There have been plenty of policy recommendations and interventions to increase the pool of women teachers in India, especially at the school level. Despite this, research in three districts of Rajasthan shows that any such attempt would need an integrated and organic approach that builds bridges across the secondary, collegiate, and teacher-training levels. The paper points out that what is needed is a definite break from past practice to creatively re-conceptualise the education continuum, while putting forward some recommendations to lower barriers in the way of secondary education for girls in the state.

This article, based on qualitative research in three districts of Rajasthan, explores the cumulative impact of the spiral of fewer women teachers and low enrolment of girls in school. The criteria for selection of the field sample were districts with a high concentration of Scheduled Castes (sc), Scheduled Tribes (st) and Muslims in the population; urban and rural representation; and the presence of teacher-training institutions.

There has been no dearth of policy recommendations or specific interventions to advance and increase the pool of women teachers, especially at the school level. No doubt, this concern has always been entwined with the larger national goals and discourse on development of modern education in India, a significant part of which involves promoting education among women and girls. A focus and thrust on women teachers is not recent; it has been central to much of the educational discourse from the 19th century. In a traditional society such as India where barriers to educating girls in the public domain were circumscribed by caste and religious restrictions, it was not surprising that spaces for training women as teachers opened up fairly early on. Successive five year plans and commissions made recommendations on the issue of female education and the need to create conditions conducive to increasing the numbers of women teachers. The significance of women teachers was also foregrounded in efforts to universalise primary and subsequently elementary education from the early 1990s. As a result, many state governments introduced reservations, in some cases up to 50%, for women in teacher recruitment policies.

Notwithstanding these measures, in Rajasthan the percentage of women teachers is far below the national average and it varies from district to district. At the secondary level, the percentage of women teachers across the state is 19% (UDISE 2011–12). The percentage of women teachers dips to below 9% in educationally backward districts and those that are sparsely populated such as Jaisalmer, Jalore, and Barmer; while it is more than 40% in Kota, Sri Ganganagar, and Bikaner—districts where education of women has been fairly good for more than five decades now. Low participation of women in secondary and higher education leads to shortage of women teachers in secondary schools. Acute shortage of women teachers in secondary schools works as a barrier to girls’ participation in areas where traditional practices continue and where women’s safety is a real problem. The situation does not only vary across districts, but also among different social groups, leading to stark differences among different communities.

This article, based on qualitative research in three districts of Rajasthan, explores the cumulative impact of the spiral of fewer women teachers and low enrolment of girls in school.

The criteria for selection of the field sample were districts with a high concentration of Scheduled Castes (sc), Scheduled Tribes (st) and Muslims in the population; urban and rural representation; and the presence of teacher-training institutions.
and women teachers at the secondary level, higher than the state average, closer to the state average, and lower than the state average. Accordingly, the three sample districts selected were Baran (poor, high ST population); Barmer (geographical and developmental disadvantage and high SC population), and Ajmer (high urban Muslim population). In each district, two blocks were selected, one closer to the district headquarters and another in a remote location. The research study covered six blocks across three districts, six secondary/higher secondary schools (four for only girls), six government and private undergraduate colleges (three for only girls), and six government and private BEd colleges (one for only girls).

The research tools and methodology included a review of the secondary literature and data, as well as a set of tools for conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). In-depth interviews were held with state- and district-level education department officials, and principals of the sample and and undergraduate colleges and with head teachers of the sample secondary and higher secondary schools. Semi-structured interviews were held with teachers at the collegiate and school levels. Focus group discussions were held with girl students in the sample BEd and undergraduate colleges and in the sample secondary and higher secondary schools; and at the community level, with parents of girls who dropped out at the secondary level.

The gross enrolment ratios (GER) along the educational continuum, nationally and in Rajasthan, highlight both gender and social gaps quite clearly. Table 1 shows that in Rajasthan, as we move from primary (classes 1–5) to higher education, the gender and social gap and dropout rates at each successive level become more significant. As it shows, while the GER at the upper primary and secondary levels indicate a significant drop, there is sharper drop in GER for girls at the higher education level—14.9%. The lowest higher education GER is for SC girls at 8.5, followed by ST girls at 10.3. This is not surprising because the share of student enrolment in higher education across all marginalised groups in Rajasthan is less than their proportionate share in the population, which is indicative of the continued persistence of educational backwardness among these communities.

The situation in the sample districts, for instance, presents a similar picture where the gaps in transition to the next higher level of education become sharper. This is true for girls in general, particularly across marginalised social groups like SCs and STs. In Barmer District, in 2012–13, the total enrolment of girls at the secondary and higher secondary levels was 33.16% and 29.22%. The situation of girls from marginalised communities is a matter of grave concern with enrolment of SC and ST girls at 13.28% and 1.16% at the secondary level, and 11% and 0.79% at the higher secondary level. Disparities are reflected not only in enrolment but also at the faculty and staff levels. In Rajasthan, compared to men, women are considerably under-represented among faculty and staff in both secondary and at higher education institutions and this deficit is higher for all marginalised social groups.

The reduced number of women as one goes up the education ladder is not surprisingly reflected in the number of women teachers available at the secondary level, and this remains an important concern in Rajasthan. Overall, the number of women teachers at the secondary and higher secondary levels (all managements) was 22% and 25% respectively. In 2011–12, this improved marginally to 28.9% and 29.3%.3 As Table 2 shows, the rural–urban divide is sharp. In the sample districts, except for Ajmer, which has a significantly higher percentage or proportion of women teachers, the situation in backward districts such as Barmer and Baran is poor. The higher percentages of women teachers at the higher secondary level are also because these schools are generally located in urban and semi-urban areas where road connectivity and transport are not a problem. Further, the higher presence of women teachers in Ajmer District can be explained by that access to higher education is much better there. Ajmer is one of the seven districts in Rajasthan with a high concentration of higher education institutions.4 It has 18 BEd colleges against three in Baran and four in Barmer.

Gaps between social classes, as much as between genders, stand out when gender is intersected with social category. In Rajasthan, at the secondary school level, only 7.7% are SC and 4.8% are ST women teachers, and at the higher secondary level, only 7.44% and 3.73% are SC and ST women teachers respectively. It may be pertinent to point out that the low representation of SC and ST women teachers is mirrored in the case of SC and ST men as well.

The reasons for this deficit in the representation of marginalised communities, which is further exacerbated in the case of women, are not hard to see. Basant and Sen (2010: 69) make a strong argument for locating the issues of secondary education in the ambit of any strategy looking to enhance participation in higher education. They argue,

Once persons from underprivileged groups cross the school threshold, the chances of their going to colleges are quite high. Clearly, the constraints on school education must first be fully understood and dealt with so as to enhance participation in higher education. Therefore, even while dealing with the issue of participation, should the higher education policy also focus on ensuring that the threshold (schooling) is crossed?

Quite clearly, any attempt to increase the pool of women teachers would need to have an integrated and organic approach

### Table 1: Gross Enrolment Ratio in Rajasthan, 2010–11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Boys Total</th>
<th>Girls Total</th>
<th>Boys Total</th>
<th>Girls Total</th>
<th>Boys Total</th>
<th>Girls Total</th>
<th>Boys Total</th>
<th>Girls Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>110.3</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>109.9</td>
<td>123.3</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>123.6</td>
<td>135.8</td>
<td>127.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–8</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9–10</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–12</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SES GoR 2010–11; higher education data from All India Survey of Higher Education, 2013.

### Table 2: Women Teachers at the Secondary Level in Government Schools in Sample Districts, 2011–12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Percentage of Women</th>
<th>Secondary Level</th>
<th>Higher Secondary Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ajmer</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baran</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barmer</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Shiksha ki Pragati, Board of Secondary Education, Rajasthan, 2011–12.
that builds bridges across secondary, collegiate, and teacher-training levels. In the current context, each of these education levels are discrete and self-contained silos. What is needed is a definite break from such practice to creatively re-conceptualise the education continuum. This is a tall order and one is not sure that the government and educational bureaucracy are ready for even a dialogue on thinking out of the box.

**School Teaching as a Career Option for Women**

The PGCs in all the three districts with girl students and women teachers in secondary schools, undergraduate colleges, and BEd colleges provided the uniform feedback that teaching, especially in schools, is not a popular or preferred choice. The exception was the feedback from tribal girls in a rural secondary school in Baran District for whom school teaching as a career held some attraction because of the very limited employment options available. Teaching at the school level, elementary or secondary, is seen as a low-prestige job, and a default option if other avenues, such as the civil services, are closed. Most women became schoolteachers as they felt they could combine their family responsibility with employment. Families also actively support teaching as a career option for women, especially after marriage. One needs to be cautious in applauding this apparent shift in societal attitudes towards women and employment. Growing aspirations for changes in lifestyles require a second income and, therefore, families now want their women to work as long as it is within the patriarchal framework where responsibility towards the family predominates. And this balance can be easily maintained if they become schooleachers.

**Gendering of Subject/Stream Specialisations**

One of the key issues explored is the possible feminisation of subject specialisation and its implications for the future availability of women teachers in certain subjects. Currently there is a paucity of women maths and science teachers. Girls, especially from marginalised communities, have limited access to science and maths education because most government girls’ schools to which most of them go do not offer these subjects. Further, social perceptions show that maths, in particular, is seen as beyond the inherent capabilities of girls. This deficit in maths and science girl students continues into the college and BEd level and, as a result, very few women science and maths teachers are available.

Nationally, as in Rajasthan, there seem to be growing disparities in enrolment in different academic streams in higher education. Except in the arts stream, in Rajasthan, enrolments are significantly lower in the science and commerce streams than the national averages. Table 3 highlights the skewed distribution of women teachers in maths and science at the secondary level in the sample districts. The situation as far as women maths teachers are concerned is very grave in the backward districts of Baran and Barmer. To understand the roots of this gender imbalance by subject stream among teachers, and the poor representation of women in teaching at the secondary level, it is important to trace the story back to the situation at the secondary and collegiate levels.

**Issues in Access and Participation**

In Rajasthan, where there are no aided institutions, the government remains a significant provider of secondary and higher secondary education. In 2010–11, 51.81% of secondary schools and 37.16% higher secondary schools were government schools (Government of Rajasthan 2011–12). Access, however, remains a major challenge in some difficult areas such as Barmer where the distribution of schools is in favour of urban and peri-urban areas. In Rajasthan, by and large, higher secondary schools are known as boys’ schools (the term “boys’ school” is used for a co-ed school). Boys’ school is a misnomer because girls are admitted either if higher secondary school for only girls is not accessible or girls want to pursue specific subjects such as science/maths that are offered only in boys’ schools.

The number of girls-only secondary schools is very limited in the state as a whole and this was evident in the sample districts as well. In 2011–12, for instance, there were only 557 girls’ only secondary schools against 15,150 for boys in the state. At the higher secondary level, there were 779 girls-only schools against 7,741 boys’ schools. As Table 4 shows, the situation in the sample districts is even more skewed with girls-only secondary schools being as few as five in Barmer District. This issue merits particular attention, especially in a state such as Rajasthan where girls’ education is challenged and obstructed by a traditional society that generally has a not-so-positive view of girls and women.

Discussions with education officials during fieldwork were revealing. We were informed that “authorities are no longer thinking of separate schools for boys and girls. We are moving in the direction of co-education to foster a change in mindset.”5 The assumption seems to be that over the past two decades, the whole gamut of gender issues in the elementary sector, including community awareness, access, textbook renewal, teacher sensitisation, and so on have been effectively addressed by achieving gender parity at the elementary level. Hence, at the secondary level, co-education is not a problem.

**Table 3: Percentage of Women Maths and Science Teachers at the Secondary Level in Sample Districts, 2010–11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>All Women Teachers</th>
<th>Women Maths Teachers</th>
<th>Women Science Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ajmer</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>12.89</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baran</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barmer</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table 4: Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools in Sample Districts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>15,150</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>7,741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajmer</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barmer*</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(336 government, 109 private)</td>
<td>(3 government, 2 private)</td>
<td>(72 government and 53 private)</td>
<td>12 (all government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baran</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Globally, co-education is being advocated as the direction in which school education needs to move. Even India seems to have accepted this position fairly uncritically.

This perspective seems to be short-sighted and fully overlooks persistent social and community-specific barriers to girls’ education. The rural co-education senior secondary school in Barmer had only 18 girls against 451 boys enrolled.8 Later in this paper we discuss the views of various groups on the extent to which co-education, especially at the secondary level, is viable or desirable and the possible adverse effects it may have on girls’ participation in secondary education. This also influences higher education and employment opportunities.

Gaps in secondary schooling access, especially among girls, are mirrored at the higher education level as well. An analysis of higher education institutions done by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in 2008 highlighted the uneven distribution and showed the concentration of higher education institutions in just seven of 32 districts in Rajasthan (Sikar, Kota, Ajmer, Dausa, Sri Ganganagar, Jaipur, and Jhunjhunu). Further, the concentration in urban and peri-urban areas exacerbates access for poor and marginalised girls in particular.

Teacher education and training in Rajasthan is mainly in the private sector with the government running very few colleges, most of which are again concentrated in urban areas and in a few districts. In the three sample districts, the variation is vast with 18 BEd colleges in Ajmer District and Baran and Barmer having just three and four respectively. The number of seats in teacher education institutions and their distribution across subjects are fixed, with girls-only colleges having 100 seats and co-ed colleges 125 seats. The stream-wise allocation of seats in favour of arts subjects (70 against 20 for commerce and 10 for science) is a clear reflection of the subjects that get offered at the secondary level.

**Limited Access to Science Education**

At the higher secondary school level, there is poor access to science education as the number of girls-only schools in Rajasthan is limited and those offering the science stream are few. The consequent feminisation of subjects at the secondary level is only now being recognised. The lack of women teachers has an effect on educational choices for girls, a situation being reported in other parts of the country as well.7 Girls’ schools often are known to offer only humanities and language courses, reflecting, in some senses, the gendered mindset of the education system.

Baran and Ajmer districts provide a clear picture of skewed access between boys and girls. In Baran, the number of schools offering science is limited both in government and private schools. Only nine girls-only government schools against 31 co-ed government secondary schools offer the science stream. The sharp disparity is evident in private schools as well, where only five girls’ secondary schools against 57 boys’ schools offer science. In Ajmer, nine girls’ government secondary schools against 31 for boys, and seven private girls’ schools against 57 for boys, offer the science stream.

Very few students from marginalised groups actually study science or maths at the higher secondary level. Very few girls (including from forward castes) pursue maths and science and the numbers are minuscule among the marginalised groups. As reported in the RGDS, the science option is seen as an expensive one as there are costs to be incurred on tuition and laboratory fees. Families are unwilling to incur these costs for girls.

Not surprisingly, the pattern of subjects opted for by students at the undergraduate and later BEd level is similar to what is chosen at the secondary level. At the college and BEd college level, choices are also circumscribed by the subject streams offered. In Ajmer and Baran, for instance, the undergraduate colleges for girls in the rural blocks offered only arts subjects.

Analysing the situation of women teachers at the secondary level, what comes to the fore is the poor participation, completion rates, and transition to the next higher level of education among girls from marginalised communities. Besides class and caste divides, addressing the gender subtext that underpins all aspects of girls’ and women’s lives is challenging. The manner in which this gender bias plays out is clearly evident in the decisions to choose specific subjects at secondary level that do not question the accepted stereotypical roles for women, where family comes before anything else. This aspect also influences the decisions that women teachers take regarding their career prospects and advancement. Often they defer or, in most cases, reject any career advancement if it disturbs their family situation.

**Key Challenges**

There are no expressly stated systemic barriers faced by women and women from marginalised communities in becoming secondary-level teachers. Despite the host of incentives and reservations in admissions at the collegiate level available for girls, the cumulative burden of poor quality education in government schools starting from the elementary cycle contributes to poor achievement and performance at the secondary level, resulting in very low participation in higher education, and low success in qualifying examinations. This finally results in very small numbers of women, especially from the marginalised communities, who actually go on to become secondary-level teachers.

The long road of nearly six years after completing secondary schooling to acquire undergraduate degree or postgraduate degree, a teacher training certificate and then clearing the state competitive recruitment examinations to become a secondary-level teacher is most often a daunting task. More so for marginalised girls, who often do not have the resources or support to undertake this journey.

The lack of women teachers at the tertiary level can be traced back to the issue of girls’ participation and completion of secondary education. The number of women science and maths teachers is worrisomely low. This latter problem, in particular, stems from the lack of access to science education at the higher secondary level.

It is important to note that there has been a perceptible change in community and parental perspectives on girl’s
education, as our field interactions showed. The thrust on universalisation of elementary education for the past 25 years seems to have yielded some positive outcomes.

The issue is no longer whether girls should be educated, but concerns related to the conditions under which they can continue to the secondary and tertiary levels of education. This is the message from across the spectrum of communities in urban and rural areas that we interacted with. These changed attitudes at the ground level need to be capitalised on and are an important pointer to policymakers. The picture, however, is not sanguine. There are social subgroups in remote areas among specific communities (such as Rajputs, Muslims, scs, and stks) that continue to support early marriage for girls and are not keen on secondary education for them. The assumption that a positive environment for girls’ education has been created under Universalisation of Elementary Education (UUE) campaigns and nothing further needs to be done at the community level requires to be critically revisited.

Efforts at universal secondary schooling need to recognise that access to education is not a neutral process. There are several factors that impinge and influence access to education, especially in traditional cultural contexts. Persistent cultural and traditional constraints on girls’ mobility and perceived threats to the safety and security of older girls in general need to be taken on board. The latter issue is emerging as a key constraint and barrier to girls’ education at the secondary level. A situation where there are only a very limited number girls-only schools and a policy that does not expressly promote or support separate schools for girls is a matter of concern. What is worrisome is that there seems to be an unstated government decision that no new girls’ schools will be opened, as our field interactions showed. This is a short-sighted approach, to say the least.

The overwhelming demand from the field is for girls-only schools at the secondary and senior secondary levels. The current policy of ensuring access through an upgrading of upper primary schools ensures that the deficit at the secondary level continues as the number of girls-only schools is limited. Often shortage of resources is cited for not opening new girls-only schools. This argument flies in the face of the larger national objectives of achieving gender and equity in secondary education.

In addition, the importance of hostels cannot be overstated. The overwhelming message from all FGDs with girls in schools, colleges, and BEd colleges across all three districts was that hostels are required across the spectrum at the secondary, collegiate, and teacher training levels, especially in rural areas where distances are quite considerable. Family concerns over rising transport costs and safety issues often work as a major deterrent. In far-flung and geographically difficult locations, hostel facilities for girls are necessary so that even those living in remote areas can participate effectively in secondary education. While opening hostels is part of the overall gender and equity strategy of the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), there does not seem to be any clear approach to strategically locating hostels after mapping local needs.

The need for safe transport has also been pointed out as a major problem. There is a heightened perception of how unsafe it is for girls to travel alone, especially older girls. The issue is critical in rural areas, like in Baran and Barmer, where habitations are dispersed and the nearest secondary school or college may be 10 to 15 kilometres away. And even in more urbanised areas like Ajmer where safety and security concerns are high among Muslims and where the distance to school or college may not be as much, the fear of harassment and teasing has had an adverse effect on girls’ higher education.

Our field sample showed that in general very few girls and an even smaller number of sc, st, and Muslim girls opt for the science stream. The predominant reason was the non-availability of the science stream in girls-only higher secondary schools. Hence, girls have to go to co-ed schools for pursuing these subjects but often cannot because their families are against co-education. This is particularly true of the Muslim community. Another equally important reason was the additional costs involved in pursuing science. Denying science education to very poor girls from marginalised groups only exacerbates the existing inequities in higher education and employment. In such a context, achieving gender and equity at the secondary level appears very elusive.

It would be pertinent to take a leaf out of efforts to promote agriculture education. In Ajmer District, for instance, we found that a cash incentive given to students who opted for agriculture resulted in many more girls enrolling in this stream. A similar cash incentive could be considered to encourage science and maths education among girls.

A critical and likely major deterrent to girls studying in co-ed institutions is the difficulties of negotiating the social environment in and outside classrooms in institutions at all levels. This was a common thread that ran through all our interactions and discussions with girls in schools and colleges, and with women teachers in colleges and teacher training institutes. Harassment, sexual innuendoes, inadequate physical safety, fear of moving around, even to go to bathrooms, within institutions, derisive talk, and so on were reported as making life in co-ed institutions very stressful. As a girl from a rural secondary school in Ajmer commented, “It’s humiliating. Man karta hai unko mar dein (I feel like hitting them).” With very few women teachers in higher secondary schools and in BEd colleges, both girl students and women teachers, feel at a disadvantage. They do not have the safety of numbers nor the support and solidarity that numbers would have provided. Almost everyone seems to be silent on this issue, so much so it continues to insidiously gain in strength. This could emerge as the major deterrent to girls’ education in general and their participation in higher education in particular.

Addressing These Barriers and Challenges

Recast the Secondary School: There is an urgent need to reconfigure secondary school. In Rajasthan, the government has two options—either open new girls-only secondary schools or start girls-only shifts in existing boys’ schools. The shift system currently exists in many urban schools, and ensures optimal use of resources. The state government’s
current plan to start a higher secondary school in each gram panchayat would address the issue of access to a large extent, and introducing separate shifts for girls should not be difficult.

In this context, the importance of distance education in coping with increased demand and poor accessibility cannot be overemphasised. Its relevance for boys and girls in remote areas go beyond the elementary level, even to higher education. Further, the distance education mode could also be an option for girls from very orthodox communities that continue to resist sending older girls to school. Our field interactions in the rural sample block in Ajmer District showed that the role of civil society organisations in reaching out to marginalised girls was a key determinant in ensuring the education of older girls beyond the elementary level.

Strategic Provision of Hostels: Mapping of the critical locations where girls would have to travel long distances and where opening a hostel would make a crucial difference needs to be done expeditiously. The issue of hostels is of equal importance for boys from remote areas and from poor communities.

Another way in which hostels could be provisioned is to locate them within the catchment area of a higher secondary school, which is an integral part of the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (kgbv) scheme, for instance. A similar forward linkage is essential and provisions made to provide hostels for girls studying in college and for the BEd programme. There needs to be a cooperative and convergent approach between the departments of secondary school education, higher education, and sc, sr, and minority welfare to map the provision of hostels for girls, especially from marginalised communities. An immediate step could be attaching a hostel to all BEd colleges in Rajasthan.

Ensuring Safe Travel for Girls: As state government plans a secondary and higher secondary school in each gram panchayat, it may be useful to provide separate bus services for girls only in rural areas (like the ladies specials used during a fixed time in Delhi for many years). In urban areas, an escort for groups of girls to go from their home to school could be considered. This is a strategy that would be welcomed by the Muslim community. This, again, is not a new strategy as it was used very effectively in the early days of uee.

Fostering Science Education: A focused plan to strengthen science and maths education at the upper primary level needs to be put in place, both to foster interest in science as well equip students to confidently opt for science and maths at the secondary level. Every girls-only school (especially in the government sector) or at least a nodal school for a cluster of schools must offer science and maths at the higher secondary level. The government could consider providing additional academic support to girls from marginalised groups, especially in classes IX and XI (this is also important for boys from marginalised social groups). Scholarships for pursuing science and maths at the school level should be introduced with a focus on promoting science among girls. Another enabling intervention could be the creation of science and maths clubs for children in general.

Provision of Career Counselling in Schools and Colleges: The government needs to consider systematic career counselling in schools, and later on at the college level, as most students do not receive much guidance from their parents. This would be a positive step as the majority of students in government secondary schools and colleges are not from economically better-off families. For them, choosing a stream and subjects that could lead to viable employment is crucial.

Creating Sensitivity to Gender and Social Diversities in Educational Institutions: The government, in collaboration with women’s organisations, could organise workshops in every secondary and higher secondary school to engage students and teachers in a dialogue on the importance of creating a non-discriminatory environment. Given the wealth of evidence, both research-based and media reports, on sexual harassment, caste- and community-based discrimination, and prevailing social attitudes towards the marginalised, schools and colleges should be positioned as spaces where teachers and students learn and internalise the values of non-discrimination and equality mentioned in the Constitution of India. This could be initiated in a few districts in a time-bound manner to develop strategies to conduct activities with students and teachers. Interested donor agencies could be brought together to explore how this could be initiated. Making our educational institutions safe-spaces is an urgent requirement.

Strategies to Increase the Pool of Women Teachers: The government needs to make a district-wise estimate of the number of women teachers required if the options of educating girls either through girls-only schools or separate shifts are implemented. Accordingly, seats for women in BEd colleges need to be increased. Equally, the allocation for different academic streams needs to be re-examined to reduce skewed allocations and bottlenecks, and to ensure that the numbers of seats for science are increased substantially from the current 10% to 20%, at least. Perhaps providing an incentive to students who opt for the science stream could be considered. This is important because we noticed that science students opt for the arts stream in BEd colleges. The National Council for Teacher Education (ncte) and other national regulatory bodies need to be brought on board to work out a strategic plan to enhance the pool of women teachers at the secondary/higher secondary levels.

Need to Revisit the Strategies for Girls in RMSA: With a daunting goal such as universalisation, it is a matter of some concern that the RMSA adopts a universal strategy though its stated objectives is to bring marginalised groups, especially girls within them, into the ambit of secondary education. The lack of in-depth studies or analysis of the gender situation in different regions, and social and economic groups to inform
the development of context-specific interventions that are imperative to address gender inequities is a major drawback. There are lessons to be learnt from the elementary education sector, where detailed studies on equity across the country became the basis for developing specific strategies and interventions for different contexts and forms of inequity, which resulted in ensuring not only access but enhanced educational participation and retention of girls, especially from vulnerable and marginalised social groups.

Further, in the RMSA, increasing the number of women teachers at the secondary and higher secondary levels is not a core objective. However, under its equity interventions, increasing the number of women teachers is included along with micro-planning, opening schools in areas with concentrations of marginalised groups, special enrolment drives, and constructing separate toilets for girls. As mentioned earlier, education is a state subject and if the central government does not have specific directives on the issue of women teachers, it is left to individual states to decide whether to adopt a targeted approach to the issue of women teachers. If one were to look back again at the experience of the elementary sector, sustained discussion and debate on gender issues at the elementary level, which was facilitated from the national level, resulted in similar processes being initiated at the state level as well. In the absence of a specific gender strategy, particularly for recruitment of women teachers to address issues of gender at the secondary level, or a specific thrust on increasing the pool of women teachers, there is every chance that gender concerns in secondary education will vanish from government and public debate and discourse.

NOTES

1 Some of the key milestones that emerged over the 19th and 20th centuries are relevant to today’s context of trying to achieve gender equity. In 1882, the Indian Education Commission supported women teachers’ training through residential programmes and providing financial support to female teacher trainees. Since then, there have been consistent recommendations to increase women’s participation in teaching. For example, the Secondary Education Commission of 1952–53 suggested part-time training courses to meet shortage of women teachers. The First Five Year Plan suggested part-time teaching for married women who could not get away fully from home responsibilities. The Second Five Year Plan pointed out that the anticipated expansion of girls’ education in the Third Five Year Plan may not be realised due to an acute shortage of women teachers, which was only 17% (both primary and secondary levels together) in 1953–54. This was one of the first policy documents to point out the provisions and allocations needed to generate a conducive and sensitive community environment with situation-specific interventions. The National Commission on Women’s Education of 1958 recommended increasing training institutions for women teachers, condensed courses, fee exemptions for such training, recruiting vulnerable women such as widows for such training, part-time courses, extra coaching classes, and placement centres so that women teacher graduates were immediately absorbed, among many others. The Education Commission 1964–66 under the chairmanship of D S Kothari made detailed suggestions on the issue of women teachers and specifically established the link between promoting girls’ education and the availability of women teachers.

2 Data from the District Educational Office (DEO), Barmer, 2013.

3 GOR, Shiksha ki Pragati, Board of Secondary Education.

4 Sikar, Kota, Dausa, Sri Ganganagar, Jaipur and Jhunjhunu along with Ajmer are the seven districts with the highest concentration of women teachers.

5 Field notes, Ajmer District, 2013.

6 Field notes, Barmer District, 2013.

7 Personal communication from Leela Visaria, Gujarat Institute of Development Research (GIDR), Ahmedabad.

REFERENCES


