
UNIT 32 WOMEN AND EDUCATION

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32.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to

- describe briefly the nature of gender inequality in education in India
- identify and describe the important reasons for the low educational participation of girls
- analyse shortcomings of the educational system
- discuss alternatives to the formal school.

32.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit begins with an overview of the educational status of women and the aspect of gender inequality attached to it. We discuss these aspects in section 32.2. Female enrolment and retention in the educational institutions are affected by various factors. A broad description of these factors is given in section 32.3. In section 32.4 we have discussed the familial and social factors affecting women's education. Here we have discussed in detail the factors, like early marriage, *purdah* and other social customs, social and familial expectations and high opportunity cost of education. These factors have affected women's education adversely. In section 32.5 we have examined the limitations of the structures and the delivery systems. In this section, we discuss in detail how distance from homes, inflexible school schedules, absence of women teachers, incentives, buildings and equipment and inadequate childcare facilities have critically affected women's educational status. Content and **ideology** of education in the form of teaching methods and gender biases among teachers, in the textbooks and in the syllabi have also adversely affected women's

education. We discuss these issues in section 32.6. The Government of India has made various efforts for the rapid eradication of illiteracy through non-formal education and adult **literacy** programmes. We have examined these aspects of women's education in section 32.7.

32.2 EDUCATION AND GENDER INEQUALITY: AN OVERVIEW

Education is the most important instrument for human resource development. Education of women, therefore, occupies top priority amongst various measures taken to improve the status of women in India. However, in India education is constrained by the socio-economic conditions of the people, their attitude, values and culture. During the pre-British era, education was linked to socio-religious institutions, reinforcing a repressive and limiting social structure. During the British period, education became a tool of colonial power, enabling a small minority to have access to education and all the benefits it entailed. The social reformers of the nineteenth century raised the demand for women's education. Since Independence, policy makers have argued for universal education and for making education a tool for bringing about social equality. However, in spite of the efforts made so far the education system has not been able to make sufficient contribution towards women's equality (NPPW 1988).

i) Female Literacy

During 1951 and 1981 women's literacy rate improved from 7.93 percent to 24.82 percent. However, the absolute number of illiterate women shot up from 15.7 million to 241.7 million (excluding Assam) in the same period. If we go further Census reports shows that in 1911, there were 1,055 illiterate women to 1,000 illiterate men, in 1981 the figure for women had gone up to 1,322. The census figures of 1981 showed that women comprised 57 percent of the illiterate population and 70 percent of the non-enrolled children of school stage were girls. The female literacy rate for the year 1991 was 39.28 percent and in 2001 it had become 54.28 percent. In 1991 out of the total illiterates 60.8 percent were women and this rate was higher in the rural area (69.7 percent). And in 2001 out of the total illiterates 64 percent were women. The gap between male-female literacy rates of 18.30 percentage points in 1951 increased to 26.62 percent in 1981. In 1991 this gap was marginally reduced to 24.84 and in 2001 it has gone down to 21.70 percentage points. Figure 32.1 shows the progress of literacy separately for male and female, during 1901-2001.

ii) Regional Variations

Inequality in education between women and men varies region wise. In 1981, in Kerala a state known for its general level of awareness, female literacy was as high as 73 percent, whereas in Rajasthan, one of the nine states officially recognised as being educationally backward, less than 12 percent women were literate. States like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were also lagging behind in girl's education. Again, though the overall female literacy figure according to the 1981 Census was 24.8 percent, in rural areas it was around 18 percent while in the towns and cities women's literacy had gone up to 47.8 percent. Kerala continues to occupy the top spot in female

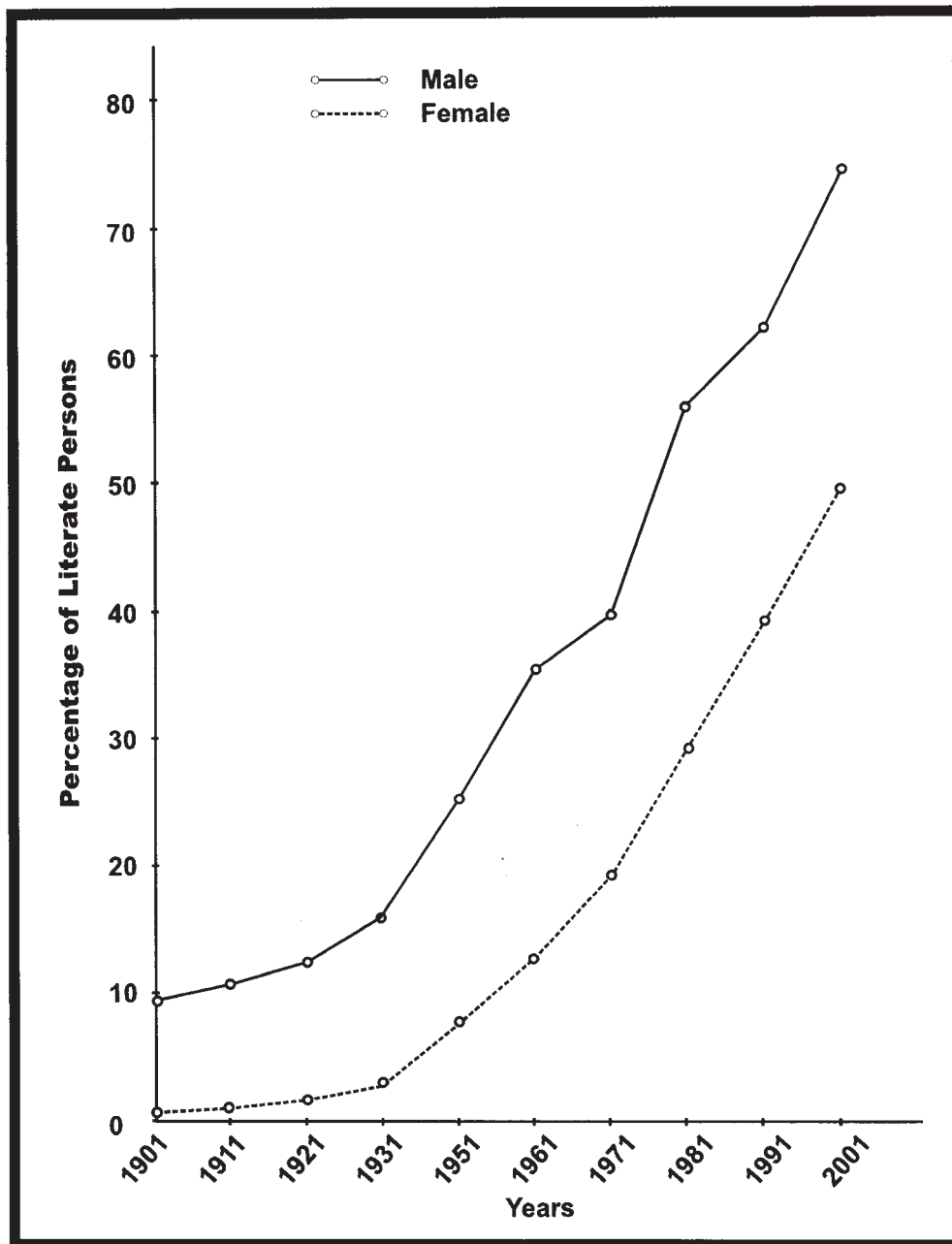


Fig. 32.1: Progress of literacy (1901-2001)

literacy with 87.86 percent even in the year 2001 and Bihar recorded lowest rate (35.57 percent) of female literacy. The States or Union Territories having less than 50 percent literacy rates are Rajasthan (44.34 percent), Arunachal Pradesh (44.24 percent), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (42.99 percent), Uttar Pradesh (42.98 percent), Jammu and Kashmir (41.82 percent) and Jharkhand (33.57 percent). In 2001 the female literacy rate for the rural area was 46.58 percent which was much less than the urban area (72.99 percent). The States with low female literacy rates are shown in the figure 32.2.

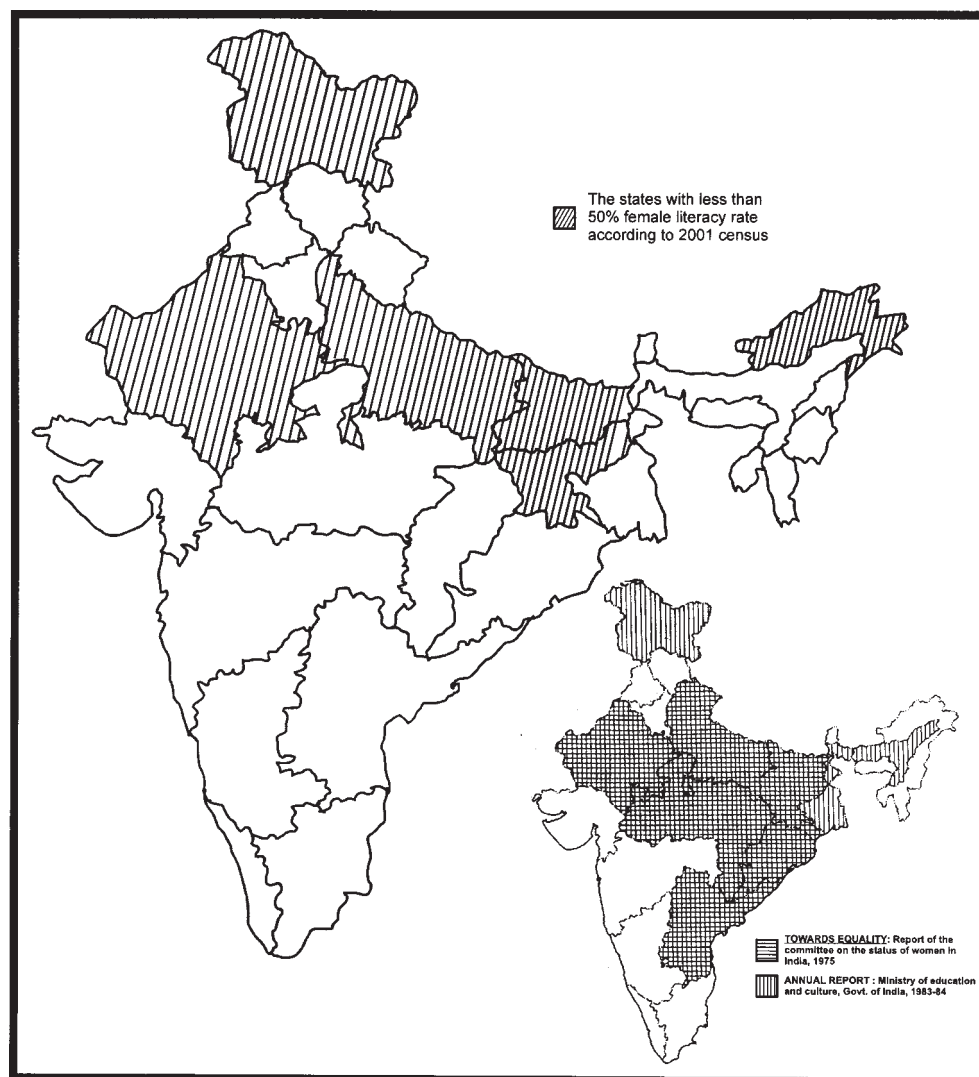


Fig. 32.2: States declared backward in women's education

iii) Enrolment

1981 census figures showed that 93.6 percent of the total population in the age group 6-11 years was in school. It is also observed that as all boys at this level were enrolled, universalisation was hindered by the lower participation of girls. It is also true when we look at later data. In the year 1997-98 while the rate of enrolment of the boys was almost cent percent, only 81.2 percent girls were enrolled at the primary level (*Annual Report*, Ministry of Human Resources 1999). However, it is necessary for us to view enrolment targets and figures somewhat critically from three points of view: first, under- and over-age children would account for about 20 percent of total enrolments, in a specific category, thus inflating the actual figure. Second, this set of official figures needs to be compared with the figure of almost 50 million children in the labour force. Even if it is accepted, for purposes of argument, that most working children were from the older age groups, where enrolments were lower, we cannot overlook the existence of a certain percentage of whole-time under-ten year old workers. It would thus be more realistic to keep in mind that actual attendance was in fact much lower. Names may figure on school registers without children ever attending school. Third, in 2005 it is possible that all girls in the 6-11 years age group would be enrolled in school. It is of

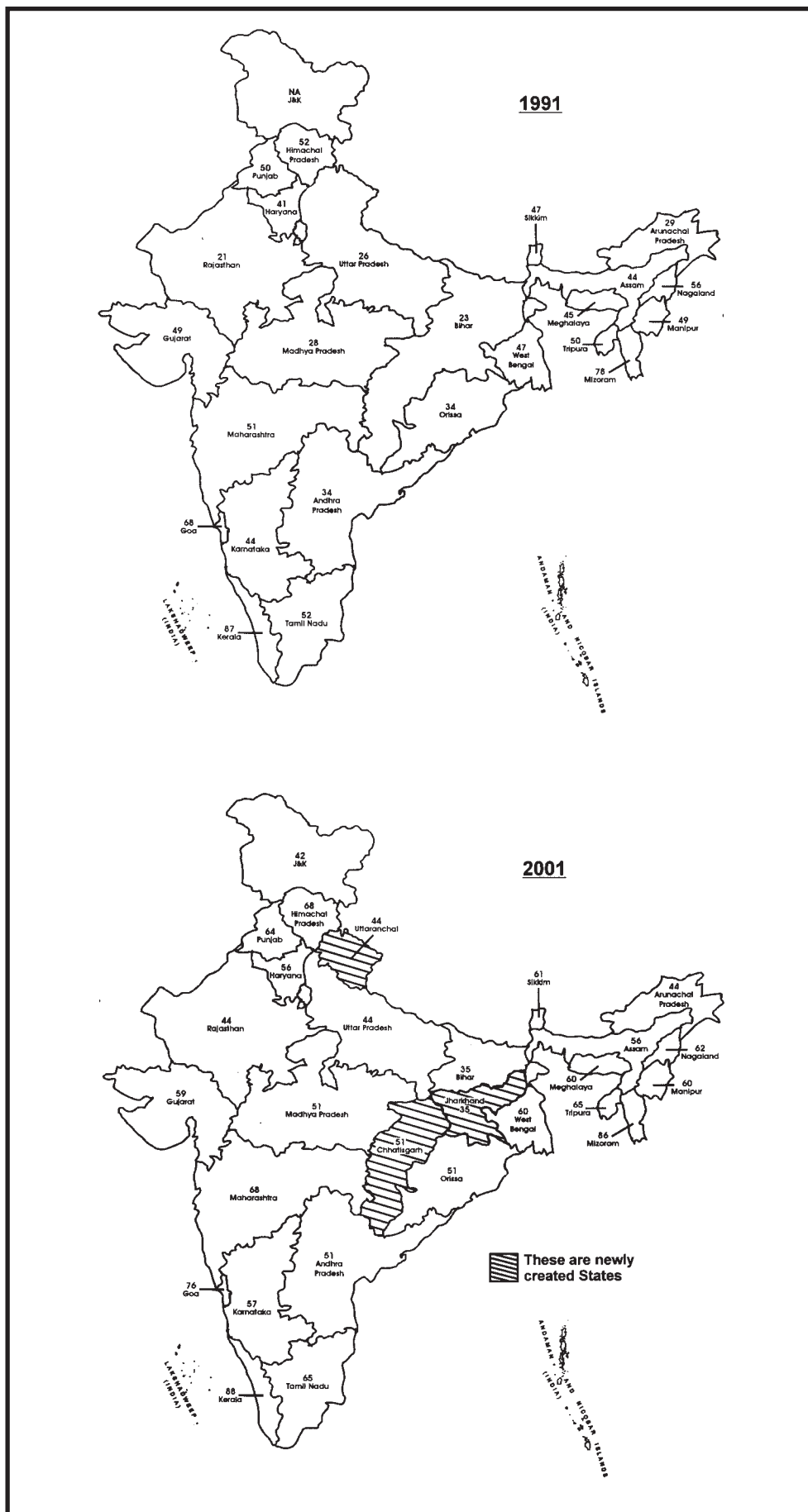


Fig. 32.3 Statewise percentage of female literacy

equal importance to see where these children are going to be in 2010 A.D. Are they still on the school rolls or are they back at work in the fields, homes or in various occupations? In the following sections we shall look at why girls either do not go to school or leave after a few years. Figure 32.3 shows the state wise percentage of female literacy rates in 1991 and 2001.

Check Your Progress 1

i) Write a short note in about four lines on the educational system of the pre-British and British period.

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ii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Tick mark T if it is true or F if it is false.

a) In 2001 the female literacy rate was lowest in Bihar. (True/False)

b) Women comprised only 25 percent of the illiterate population in the year 2001. (True/False)

32.3 FACTORS AFFECTING FEMALE ENROLMENT AND RETENTION

Though various efforts are made to improve girl’s enrolment and provide adult education for women, their enrolment in the educational institutions is much lower than that of men. The drop-out rates are significantly higher among the females. Factors affecting enrolment and retention of girls in the educational institutions are many. These can be categorised under three broad headings a) familial and social factors, b) limitations of the structure and delivery systems, and c) content and ideology of education. Before examining these factors in detail let us have a glance at the various aspects of these broad factors given below.

a) **Familial and Social Factors**

- i) Family traditions and early marriage
- ii) Purdah an social customs
- iii) Social and familial expectations
- iv) The high opportunity cost of education

b) **Limitations of Structures and Delivery System**

- i) Distance of school from homes
- ii) Inflexible school schedules

- iii) Absence of women teachers
 - iv) Absence of girls' schools
 - v) Insufficient number of teachers
 - vi) Insufficient incentives such as scholarships, mid-day meals, free books
 - vii) Insufficient facilities such as physical structures and equipment
 - viii) Inadequate childcare facilities.
- c) **Content and Ideology of Education**
- i) Teaching methods
 - ii) Biases among teachers and in textbooks and syllabi.

In the following three sub-sections of this unit we shall deal with these factors in detail.

32.3.1 Familial and Social Factors

In this sub-section, we shall discuss the major familial and social factors affecting women's education in general.

i) Family Traditions and Early Marriage

By and large, irrespective of socio-economic background, the notion of what it means to be a girl comes into conflict with the ideal of education. For their survival and unity families build on the nurturant and docile aspects of womanliness. These often run counter to a value system which stresses a certain degree of independence of thought, spirit of enquiry, learning by rote, and at a more mundane level, relating to peers and developing non-familial loyalties. While, as shall be seen later, middle class families strike a balance by allowing girls access to certain kinds of courses. Among the large majority, withdrawing a girl from the family's labour force to go to school is viewed as illogical and pointless. The distribution of functions within the household, or what is now known as the gender-based division of labour at home, allots a number of tasks to women and girls. It is seen to be a girl's inherent nature to tend and care for others and not waste time on self-oriented activities such as going to school or playing with friends.

Related to notions of femininity are traditions of early marriage, and *purdah* or the seclusion of women. The Child Marriage Restraint Act (popularly known as the Sarada Act) which was enacted in 1929 and enforced in 1930, fixed the minimum age of marriage for boys at 18 and for girls at 14. The Act was subsequently amended in 1949 and in 1956, raising the minimum age for girls to 18 and that of boys to 21. Yet, a study conducted in late 1980s by the Family Planning Foundation of India found that one crore girls below the age of 11 years were married. Rural women tended to be married by 15, and at a year later in the cities. According to the 1991 census among the currently married women 53.3 percent married below 18 years of age. And as per the National Family Health Survey (1993-94) almost 33 percent women were married by the age of 15.

On “Akha Teej”, annually over 50,000 children are married in Rajasthan, many of whom are mere babies. Other studies reported in newspapers from Belgaum district in Karnataka and Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh indicate that child marriages are common in those areas. According to official statistics, of the 4.5 million marriages that take place annually, at least 3 million brides are in the age group of 15-19 years, many of whom come from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. These are also the states where low educational enrolment of girls is coupled with high female and maternal mortality.

ii) *Purdah* and Social Customs

By and large, throughout the country, the time span between the onset of puberty and betrothal, if not marriage, is regarded as one of potential danger for sexually vulnerable girls. It is also a phase when girls first experience *purdah* or seclusion as well as restraints on activities within the home during menstruation. The link between a family’s *izzat* or honour and control of its women’s sexuality results in not only limits on physical activities but also taboos associated with purity and pollution such as regarding women as unclean at specific times. At the same time, girls have to be kept chaste and pure so as to be acceptable in the marriage market. Apart from affecting school enrolments, these constraints and values have led to the acceptance or internalisation of a negative self-image among girls. Such an attitude works counter to the school culture, which should ideally aim at developing healthy competition and a questioning mind.

iii) Social and Familial Expectations

Since the nineteenth century, in the West as well as India, whether girls should have access to the same body of knowledge or not has been an area of major ideological and **pedagogic** debate. In the post-Independence period all major Committees and Commissions have concluded that girls should have access to the same kind and extent of education as boys. Nonetheless, it is only a small minority of girls who are free to exercise choices in this vital area. A look at enrolments after class X indicate that girls tend to go into the Arts and Vocational Educational streams in large numbers. What is interesting is that given their results, a far greater number could study Science and Engineering. The fact that they do not is a direct reflection of familial expectations and an internalisation of these expectations. A similar pattern is repeated at the higher education level.

While girls comprise 24 to 50 per cent of those enrolled in higher education in 1981, there were 23 girls to 100 boys in Science courses, and only 6 to a 100 boys in Engineering and Technology courses. By the year 1998 while the percentage of girls who selected science stream for higher education was around 25 percent only, there was an improvement in the percentage of girls who selected engineering and technology courses for higher education. Thus, far fewer girls do, in fact, go in for Science and Technology than would be reasonable to expect from their school-leaving results. Clearly then there are important non-academic factors and situations which influence choices at the age of sixteen or seventeen. These are related to social and familial expectations of what a girl’s basic role in life is to be. In the majority of cases, it is assumed that she is to be a good wife and devoted mother, who may, if she has time,

work as a teacher or as a clerk. There seems little point in investing time and energy on a career in science and other related areas. Again, if it is a question of investment of scarce family resources, these are invariably spent on the technical education of a boy. Even if his sister has similar **aptitudes**, she more often than not, redirects them to traditional feminine-oriented courses. Underlying many of these decisions is, of course, a deep-seated conviction that a woman's basic nature equips her to perform better in certain areas than in others. Even when school results point to the contrary, families and indeed girls themselves choose to believe that there can be no true fulfillment in combining too many roles, or in competing to enter male-dominated disciplines. The percentage of faculty-wise enrolment for both men and women is given in the figure 32.4.

A survey of parents, conducted in a private co-educational school in New Delhi, found that 25 percent said that they would not discriminate in role distribution between sons and daughters. On the other hand, work outside the home such as fetching eggs and bread from the market, taking the dog for a walk or running an errand at the neighbours' were regarded as the boy's legitimate area of activity. Thus only 1 percent of the parents expected their sons to help in the kitchen, while 58 percent felt that this was a daughter's function. She was also expected to sweep the floor, dust furniture and wash the occasional dish in many more instances than was the case for a son. Another questionnaire (Parthasarathi 1988) circulated among 66 teachers (44 women and 22 men) indicated that "male teachers display a traditional expectation of role-behaviour from girls, whereas the women teachers believe in a definite personhood being given to girls and ascribe roles to girls that are incongruent

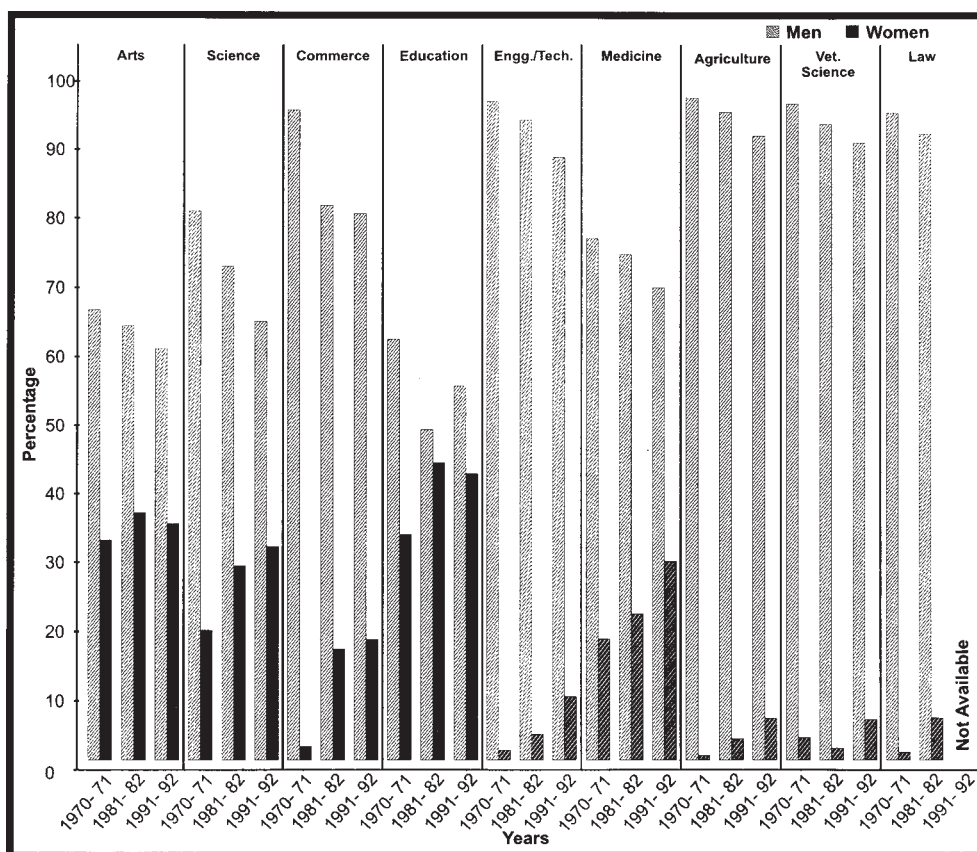


Figure 32.4 : Facultywise enrolment 1970-71 TO 1990-91

with our society's expectations". Interestingly, though teachers of both sexes expected girls to be good at studies, there was greater variance regarding their social role.

iv) High Opportunity Cost of Education

You have earlier read about the high opportunity cost of education. Most poor families do not consider it worthwhile to educate their children who can work at home or for a wage. It is clear from the figures on child labour that the existence of poor families is heavily dependent on the labour of children and of women. In such a situation, the returns on education, which normally means a few years of schooling, are low. Being in school means foregoing the opportunity to earn or help in the home, thereby releasing adults for productive activity. In a poverty situation, the cost of education in real terms are too high and schooling is seen as a poor investment, which provides no sure access to better employment.

One of the main areas involving the labour of girls is that of sibling care. While their brothers play marbles or go to school, young girls, either in the villages or in urban slums are initiated early into the maternal role. This releases mothers and older female kin for productive work both within the house and in the wider economy. At present, it is estimated that at least 4.5 crore children need childcare services. Yet, government sponsored schemes and those in the organised sector cover a mere 3 lakh children.

Most working girl children also are in the rural areas (see section 2.3 of unit 31 of this Block). It is estimated that almost half of the women's share in agricultural operations is covered by female child labour. In the Sivakasi match industry, of the 45,000 working children, at least 90 percent are girls below 14 years of age. Girl children work in large numbers in the coir industry in Kerala, and in the home-based production of incense and papads, beedi rolling, gem polishing, and in the making of paper bags, the stitching and embroidering of readymade garments and linen as well as in the assembling of electrical and electronic goods. Again, as is the case with adult women, girls are concentrated in more tiring, monotonous and time-consuming tasks (Burra 1989).

Activity 1

Interview 15 housewives from your neighbourhood. Ask each of them:

- i) age at her marriage
- ii) upto which class has she studied?
- iii) if a drop out, ask why she gave up school or college?

Based on the collected information write a note in about 20 lines stating the manner in which familial and social factors have affected these women's education. If possible, compare your notes with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

32.3.2 Limitations of Structures and Delivery Systems

Women's education has been affected by various non-familial factors, especially by the structure and the delivery system of education. By delivery system we mean availability of education to the population. Let us examine these factors in detail.

- i) **Distance of School from Homes:** In a situation where families impose restrictions on girls, particularly after a certain age, easy accessibility to a school is essential to ensure at least a few years' of schooling. Well over 90 percent of the population have access to primary school within a kilometre of the habitation. Yet, the Fifth All-India Educational Survey published in 1989 showed that 32,000 habitations with a population of 300 or more had yet to be provided with primary schools. This figure accounted for 6 percent of habitations with a population of 300 or more. At the time of Sixth All India Educational Survey the rate of habitations having 300 or more population not served by primary school increased slightly to 6.97 percent. As per the government policy, a habitation should have a minimum population of 300 for opening a primary school. The Sixth All India Educational Survey (1997) shows that there were 5,80,590 habitations with a population of 300 or more out of which 93.03 percent habitations have access to primary school facility upto a distance of one kilometre. Out of 6.97 percent (40467) habitations which do not have primary school facility within one kilometre, 2.09 percent did not even have upto two kilometres.
- ii) **Inflexible School Schedules:** The existence of daily as well as yearly school time tables which do not take into account the work patterns of households deter the participation of children. It is interesting that though the demand for a more environmentally sensitive school-schedule was mooted first by the Hartog Committee (1929) and has been mentioned often by other Committees and Commissions, the issue has not been given adequate time or thought.
- iii) **Absence of Women Teachers:** That the education of girls is substantially dependent on whether they are taught by women or not, has, over the years, been clearly established. From 1983 onwards the Government of India has sponsored a new scheme for financial assistance to encourage the appointment of women teachers in the nine educationally backward states. Yet the supply of women teachers continues to be inadequate for the country's requirement. Despite the fact that teaching is a preferred option for a majority of the middle class working women, only 26 percent of primary school teachers were women in 1981. Interestingly at the middle and secondary school levels, the figure had risen from 15 percent in 1951 to 30 percent in 1981. In 1991 there were only 29 percent women teachers at the primary school level and 33 percent at the middle school and 32 percent at the secondary school level. In 2001 while there was an improvement in the rate of women teachers at the primary and middle level (35 percent and 38 percent respectively), there was no difference at the secondary level (*Annual Repot*, Ministry of Human Resources 2002-03).
- iv) **Absence of Girls' Schools:** The issue of co-education versus single sex schools involves certain specific pedagogic principles and points of view. In the Indian context among certain social categories and in parts of the country co-education at any level is unacceptable, and affects girls' enrolment adversely. Though the financial viability of co-educational institutions is undoubtedly much higher than running several single sex institutions with low rates of enrolment, by and large, the present situation

demands segregation as a pre-condition for the mass schooling of girls. Yet, some figures show that the ratio of such institutions to all institutions is only about 10 to 15 percent, when the overall enrolment of girls is approximately 35 percent.

- v) **Insufficient Number of Teachers:** Under the Operation Blackboard (National Policy of Education, 1986) it was stipulated that in primary schools, “at least two teachers, one of whom a woman, should work in every school, the number increasing as early as possible to one teacher per class”. Figures from the Fifth All-India Educational Survey indicate that 2,628 schools in the country have no teachers; fifty per cent of these institutions were in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. It is possible that teachers were absent on the day of the Survey; nonetheless, the time lag involved in transfer as well as situations where teachers are unwilling to take up postings in remote areas need to be taken into account. Further, 23.91 percent schools have only one teacher, and most of these are in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Meghalaya and Rajasthan. According to the Sixth All India Educational Survey out of the 5,70,455 primary schools in the country 20.12 percent are single teacher schools and another 0.77 percent do not have any teacher at all. There is a decrease in the percentage of single teacher schools since Fifth Survey. The National Educational Policy of 1986 envisaged that each primary school should be provided with two teachers under the Operation Black Board scheme. The aforesaid decrease may be due to the impact of this scheme. The problems of zero teacher and single teacher school are acute in rural areas. There are more than one third of primary schools in Andhra Pradesh (33.49 percent), Arunachal Pradesh (45.46 percent), Jammu and Kashmir (35.26 percent), Meghalaya (37.13 percent) are single teacher schools. Dependence on one individual means that in the event of his or her illness, absence or even transfer, children are left on their own. Again, in such situations parents would be reluctant to expose their daughters to a potentially ‘unprotected’ environment.
- vi) **Insufficient Incentives such as Scholarships, Mid-day Meals, Free Books:** The midday meal scheme which has been introduced in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa has succeeded in attracting children to school, as well as keeping them on for more years. It is also in these states that the scholarships and free books schemes have been encouraged. As per the Sixth All India Educational Survey, out of the 8,22,486 schools in the country 14.39 percent has provisions for midday meals. And 52.60 percent provide free book facility. Nonetheless, delivery systems are not free from snags. A study of Scheduled Caste children, in 1980s, in the Ballia and Azamgarh districts of Uttar Pradesh found that as supplies of stationery and freeships rarely arrived on time, parents did not have the resources to support their children in the interim period. Further, small fees had to be paid to the teaching staff for transfer and pass certificates known as pass *karahi* fees. In Maharashtra where schooling has been made free for girls, teachers have reported two kinds of responses: while the principal of a rural school in Dhulia district said that enrolments had doubled with free education, the experience from a suburban Bombay school was less positive. Boys now teased girls as being inferior, and similar to the Scheduled Castes, who,

they said, basically studied *phukat* or without paying fees. This negative attitude in a previously more or less egalitarian atmosphere resulted in girls becoming withdrawn and resentful. In both cases the Principals reported that they had discussed at length with their teachers strategies to cope with a not unexpected situation. (based on interaction with school teachers and Principals)

- vii) Insufficient Facilities such as Physical Structures and Equipment:** Over 90 percent of educational expenditure go to the salaries of teaching and other administrative staff. Consequently, very little is left for buildings and equipment. The Fifth All-India Educational Survey points out that 13.50 percent (71,495) primary schools in the country are without buildings and operated out of thatched huts, tents and open spaces. And this has increased to 14.18 percent at the time of Sixth All India Educational Survey. Another 7.69 percent have no classroom and almost 40 percent have only one classroom. An earlier document showed out that almost 40 percent schools have no blackboards and 54.72 percent have no drinking water. The Sixth All India Educational Survey states that 63.08 percent schools do not have adequate number of class rooms. And 25 percent schools have no black board and 52.59 percent have no drinking water facility.
- viii) Inadequate Childcare Facilities:** Studies have shown that school enrolments go up when facilities for childcare are available in or near primary schools. Children, in particular girls, can then sit in class knowing that their younger siblings are being taken-care of. However, as we have seen, childcare facilities are very inadequate, and despite recommendations from individuals, groups and committees, the State has yet to take the issue of child minding seriously.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Mention five limitations of structures and delivery systems affecting women’s education.
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- ii) Write a note on the opportunity cost of education for a girl child of a poor family. Use about seven lines to answer.
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32.3.3 Content and Ideology of Education

The content and ideology of education has also contributed enormously towards the low educational status of women. In this section we shall be discussing how the teaching methods and sex biases in text book, which form the basis of the content and ideology of education, have affected the educational status of women in India.

i) Teaching Methods

The institution of the school is based on specific norms regarding age at enrolment, sequential promotion on the basis of examinations, teaching from prescribed textbooks within a certain time period and a policy of punishment and reward. These norms assume a certain level of receptivity, awareness and judgment within an age cohort or age group. In most cases, as educational planners and administrators as well as authors of text-books have been and continue to be from middle class urban backgrounds, their assumptions are based on the experience of children from the same environment. In India, where a majority of schools and pupils are in the rural areas, the validity of these premises needs to be re-examined. A lack of imagination and initiative in teaching methods is usually combined with a rigid admissions policy. The single-point entry system which permits entry into school only at class I and by a certain age is generally followed in India. In this context, debarring a child merely because he or she is over-aged keeps potential students away from school.

Due to the factors discussed earlier, a number of those who left out are often girls. At the same time, it is true that a 9 year old tribal girl would possibly find it difficult to relate to 6 and 7 year olds in class II. Her sense of **alienation** and feeling different may mean that she would leave school within a few months. The problem can in part be solved by the introduction of multiple-point entries at different ages in specially based on primary schools where teaching is based on using innovative techniques for those with a greater degree of maturity.

ii) Biases Among Teachers, in Text Books and in Syllabi

We find that teacher assessments can be influenced by variables such as caste, class and religious background, as well as sex of the child. Quite apart from the inherent injustice of categorising a child as a low achiever merely because he or she wears torn clothes or is unable to pronounce words with the correct intonation, there is the equally important issue of how the boy or girl reacts to such a situation. It is not unlikely that the 10 year old girl who leaves school to look after her younger brother often does so unwillingly. Her inability to relate to textbooks, which talk about unfamiliar situations in an alien dialect, heightens her sense of inferiority. She feels more at home gathering firewood, chatting to her mother about known experiences and characters and doing jobs she has grown up with. For this young girl the situation is compounded by the fact that textbooks and indeed teachers perpetuate ideas about a woman's basically dependent and inferior status. In so doing the school merely reinforces common familial attitudes towards a girl's, and later woman's role in life. These are particularly relevant

when they influence decisions on subject and career choices of that small minority of girls who qualify to go in for higher education.

Textbook writing often reflects a middle class, urban, male viewpoint. This comes through in the style of writing, choice of subjects and stories. Awareness among textbook writers could result in material, which is sensitive to girls and their dilemmas in a stratified society. We find that irrespective of whether a child studied English or Mathematics, the text can convey ideas on gender equality and justice.

Textbook revision and in-service orientation programmes for teachers have been initiated in several parts of the country, with a view to understanding the issues in girls' education better. Nonetheless, these constructive measures have to contend with a basically conservative teaching force and problems associated with large-scale syllabi and textbook reforms. In addition teachers and educational administrators have genuine problems relating to finishing unwieldy courses within an inflexible time schedule. This results in a somewhat single-minded and unimaginative focus on the content of books encouraging learning by rote.

Activity 2

Interview 15 girls from your locality. Enquire about the major problems faced by them in continuing their studies.

Classify these problems in terms of the familial and social factors, limitations of structure and delivery systems and content and ideology of education. Now write a note on the factors affecting girls' education in contemporary society based on your findings. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

32.4 WOMEN'S EDUCATION THROUGH NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMME

An awareness that the formal school system alone can not solve the problem of illiteracy led to an early expansion of the non-formal education programme. In addition, the need to reach out to adult illiterates with relevant learning schemes was also recognised. The target groups of non-formal education are those children who have to work either for a living or within the home. The underlying assumption of the programme is that when not at work, with the right type of encouragement, children will find their way to functional literacy and non-formal education classes. Though there have not been enough follow-up studies on the impact of non-formal education on girls, there are sufficient indications that this scheme, like all those affecting children who have to combine productive work with other roles, will suffer until the issue of childcare facilities is solved.

- i) **The National Adult Education Programme:** The National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) was launched by the Janata Government in 1978 with the aim of bringing those in the age groups of 15 to 35

years within the ambit of literacy within the next five years. In the Sixth Five Year Plan, adult education was included as a part of the Minimum Needs Programme and the National Literacy Mission (NLM, 1988) in the beginning has aimed at the eradication of illiteracy in the 15-35 year age group by 1995. When they couldn't reach the objective by the targeted time, they further extended the target. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the goal of National Literacy Mission is to attain full literacy, i.e., a sustainable threshold of 75 percent by 2007 by imparting functional literacy to non-literates in 15-35 years. Out of the 600 districts in the country, 587 districts have been covered by the National Literacy Mission under the literacy programmes. Its focus is to be on women and backward communities living primarily in the rural areas. About 60 percent of participants or beneficiaries are women. These targets continue to be out of tune with reality. Nonetheless, there are indications that well-run programmes may well benefit entire families.

- ii) **Few Evidences of Change:** An extensive study in a backward part of Andhra Pradesh shows that an integrated programme of education with basic maternal and child health and nutritional services resulted in a high degree of awareness and receptiveness to modern health practices. Follow up studies on programmes built around women in various stages of pregnancy and early childhood showed that knowledge on nutrition, health and general development through the Mother Child Centres (MCCs) and Functional Literacy Classes (FLITs) has increased considerably. The minor ailments were dealt with more competently and dietary practices of both pregnant women as well as infants appeared to have been influenced by government-run programmes. What is important is receptivity to change.

Organisers of income generating schemes for rural women in Punjab reported that some familiarity with numeracy helps in learning simple counting exercises. While calculating aggregates for a number of days at a time was difficult, women easily learned how to compute their daily earnings. This helped them in dealing with exploitative middlemen as well as with family members who were interested in appropriating most of their earnings. Various alternatives for the advancement of women's educational status is shown in figure 32.5.

- iii) **Alternative Schemes:** We find that a major criticism against the adult education programmes for women is that they reflect by and large a middle class world view and rarely take into account the vital role of their client groups in income generation and other productive activities. Such programmes stress the role of home-maker and provide training in conventional areas such as health, nutrition, childcare, home economics, sewing, embroidery and so on. While these are undoubtedly important, it is equally relevant to train such women - most of whom are earners - on how to increase productivity as well as provide information on alternative channels of employment and create awareness of their rights as workers.



Figure 32.5: Women and educational development

These are also areas where non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) have provided alternative models and schemes. Two case studies of the *Kasturba Vanvasi Kanya Ashram* (KVKA) in Madhya Pradesh and the *Kumaon Mahila Utthan Mandal* (KMUM) in Kausani, Uttar Pradesh, indicate that community participation helps in keeping little girls in the educational system. Both are Gandhian organisations, and in Madhya Pradesh the Ashram is the focal point. Attraction to the Ashram led in turn to an involvement with the school, which was perceived as “a place which provides the necessary strength to the members of their families in coping with local pressures”. The centre in Kumaon functions more informally providing *balwadi* services to pre-school children and non-formal programmes for older girls with “little access to primary schools in the hilly areas”. All the staff are local persons, and “the daily routine is close to home life – not too ‘schoolish’ whether it is ‘living’ or food or other aspects”. Both organisations are successful because of community involvement with a **curriculum**, which is relevant and at the same time provides “linkages with mainstream education” (Based on newspaper reports).

i) How 'single point entry' policy affects girls education? Answer in about five lines.

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ii) What is the main objective of the National Adult Education Programme? Use three lines to answer.

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iii) Write a note on the alternative models or schemes of women's education in India in about six lines.

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32.5 LET US SUM UP

We find that within the broader theme of equality of educational opportunity, women and girls' education needs special attention. In this unit, we have discussed that the social environment, attitudes towards women and more specifically, familial expectations limit the nature and extent of girls' education. We have looked at some of the factors responsible for such a situation and at the inter-linkages between the State, society and the individual. You would also have noted growing disillusionment with the existing system; that alternatives are being thought about outside the formal structure is indicative of the desire for change and positive action. It is important to note that such action can easily fall into established patterns of inequality. Educational reform can be meaningful when concerned individuals and organisations work towards influencing attitudes by demonstrating the possibilities of alternatives. Hence, besides analysing the content and ideology of contemporary education, we have also discussed alternatives to the contemporary system.

32.6 KEY WORDS

Alienation	The inability of an individual (or group) to relate to an environment, workplace or even family situation. This is due to situational factors or the individual/group's own misgivings, hesitations and perhaps failures or a combination of both.
Aptitude	To have tendency or flare in a particular area. For instance, pupils are put into different streams (Arts, Science) on the basis of their aptitudes, which are reflected in their examination results.
Curriculum	Course of study; extra and co-curricular activities such as games, music, theatre, when these are not a part of the formal curriculum
Ideology	The beliefs, attitudes, opinions that guide and direct a system, political party, group, family or individual
Literacy	It is defined as the acquisition of the basic skills of reading and writing, through the formal school system or non-formal learning.
Pedagogy	Methods of teaching particularly through the formal system of education

32.7 FURTHER READING

Chanana, Karuna (ed) 1988. *Socialisation, Education and Women*. Orient Longman: New Delhi.

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Deem, Rosemary 1978. *Women and Schooling*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London.

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Indiresan, Jaya 2002. *Education for Women's empowerment: Gender Positive Initiatives in Pace Setting Women's Colleges*. Konark: New Delhi

Karlekar, Malavika 1983. "Education and Inequality" in Andre Beteille (ed) *Equality and Inequality: Theory and Practice*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi.

Shukla, Suresh Chandra and Krishna Kumar, 1985. *Sociological Perspective in Education*. Chanakya: New Delhi.

32.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) During the pre-British era, education was linked to the socio-religious institutions, reinforcing an oppressive and limiting social structure. During the British period, education became a tool of colonial power, enabling a small minority to have access to education and all the benefits it entailed.
- ii) a) True b) False

Check Your Progress 2

- i)
 - a) Inflexible school schedules
 - b) Absence of women teachers
 - c) Absence of girl's school
 - d) Distance of school from home
 - e) Insufficient number of teachers
- ii) The existence of the poor families is heavily dependent on the labour of children and of women. In such a situation, the returns on education, which normally means a few years of schooling, are low. Being in the school means forgoing the opportunity to earn or to help the family, thereby releasing adults for productive activity. In a poverty situation, the cost of education in real terms is too high and schooling is seen as a poor investment, which provides no sure access to better employment.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) In India, a vast majority of the schools and pupils are in the rural areas. The single point entry system permits entry into school only at class I and by a certain age. In this context, debarring a child because he or she is over-age, keeps potential students away from school. Hence, the majority of those left-outs are often girls.
- ii) It was launched by the Janata Government in 1978 with the aim of bringing those in the age groups of 15 to 35 years within the ambit of literacy within the next five years.
- iii) Non-governmental organisations and voluntary agencies have provided alternative models and schemes. These indicate that community participation helps in keeping little girls in the educational system. The community participation led to an involvement with the school that was seen as a place, which provides the necessary strength to the members of their families in coping with local pressures.