were effective in reducing teacher absenteeism and ensuring that learning took place in the classroom.

7.2 Developing Capacities and Skills of Women to Act as Change Agents[6]

A significant feature of innovative programmes that have made an impact on female education is their investment in cadres of women involved in different aspects of education (management, teaching, community mobilization) and their emphasis on women's participation. This is one critical lesson that has yet to be adopted and scaled up within the education system; currently, it is a token strategy within the wider approach. Programmes such as Shiksha Karmi, Lok Jumbish, and Mahila Samakhya have demonstrated the importance of building up women's capacities and skills and giving them positions of responsibility within the wider education intervention. Investing in adult women, as argued in the introduction to this paper, is one of the key interventions that can make a significant and meaningful impact on female education. This involves, however, substantial investment in processes of confidence building and awareness-raising to ensure that women feel equipped to fulfil new roles and responsibilities. Support to women cadres is also highly critical, as they may need to defend processes of change that are otherwise resisted by their communities[7].

The Shiksha Karmi Project in Rajasthan focused on training women as education workers or *shikshakarmis* as the main strategy to promote awareness and encourage enrolment of girls. Low levels of literacy, particularly female literacy, in Rajasthan meant that it was very difficult to find qualified women to work as teachers in the formal education system. The conservative nature of feudal Rajasthani society meant that constraints on female mobility and participation in the public sphere prevented women from coming forward to participate in government programmes and in the education sector. *Mahila Shikshakarmis*

[6] This section draws heavily on information provided in Jain (2003).
[7] This is highlighted, for example, by the rape of Bhanwari Devi, a *sathin* with the Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan, who fought against child marriage in her community (see Sinha, 2003).

or women teachers were appointed through an intensive outreach and training programme. In order to find women willing to come out in the face of parental and community resistance, the project focused on daughters-in-law in a village, as they were likely to remain within the community. The project thus needed to invest in the confidence and skills of young women to enable them to overturn conventional domestic expectations and occupy a public role. The demands of the new roles, however, including travelling for training and being away from the home, generated resistance from family and community. Supportive supplementary interventions included the establishment of training centres for women (Mahila Prasikshan Kendras) to develop new skills and capacities for female teachers.

A supportive cadre of women helpers was also developed to escort young girls to school and back, and to provide child care during school hours so as to free up the labour of school-age girls who would otherwise miss school to look after younger siblings. At the state level, a further cadre of women served as a Women's Task Force, to provide dedicated support to women workers at the field level.

These multiple layers of women cadres are a major step towards ensuring that more women actively participate in educational processes in three important ways: (i) to empower adult women and show communities the potential for women to play an active public role; (ii) to ensure that women play a role in motivating younger girls to go to school and perceive themselves as change agents; and (iii) to create a push within the education system to include women as part of the change process.

Lok Jumbish (LJ) has also viewed women as critical agents in education management and delivery, and has attempted to bring women in as equal participants at all levels of decision-making. Field functionaries and gender experts were brought together in a forum created to discuss gender issues and advise project management. Jain (2003: 19) noted that 'the assumption running through LJ management is that shifts in gender attitudes have to be created and nurtured at all levels of the planned intervention'. Trained women work within a cluster of villages and provide support to women's groups that are formed at each village. Women's groups in each village promote girls' access to schooling and monitor the regularity of educational transactions, and provide inputs into education planning for out-of-school children. Further, LJ started a forum for women teachers, recognizing their need for mutual support, a Women's Residential Institute for Training and Education (WRITE) to provide training and education to young women up to Class VIII, and Residential Camps for Adolescent girls to provide some formal schooling for adolescent girls who had married early or been denied the opportunity for schooling for other reasons.

LJ's interventions foreground the challenges faced by women and girls where their participation in schooling is seen to go against ingrained prejudices and obstacles. Jain (2003) notes that girls' brothers were often the most resistant to their sisters' participation in educational camps, and often ridiculed them or even were physically violent. She also notes, importantly, that new issues arising from gender equality interventions are often not taken up, even within an innovative programme like LJ, because management

capacities are often incapable of coping with the complex nature of social change, and the often unforeseen consequences of these interventions. This emphasizes the importance of sustained follow-up, flexibility and responsiveness, all of which are features that require radical changes to management structures, inimical as they are to the current hierarchical functioning of public service delivery systems.

Mahila Samakhya (MS), set up as a programme operating within the Department of Education, has come closest to generating innovative pro-women strategies within the education system. However, even MS has been implemented through a parallel structure, recognizing the need for flexible and responsive planning and implementation. While all major education programmes (DPEP, and then SSA) have incorporated MS within their overall strategy, MS is seen as having a distinct approach. MS stands out amongst all education interventions because of its explicit redefinition of education as a process of maximizing potential through self-realisation. Thus, its strategies for women's education include promoting self-confidence and self-esteem through intensive collective reflection processes, building the negotiation and articulation skills of poor women to enable them to deal with authority figures and structures within the home, community and state, enabling women to be aware about their bodies, their health and their rights, supporting women's livelihood strategies through developing vocational skills, credit and savings, and finally, functional and legal literacy.

MS puts into practice the understanding that education cannot be seen in isolation from the wider processes of society, livelihood and power. Recognising that education participation and outcomes rely on inter-linkages with other capabilities and skills has led to an approach that allows women in each local context to collectively set priorities for their empowerment. Education may or may not be the first priority for women. In many MS areas, for example, violence and bodily integrity have been identified as important precursors to enjoying full rights to education (Jain, 2003). Collective action also sees education as a process that is in-built into social relations, not distinct from it. Both these dimensions of the MS approach are profound in terms of their departure from the conventional notion of education as a set of skills and credentials that develop individual capacities and bring individual returns.

MS is widely acclaimed to be a success, but difficulties remain in 'mainstreaming' its approach into a wider system that is so different in its conceptualization. This is a dilemma that it may not be possible to resolve. Yet, it offers an important set of insights into what it will take to make an education system gender-aware enough to sustain the significant gains in female enrolment that conventional programmes have yielded. The lack of 'fit' highlights the fundamental problem in Indian education which is the tendency for fragmentation of approaches in a system that appears too complex and stagnant to reform.

7.3 'Mainstreaming' Gender

DPEP has made a significant effort to institutionalize gender-awareness in the education system. As Table 18 above shows, DPEP developed gender units at different levels, and made the monitoring of gender equity achievements a consistent aspect of review

processes. However, there are no studies to review the impact of these strategies. Ramachandran's (2004a) detailed desk and field studies of the impact of DPEP are the only exception. She notes that monitoring systems such as the Project Monitoring Information System (PMIS) District Information System for Education (DISE) and reports of the Joint Review Missions (DPEP, and now SSA) have yielded significant data that can be used for better planning in local sites. However, capacities to use that data in innovative ways remain limited, and in particular, gender disaggregation has not led to systematic and nuanced approaches to address the particularities of gender inequalities in different settings.

In Ramachandran's (2004a) assessment, the elaborate infrastructure to put in place gender coordinators at states and in DPEP districts has made gender issues visible within the system, and ensured that awareness of gender issues has 'percolated' down the system. Yet, she notes that, 'there is little evidence of the structure being used to actively pursue equity goals, particularly with respect to eliminating gender and social bias inside the classroom and ensuring participation of children who are out-of-schools' (Ramachandran, 2004a: 94).

'Gender mainstreaming' in education in India has thus largely been focused on the collection of data, and the creation of gender units and coordinators, both of which are strategies to promote greater visibility to the issue of gender inequality. As discussed above, however, the tendency in Indian planning has been to create female cadres and gender units and yet treat them as distinct from the 'mainframe' of administrative planning and delivery. Most female cadres are paid honorariums rather than salaries, and reflect a wider bias against valuing women's contributions as intrinsic to the achievement of national policy goals. Ramachandran (1998) documents the widespread indifference to gender specialists and women workers focusing on gender issues within the education system. The difficulty of conveying conceptually the importance of tackling gender inequality as the root of gender disparities in education makes the job of specialists even harder, as such discussions require substantial 'revisioning' of social relations by administrators who may not grasp the underlying rationale for the kinds of change demanded by the NPE and educational programmes. 'Gender sensitisation' training programmes raise the pertinent issues, but are seldom linked to the routine work programmes of the administrators who attend them. They thus see the issue as abstract, and are unable to continuously review their activities from the perspective of gendered effects. A separate but linked issue is that the Indian 'everyday' state (Fuller and Benei, 2001) is best able to respond in campaign form to promote issues (for example, short-term enrolment drives, high intensity time-bound awareness raising campaigns), but much less able to sustain the kinds of routine change required to streamline issues into processes of implementation and monitoring.

Jain (2003) points to the fundamental problem in gender mainstreaming which is the need to step out of a narrowly conceived 'sectoral' approach to education and shift towards a broad-based understanding of the multiple linkages between education and other aspects of human life. In the context of the deeply embedded tradition of sectoral policy and programming, this is indeed a huge challenge. Innovations have thus been introduced

through parallel programmes and structures. While, as Ramachandran (1998) notes, this may be an inevitable development given the difficulty of shifting the entire administrative structure from its current architecture, it does raise questions about the future of efforts to 'mainstream' gender.

It is too early to assess the impacts of two recent policy initiatives – the National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBVS) – but indications from their design are that they are not likely to address these fundamental problems. NPEGEL promises to focus on supply-side improvements in geographically targeted areas (2,656 educationally backward blocks) within the overall SSA. Strategies in these blocks will continue to focus on community mobilization, monitoring, curricular strengthening, positive incentives for teachers and students, and the development of a 'model' upper primary school. KGBVS will provide residential schools and boarding facilities in girls' upper primary schools in remote areas which have a concentration of out-of-school girls. Residential schools have the potential to make a significant difference in girls' access to upper primary school. SSA promises a 50% reservation of teachers' positions for women, but how this will happen – i.e. how best to ensure good working conditions for women teachers to enable them to work in remote areas, and how to recruit more women teachers – remains unclear.

Finally, it should be noted that 'mainstreaming' gender is not just an issue of greater administrative action in the area of gender equity. Mainstreaming is most successfully achieved when civil society, political leadership and the state work in different yet complementary ways to push for change (Subrahmanian, 2004). Jha and Subrahmanian (2006) document the case of a policy aimed at promoting girls' education through providing incentives to commercial providers to set up secondary schools for girls in Uttar Pradesh. The initiative was subverted by the commercial providers, who allowed boys to pay fees and benefit from subsidies provided by the state. What was in effect a progressive policy aimed at setting up subsidized schools for girls was undermined by the apparent lack of demand from girls for these schools. Rather than focus on stimulating demand from girls, however, the state caved in and allowed commercial providers to change the policy. This policy change attracted no comment because there was scant vigilance by civil society actors, and the policy itself had no external champions. The failure of policies such as this illustrate the importance of multi-actor involvement in policy formulation and monitoring.

8. Conclusions

The preceding analysis reveals that there has been considerable improvement in participation of girls during the post-Independence period, yet it continues to be below 50% both at primary and upper primary levels of school education. Although the increase in enrolment has been more significant at the upper primary level as compared to primary level, progress has been made. Data from the Seventh AIES, for example, shows an increase in total girls enrolment of 26.2 percentage points in primary schools and 37.5 percentage points in upper primary schools from 1993 to 2002 (NCERT 2005).

There has also been a noteable increase in the enrolment of rural girls. While enrolment of girls in all areas grew by almost 37% in grades I-V and by 52.5% in grades VI-VIII, in rural areas it increased by 42.4% in primary schools and 66.2% in upper primary schools during the same period. It is noteworthy that enrolment of girls is increasing steadily with higher growth rates than that of boys; the growth rates for girls' enrolment at the primary stage (grades I-V) were twice as high as that for boys and more than double at the middle stage (grades VI-VIII).

The GER of both boys and girls have shown steady increases at the primary and upper primary levels, but considerable gender gaps remain, particularly at the upper primary level. GER of boys as well as of girls are much lower at the upper primary level than primary level, but there is very little difference between GPI of primary and upper primary. While the GPI is now 0.95 at the primary level, it is 0.93 at the upper primary level. Although the GER of boys was much higher than girls at the upper primary level, the GER of boys increased by 20 percentage points whereas for girls this increase was around 44 percentage points between 1981 and 2005.

The analysis in this paper also throws some lights on considerable variations in the growth of enrolment of girls across the states. In many states there has been a significant improvement in girls' enrolments during the six years between NFHS I (1993) and NFHS II (1999). Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar have witnessed especially high increases. States such as Haryana, Maharashtra, Punjab, Kerala and Tamil Nadu also had high levels of enrolment initially, and continued to experience increased enrolment levels between 1993 and 1999.

Despite such impressive gains in the participation of children in schooling, a large number of girls still face difficulties in entering school and continuing their studies. The states which need serious attention are Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal, where more girls than boys tend to remain out of school. There is also a significant gender gap in educational participation in states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa. In Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Chandigarh, the GPI has not yet reached 90 at the primary level. Some of the major reasons for girls' non-attendance and drop out include gender discrimination by parents and society in general; the undervaluing of girls' education; the burden of household chores and sibling care; poverty; and the practice of child marriage. It is also evident from the state-wise attendance rates that girls in certain states (e.g. Bihar, Arunachal

Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh) are less likely to be enrolled in school than girls living in others (e.g. Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Mizoram). In general, wide gender disparities in enrolment still exist in 'educationally backward' states, and accompany long-standing gendered divisions in society. Although in the majority of states girls have lower enrolment rates than boys, girls do have higher rates of enrolment than boys in Goa, Kerala, Delhi and Meghalaya. This suggests that positive change is possible.

In addition to improvements in the enrolment of girls, a simultaneous decline in drop out rates has also contributed to the overall increase in school participation. Recent SES data from 2004-2005 indicates that while girls now have a lower drop out rate at primary level, it remains high at upper primary level (GOI, 2007). Drop out and repetition continue to be more prevalent among girls than boys, with girls' share of enrolment declining as they progress to higher grades. The 61st NSS data, for example, found more females than males in the 5-14 age group were not attending school (NSS, 2006). Furthermore, 14% of girls in the 6-11 age group were found to be currently not attending school as compared to only 10% of boys in same age group.

Improvements in school participation are also the result of increases in enrolment and decreasing drop out amongst SC/ST and other disadvantaged girls. Improvement in enrolment has had a positive impact on the GER of SC and ST children at the primary level, although the GER at the upper primary level showed a marginal decline from that of 2003-2005. At the same time, the gender gap in enrolment of these groups continues. According to data from the Sixth AIES, the percentage share of SC girls in primary education is much lower than that from the general category (NCERT, 1998). Other disadvantaged girls are from religious minority groups, working children engaged in domestic chores, disabled girls and girls from difficult groups. The previous discussion revealed that promotion of gender equity in elementary education is clearly visible in some states, while some others are still lagging behind. As a result, a large number of girls in India fall within CREATE's six Zones of Exclusion.

To conclude, challenges in achieving gender equality remain significant, and recent policy initiatives are silent on many of the critical issues of quality and mainstreaming gender within the education system as a whole. Lessons since the mid-1980s point to the need for intensive process-based, multi-sectoral approaches in order to sustain gains made in enrolment rates. Whether this is within the capacity of the existing educational architecture, or is possible without major administrative reforms, is the most important question. Further, the impacts of the increasing commercialization of schooling and the rise of diverse providers needs to be better understood and addressed. A pragmatic view would be to accept that this cannot happen and therefore to push for greater decentralization and more innovative ways to encourage local communities to achieve change. As long as weak incentives continue to be offered to a large and opaque education bureaucracy, the kinds of change required are unlikely to take place in the near future.

Several gaps continue to exist in research on gender and education in India. First, there is a need to understand the forces (both push and pull) that shape female access to

education, especially in the context of the recent rapid structural transformation of Indian society. Second, the education landscape is also changing within this wider social transformation, and a better understanding of these changes would help identify new spaces and language to promote greater gender equality. Third, the impact of current strategies needs to be monitored and assessed in order to ensure that current expenditures (which are large) are actually translating into change or that, where necessary, they can be more effectively structured. Therefore, in addition to checking whether existing resources reach their intended recipients, there is a wider question about the value of incentive schemes in terms of their actual impacts on demand and participation. A number of tough questions need to be asked and research studies are needed to focus on these questions in order to support improvements to gender equity across India.

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Report Summary:

This review paper draws on recent data to map the access and participation rates of girls relative to boys. This paper offers a critical assessment of findings of different recent researches on school education in India identifying the areas that need further research. The paper reveals that while enrolment of girls has increased rapidly since the 1990s, there is still a substantial gap in upper primary and secondary schooling and gender inequalities interlock with other forms of social inequality, notably caste, ethnicity and religion. The paper concludes with recommendation for implementation of enabling policy to meet the challenges for improving the quality of schools ensuring better opportunities for girls at higher levels of education, notably upper primary and secondary schools.

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