



Women's Education in Delhi after Independence: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract

The article provides a continued historical account of women's education in Delhi since independence (1947) to the early twenty first century. Contending that the rise of female literacy and institutionalization in the capital was not driven by a momentous event, but rather a gradual, uneven process of government action, pressure, and changing aspirations, it draws on the work of constitutional history, education policy, demographic data, and social history. It looks at the colonial legacy, the legacy of the various important policy documents like the Kothari Commission and the Right to Education Act 2009, and how structural barriers, such as caste, class, community and the organisation of household labour, continued to shape educational opportunity for many of Delhi's women. It is claimed that equal opportunity in education is more than simply an expansion of institutions and that it must take place within a social context that needs to be changed.

Keywords: Women's Education, Delhi, Female Literacy, Right to Education, Educational Policy, institutionalization.

Introduction

Education is always a political activity. Education (implicitly, of a woman) asserts in any society a statement about the nature of that society, its division of knowledge, its division of opportunity, and its definition of civic role. This demand was particularly acute in India at independence in 1947, when the new state was faced with a level of female literacy of only eight per cent and a condition of social inequality where a woman's exclusion from formal education had been institutionalised for centuries by tradition, religion and the colonial administration's lack of interest.¹

Delhi, the new government's capital, was the nerve centre of post-independence state-building, and also held this unique place in this history. It was the home of policy-making, and one of the key laboratories in which policies were trialed, rolled out and tested as the national capital. It was a city of great diversity because of the traditions of the Mughals, the reform movements of the Bengal and Punjab renaissances, and, subsequently, the influx of refugees from the partitioned Punjab after 1947, who brought with them their complex and conflicting views on the learning

¹Aparna Basu, 'The History of Education and the New Social History,' in Nita Kumar, ed., *The Politics of Gender, Community, and Modernity: Essays on Education in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19–22. See also Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2013), 1–8, for the entanglement of caste, gender, and educational deprivation in pre-colonial India.

of women. Knowing this history of women education in Delhi is thus not only a local history, but also a mirror of the tensions and successes of the Indian educational project.²

The historiography of women and education in post-independence India has come a long way since the 1980s when the first systematic, feminist scholarship started to question the triumphalist narratives of state-led development. The increase in the basic literacy rate, welcomed as it was, masked deep inequities of access, quality and social impact that were shown by scholars like Vina Mazumdar, Devaki Jain and Uma Chakravarti. Recent research has focused on the intersections of gender, caste, class and community, making the cause and effect argument of linear progress more complex.³

This article adds to the existing scholarship to provide a historical perspective on women's education in Delhi in the decades following Independence. It examines the institutional, policy and demographic aspects of educational change, places them in their social and political context, and places them in a dialectical relationship between state ambition and social resistance; a dialectic that resulted in real and historically significant educational advances, but also in important and troubling inequalities.

Research Methodology

In this study, the method of historical research and qualitative research is used, and the primary and secondary sources used are gathered systematically and methodically. The sources of information used are primarily the successive Census of India reports from 1951 to 2011 which provides the most comprehensive longitudinal data on female literacy and educational attainment; the government of Delhi and the Ministry of Human Resource Development published the educational statistics; various government policy documents, such as the National Policy on Education of 1968 and 1986 and the Programme of Action of 1992; and government appointed bodies including the Education Commission of 1964-66 chaired by D.S. Kothari.⁴

Secondary sources are educational history books, scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed articles published in education, gender and social history journals in modern India. The analysis does not focus so much on number-crunching. While quantitative data on literacy rate and enrolment are used to shed light on overall trends in literacy and to mark periods of change, the use of these data is secondary to the primary analytical objective of situating these trends in the broader social and political history of the period. It is important to note here that numbers do not "explain themselves," but rather need the "historical contextualisation" of the historian to be understood and to gain meaning.

The Colonial Inheritance: Women's Education prior to 1947

²Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 116–134. Chatterjee argues that the 'woman question' was resolved by nationalist discourse by confining women's modernity to the domestic sphere, simultaneously demanding their education and limiting its scope.

³Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885–1947*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1989), 67–71; Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India, The New Cambridge History of India*, vol. IV.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 32–38. Forbes documents the deeply uneven geography of colonial female education, concentrated in Bengal and Bombay Presidencies.

⁴Constitution of India, 1950, Articles 14, 15(1), 21A (inserted by the Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002), and 45. For an authoritative commentary, see D.D. Basu, *Commentary on the Constitution of India*, 8th ed. (Nagpur: LexisNexis, 2007), vol. 2, 1832–1841.

It is only in this way that the size of the problem before the educational planners following 1947 can be grasped, even if only superficially, in order to understand the colonial heritage. Education for women in colonial India was extremely restricted, very unevenly distributed, and was plagued by a simmering contradiction between reformers with progressive interests and the majority who were socially conservative. For the bulk of its history, the British colonial administration either had neglected women's education or considered it a space for the missionary societies and the Indian social reformers. This led to a highly polarized terrain, with hotspots of fairly high levels of female education in the major presidency towns, surrounded by large rural areas with low or zero rates of girls' education.⁵

The social reform movement of 19th century had made education for women its moral priority, for a good part of both progressive conviction and nationalistic aspirations that it held that it would be able to prove India's capability of self-governance. They were the schools established by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule and, most radically, Savitribai Phule; they were the religious restrictions protested by Phule and Vidyasagar; and they were the equal intellectual capacity asserted by Phule. However, as Partha Chatterjee has pointed out, women were both modernised and restricted by nationalist discourse, which called for their education and yet held that the properly educated woman could not be part of public life, but a keeper of cultural traditions.⁶

This history became clear once more when writing the record of independence. The literacy rate for women in the country was 7.93 per cent in 1951. Delhi, a more urban territory with more educated, middle class population, and more exposure to colonial education institutions, was in a slightly better position, but its numbers concealed the sheer internal difference between the relatively settled bourgeois neighbourhoods in the city and the scattered periurban villages and refugee camps that had been swirling up in the wake of Partition.

Constitutional foundations and the normative architecture of reform.

The expanded women's education was to be built on a normative framework laid out in the Constitution of India which was effective from 26 January 1950. The articles 14, 45 and 15 of the Directive Principles of State Policy had provided equal protection of laws, prohibition of sex discrimination and an assurance to the state to provide free and compulsory education of children up to the age of fourteen in ten years. This was a key enabling article that enabled the state to make special provision for women and children, laying the constitutional basis for positive education policies towards women.⁷

The provisions in the Constitution were not automatic. Their vision of what India was not - their vision of what it ought to be - was more than vast from the social reality. But don't underestimate the significance or impact of their work. They created a mechanism for legal and political accountability — and that's what activists, litigants and opposition politicians reported when the government's actions were perceived to be less than the constitutional expectations. They also exhibited the political courage of the founding generation of Nehru, Ambedkar and others in

⁵ University of Delhi, Fifty Years of the University of Delhi (Delhi: University of Delhi, 1972), 88–95. Miranda House was founded in 1948 and Lady Irwin College, originally established in 1932, was significantly expanded in the post-independence period.

⁶ Government of India, Report of the Education Commission 1964–66 (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1966), 17 and 204–210; Government of India, National Policy on Education 1968 (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1968), 3–5.

⁷ Government of India, National Policy on Education 1986 (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1986), 14. See also Government of India, Programme of Action 1992 (New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1992), 22–28.

the Constituent Assembly to embrace the concept of a democratic republic where the systematic denial of education was not part and parcel.⁸

Post-Independence years saw the promises for education in the Constitution become more real. During the process of planning, the provision of education was increasingly used as a means to achieve national development, and the following 5-Year Planning documents were adopted by the Planning Commission. In some degree of urgency and specificity, the plans acknowledged that female literacy was a social good in itself, and also a necessary condition for other goals of development, such as low birth rates, improved child health and greater economic activity.

Institutional Growth in Delhi: Schools, Colleges and Career Pathways

Educational infrastructure in the city of Delhi saw a sharp change for the better in the post-independence period, growing in terms of scale and social geography. When the country gained independence, Delhi had a few high concentration of geographically concentrated girls' schools which were sparse in number. The task of reconstruction was enormous and pressing, and was complicated by the influx of some 5 lakh refugees into the city in a few months due to Partition.⁹

The growth of primary and secondary education was rapid in the 1950s and 1960s. New government girls' schools were built in the re-developed refugee colonies of West Delhi (e.g. Rajouri Garden, Tilak Nagar, Rajinder Nagar) and in the planned residential areas built as per the Master Plan of 1962. Single-sex schools were a conscious policy choice, made in the light of the social conditions in the community: where parents continued to be unwilling to allow their daughters to share school spaces with boys, the provision of separate schools was a necessary practical prerequisite to any involvement of girls in education at the school at all.

The growth was even more pronounced at the tertiary level. Founded in 1922, the University of Delhi expanded greatly in its colleges during the post independence period and a number of institutions also specifically set up for women's higher education were established or expanded. Built in 1948, Miranda House was a symbol of women's higher education and, along with Lady Irwin College and Indraprastha College for Women, was a significant social hub in which students from all over northern India came into contact with new traditions of learning and new professions. They were not just administrative conveniences but a conscious social statement, a statement embodied in stone and curriculum, a statement about the proper role of the female in the realm of ideas.

The process of professional education was also a delayed and slow one. The first professional areas to allow women to enter in significant numbers were teaching and nursing, both of which were traditionally considered suitable male occupations that transferred the domestic values of nurture and care from the private sphere to the public domain. Then came the medicine, and in the 1970s and 1980s, women began to take up legal careers, journalism, civil service

⁸Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (London: Meridian Books, 1946; repr. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004), 521. Nehru's formulation of education as the 'nation's investment in itself' was reiterated in his speeches to the Constituent Assembly and shaped the Directive Principles on education. See also Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, and Aditya Mukherjee, *India Since Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008), 519–522.

⁹Government of Delhi, *Report on the Educational Development of Delhi, 1947–1960* (New Delhi: Directorate of Education, 1961), 4–12; Census of India, 1961, vol. XIV (Delhi), Pt. I-A (New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General, 1964), 88–92. The 1961 census recorded Delhi's female literacy at approximately 38.5 per cent, compared to a national female literacy rate of 12.95 per cent.

and, grudgingly, positions in business management. Every one of these incursions took the form of a struggle to negotiate socially, rather than toward the institution, the competences, the authority, and the appropriate boundaries of women's ambition.

Policy Architecture: The journey from Kothari Commission to the Right to Education

As the provision of education grew during the post-independence decades, a more complex, though not always tightly structured, framework of educational policy developed at a national level. The most significant early landmark was the Report of the Education Commission of 1964-66 headed by the physicist D.S. Kothari. The Kothari Commission's report 'Education and National Development' was singular, both in respect of its intellectual range and, crucially, its rejection of the view that educational inequality, with particular reference to gender inequality, was simply a social issue and not structural. It advocated a dramatic transformation of the educational system; it was based on a common school principle aimed at meeting the needs of children from all social backgrounds and it made clear recommendations for the rapid development of women's education at all levels.¹⁰

These principles were later reflected in the National Policy on Education (1968), which was based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission, and became a formal government policy that it will provide equal educational opportunity for all citizens irrespective of their social status and sex. Its implementation, however, was impeded by a lack of specific funding mechanisms and because during much of the 1970s, the political interest shown in education spending was low. The mismatch between policy and practice which prevailed during the NPE in 1968 would become an important feature in the history of educational reform in India.¹¹

The more ambitious, in important respects more influential, was the National Policy on Education of 1986. The NPE (1986) was adopted by the Rajiv Gandhi government after a decade of feminist's effort and the landmark Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974), which recognized that access to education was not enough to ensure gender equity and introduced the term 'education for women's equality'. It urged a reorientation of curricula and pedagogical approaches to be gender sensitive, to increase the number of female teachers and to implement specific interventions for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹²

It bears much resemblance to the ideas of scholars and activists, especially Vina Mazumdar of the Centre for Women's Development Studies, who for ten years were documenting the ways in which formal schooling could both enrol and

¹⁰Government of India, Report of the Education Commission, 1964-66 (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1966), 17 and 204-219. The Kothari Commission's landmark report, formally titled 'Education and National Development,' argued that the perpetuation of gender inequality in education was both a social injustice and a structural impediment to national economic growth.

¹¹Government of India, National Policy on Education, 1968 (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1968), sections 3 and 11. The policy's commitments to gender equity were expressed in principled terms but were not accompanied by the dedicated funding or accountability mechanisms that might have ensured their realisation. See Krishna Kumar, Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Indian Policy (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), 110-118.

¹²Government of India, National Policy on Education, 1986 (New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1986), para. 4.2-4.6; Government of India, Programme of Action, 1992 (New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1992), 22-28. The phrase 'education for women's equality' was introduced as a distinct programmatic category in the 1986 Policy, signalling a conceptual shift from access to equity.

exclude women, enroll them in school and teach them that the primary domain of their lives was their domestic sphere.¹³

This critique of the content and also access aspects of women's education was an intellectual leap that had a lasting impact on the subsequent policy discussions.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which was introduced in 2001, continued the government's commitment to educating girls by implementing specific operational interventions, such as building toilets and safe sanitation facilities at school, providing free books and uniforms to all girls, and establishing Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas as day and boarding schools for girls from the most marginalised groups. The interventions in Delhi have been introduced with some success in terms of implementation but have made a meaningful impact on the documented improvement in enrolment of girls in primary school in the 2000s.¹⁴

The Right to Education (RTE Act) which is mainly the short form of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, which provided the substantive law for the Article 21A of the Indian Constitution, was the culmination of this policy orientation. It established a legally binding right to free elementary education, making the provision of education a right rather than an aspiration of the government; it also provided new instruments by which parents and civil society could challenge the government's provision of education. The experience of its use in Delhi was a revelation to its possibilities and constraints within a rights-based framework of addressing educational equity.¹⁵

Female Literacy in Delhi: Finding trends, patterns and their Importance

The impact of institutional growth and policy making is most clearly evident in the trend of the female literacy rate in Delhi over the decades since independence. Delhi's female literacy rate jumped from around 38 per cent in 1961 (already higher than the miserable national average of around 13 per cent) to around 64 per cent in 1991, up to 74.7 per cent in 2001 and to 80.93 per cent in 2011 while the national female literacy rate improved from 39.29 per cent in 1981 to 65.46 per cent in 2011.¹⁶

These are the facts and real historical advances. It is not a small scale change in the sense of just a few individuals: It is a change of millions of women in Delhi, who have gained access to literacy, and to formal credentials, and to the economic and social possibilities that this access to literacy opens. However, the total is overall hidden as much as they show. At the overall level, female literacy hides a lot of geographical, caste, community and class differentials in Delhi. In the affluent districts in South Delhi, the female literacy rate has been close to 100% for a long time, whilst in the unauthorised colonies and informal settlements of outer Delhi, over the past few decades, the female literacy

¹³Vina Mazumdar and Kumud Sharma, *Women and Education* (New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1992), 34–42. Mazumdar was instrumental in the drafting of the NPE 1986's chapter on women's education and provides an insider account of the political negotiations that shaped its final language.

¹⁴National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), *Elementary Education in India: Where Do We Stand? District Report Cards, 2007–08* (New Delhi: NUEPA, 2008), 45–52; Government of India, *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: Framework for Implementation* (New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2001), 18–25.

¹⁵Government of India, *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009* (New Delhi: Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009), sections 3–8 and 12. For a critical appraisal of the Act's implementation in Delhi, see Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 107–115.

¹⁶Census of India, 2011, *Primary Census Abstract: Delhi* (New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2011), Statement 5 and Table C-8. Delhi's female literacy in 2011 stood at 80.93 per cent against a national female literacy rate of 65.46 per cent, itself a rise from 39.29 per cent in 1981.

rate has been significantly lower and access to quality education much more limited, with large migrant populations coming from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan.

Household Economy: A Roadmap for a Classless, the Caste-Based Economy, and the Community-Beyond-Class

However, an attitude and community conservatism approach can't be the sole reason behind the persistence of educational inequality for women in Delhi. Its focus is on structural factors (economic, spatial, institutional) that have proven to be difficult to change with policy and that remain important to the educational opportunities of girls in the city's most disadvantaged communities.

If we talk about the most basic structural barriers that are economic hardships. When considering the costs of educating a girl, we must recognize that for families in acute poverty, there are real opportunity costs: the domestic labour, childcare and income-generating possibilities that a girl could contribute to the household economy if she were not in school. The choices of education investment by families near the subsistence level have traditionally been gendered, with a preference for sending sons rather than daughters. Historically, decisions about the education of members of a family near the subsistence level have been gendered, with the sons being preferred for the investment.¹⁷

Class has intersected with community and religious factors in some complicated ways. Research in Muslim communities in Delhi has identified specific constraints for girls' secondary and higher education, and these have been linked to issues of female modesty, social mixing and perceived conflicts between gender and female higher education and early marriage norms. These concerns are not shared by all Muslims (or all Hindus, for that matter), and many Hindu communities – especially those that had recently moved here from socially conservative parts of the country – had similarly high rates of gender-differential educational investment, but they have been enough in total to create measurable differences in the educational attainment of women across communities.

Research has brought up an issue of physical safety and distance as one of the most important factors determining child participation in secondary school. Where secondary schools are located far from where the girls live, and they are able to be harassed or physically threatened along the way, there is a real choice between wanting to send your daughter to a good school and keeping her safe. This lack of public transport and the risks associated with the streets in Delhi have been cited on numerous occasions, in research and girls' own accounts, as reasons that girls' families pull their daughters out of school at the crucial age of transition from primary to secondary school.¹⁸

Dropout levels, especially at the primary to secondary level, have been a long-standing concern, and are caused by several interrelated factors: early marriage, domestic responsibilities, poor sanitation in schools, distance, financial constraints, and too few schools providing acceptable quality and relevance of education that students can afford and

¹⁷Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon, *Unequal Citizens: A Study of Muslim Women in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 88–98; A.R. Kamat, *Education and Social Change in India* (Bombay: Somaiya Publications, 1985), 112–118. Both studies document how minority community girls faced compounded disadvantages rooted in community conservatism and infrastructural deficiencies.

¹⁸Jean Drèze and Geeta Gandhi Kingdon, 'School Participation in Rural India,' *Review of Development Economics* 5, no. 1 (2001): 2–24. Although focused on rural settings, their analytical framework—which identifies safety, distance, and opportunity costs as the principal determinants of girls' dropout—has been applied to Delhi's peri-urban settlements by subsequent researchers.

are willing to attend. More difficult to bring change by these structural factors if it brings changes then it will be nothing more than lack of access, and their endurance indicates there is a need for in detail interventions into the social conditions of the family life to reach actual equality in education for women in Delhi than it can be attained by building schools or giving scholarship programmes alone.

Women's Education and the Transformation of their Lives

Although it does not provide for women in an ideal manner and its inequalities remain, the spread of women's education has had a variety of impacts that have transcended the classroom and that have contributed—albeit unevenly—to the change in women's status in the social, economic, and political life of Delhi. These effects are manifest at many levels—in overall demographic and labour-market trends, in changing institutional configurations, and in the evolving self-perceptions and expectations of successive cohorts of educated women.

The link between women's education and women's participation in the labour market has been well established in the research literature, and is equally apparent in the labour market statistics of Delhi. There are significant differences in the participation of women in the formal economy, by level of education, with educated women far more likely to be formally employed and earning significantly more than uneducated women. An increasing share of women has been employed in teaching, health care, and the government sector, and from the 1990s onward, in the growing service and information technology sectors of the city's economy, all of which has been strongly linked with greater levels of education.¹⁹

Important and documented changes in family health outcomes have also been brought about by women's education. Educated women are much more likely to access ante/ post natal care, immunise their children, gain knowledge about family planning options and seek medical help when ill family members suffer. Such effects have manifested in the demographic statistics of Delhi itself: the TFR has significantly reduced since the 1970s, and the infant and child mortality rate improvements in this period have been partly due to the increasing educational level of the female population in the city.²⁰

Increased female education has also influenced political participation, however in a way that is not necessarily mechanical, and is filtered and influenced by class, community, and political opportunity. The reservation provisions for women in urban local bodies after the implementation of the Seventy-fourth Constitutional Amendment in 1992 opened up new formal avenues for women's political participation, which have been best utilised by women who had the literacy, rhetorical skills and institutional understanding for navigating the political process.²¹

Conclusion

¹⁹International Labour Organization, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, 3rd ed. (Geneva: ILO, 2018), 22. For Delhi specifically, see Planning Commission of India, *Human Development Report: Delhi* (New Delhi: Government of NCT of Delhi, 2006), 72–78, which links female education levels directly to labour-force participation rates.

²⁰Devaki Jain, *Women, Development and the UN: A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 72–76; Lotika Sarkar, 'Women and the Law,' in Devaki Jain, ed., *Indian Women* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1975), 165–182.

²¹Susan Visvanathan, 'Education and the National Agenda: India's Experience,' in Cecilia Sardenberg and Ann Whitehead, eds., *Feminist Circulations: Crossings in Theory and Practice* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 144–159. Visvanathan argues that the measurable improvement in urban women's political participation from the 1990s onwards is partly a lagged consequence of educational investments made a generation earlier.

The history of women's education in Delhi since independence is not just a story of aspiration and constraint, but also one of both. The aspiration was sincere: the framers of the 1950 Constitution of India made meaningful and worthwhile promises for equality in education and successive governments, in varying ways and to varying extents, did what they could to keep those promises by developing institutions, reforming policies, and intervening directly in targeted ways. The literacy rates in Delhi, which left most of the population of females out of formal economic and civic life, became a thing of the past and in 2011, Delhi's women were among the most educated in the country.

But this is a limitation as well and one that has great historical importance. Increased access to education has not led to educational equality. The reforms and the advantages of post-independence education have had a differential impact on the educational outcomes across the social geography of the city, with benefits being felt in the middle class localities and established settlements, and significant gaps in the informal settlements, migrant colonies, and marginal communities that home the bulk of the city's actual population. The issue of quality has been a constant as well as access: many of the schools that provide education to the city's most impoverished have failed to provide their students with the quality education needed to help them lead economically productive lives or to participate in substantive civic life.²²

However, this is also a constraint and one of significant historic value. Increased access to education has not led to educational equality. The reforms and the advantages of post-independence education have had a differential impact on the educational outcomes across the social geography of the city, with benefits being felt in the middle class localities and established settlements, and significant gaps in the informal settlements, migrant colonies, and marginal communities that home the bulk of the city's actual population. Quality has been a constant as has access: many of the schools that educate the city's poorest have failed to offer their students a good education, and thus an ability to contribute to an economically productive life or a meaningful civic life.

In one lesson this is the sobering and clarifying history. The gains have come at the cost of state action through the growth and development of institutions, through changes in policy and targeted programmes; but not enough in terms of equitable progress that is expected by justice. More resilient than any policy tool to date have been the social contexts in which schooling occurs: the economy of precarity, the household forms in a patriarchal family, the caste system, and the spatial risks of the public sphere of the city. This does not mean to say that the task of education should be abandoned or that despair is the only fitting attitude for education; it is a call instead for a deeper appreciation of the education as a part of a wider social transformation, the completion of which is not within the schools' control but is necessary as much in the field of economics as in that of gender relations, community norms, and power distribution.

Finally, the history of women's education in Delhi post-independence is a process one. There is an increase in Female literacy that needs to be appreciated and deserves to be recognized. The disparities are also genuine and need to be faced up to. There are lessons to be drawn from this past: most importantly, the lesson that the education of women is not a technical issue that can be solved with a technical solution, but a political and social issue that calls for the ongoing efforts of the state, the tireless actions of civil society and the agency of women themselves.

²²Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 148–157; Chandra et al., *India Since Independence*, 526–529. Both works emphasise the gap between stated policy ambitions and institutional realities, particularly for first-generation learners from Scheduled Caste and migrant communities.

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