Education of Adolescent Girls in Rural Uttar Pradesh, India

My Experience of Mahila Samakhya–run Kasturba Gandhi Girl’s Residential Schools (2006-10)
The woman empowerment program named *Mahila Samakhya* was established in 1988 under National Policy on Education 1986

The program works to:

- enhance self-esteem and self-confidence of women
- recognize women’s contributions to society, polity and the economy
- develop ability to think critically
- foster decision making and action through collective processes
- enable women to make informed choices in areas like education, employment and health
- ensure equal participation in developmental processes
- provide information, knowledge and skill for economic independence
- enhance access to legal literacy and information relating to their rights and entitlements
Kasturba Gandhi Residential Girl’s Schools
(Government scheme)

• Launched in July 2004 for girls belonging to deprived social backgrounds and below poverty-line.

• In educationally backward regions of the country where female literacy is below the national average[46.13%] and gender gap in literacy is wider than national average[21.59%].

• It consists of facility for girls to stay in hostel while studying in upper primary stage of elementary education, classes VI-VIII.
Knowing
Sites of deprivation

rural
poor
hungry → starved → malnourished
an out-caste
displaced/homeless/inadequate shelter
a child labour
born with a disability
Never been to school/drop out
What Complicates?

- Preference for son
- Subordinate status to girls
- Marriage seen as a priority and a financial burden
- Early marriage and early motherhood
  - Lack of safety and prevalence of sexual abuse
  - Social pressure to control and direct her sexuality to motherhood
- Domestic violence
- Social, cultural and religious barriers
- Denial to health care and negligence
- Denial of property rights (socially)
- Low literacy
- Lack of woman teachers in rural schools

Schools as the sites of cultural reproduction. Thus perpetuating the gendered role and mental blocks.

Example-
Each year around the months of October to March, attendance of girls used to drop down drastically in schools located in districts of Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur. We realized that this was happening more in the schools, which were either close to cane fields or where girls had to walk through cane fields to reach their school.

While speaking to parents and the community, we found out, to our utter pain; as the cane crop grew taller each year, the rapes too went up in the villages.

These villages were still resorting to dark age, patriarchal ways to deal with the crime. Further victimizing her by forcing her to-
- stay silent and tolerate the humiliation
- marry the rapist
- leave the village with family
- suicide (kill her) if turned pregnant out of wedlock.
Negligence

Examples of negligence

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) Bhathat, Gorakhpur

Shabnam, 15 years, “whenever I talked about my headaches, which were always very severe, I was blamed for shirking from work. It was only when I came to KGBV that I was shown to a doctor... now I am fine.” Her haemoglobin was found to be 3.8 which after treatment and planned nutritive diet reached 8.6.

KGBV Kopaganj, Mau

Manju, 14 years, she complained of headache, body cramps and dull pain, had fever. She was diagnosed with acute anemia. Heamoglobin at 3.6. She was given blood at the medical college, Gorakhpur. She recovered.

Rambha, 14 years, “I always felt very weak, fainting and never hungry but my people accused me of pretending.”

The girl had TB. Her health improved after the treatment.
Facing Under-Nutrition and Poor Health

- Gross underestimation of prevalence of undernourishment.

- Undernourishment is not considered a health problem... Mothers distinguished between and under nourished and well nourished by physical appearance only.

- Food availability and presence of provisions is not enough to handle the issue.
Teacher Selection and Orientation

Required negotiating for selection procedures and norms

- Statewide written evaluation and interview
  - 70% weightage given to gender sensitivity and aptitude
  - 30% content knowledge

More teachers were needed in-

- Science and mathematics
- Sports, Expressive Arts and Theater
- Vocational education

300 teachers selected & 33 KGBV come into being

At times Govt. policies are inadequate to cope with situations.[no women teachers of science and mathematics were available in SC/ST category, only men teacher that too in General Category. Application of reservation norm in this particular case was going against children’s interest]
Key Questions

• How to create an experience for teachers, school staff and students that is equitable?

• How to facilitate critical thinking on gender and socio-economic hierarchies?

• How to develop teaching methods that build upon experience of children and the context?

• How to create an interface between schools and community?
Objectives of Teacher Orientation

• Acquaint teachers with community’s general deprivations, caste based division of society.

• Social bias and suppressive forces that each girl/woman face

• Raising teacher’s ability to interpret reality and develop gender perspective

• Enhance their understanding of girls’ pedagogic and developmental requirements

• Enable and empower them to make sustainable efforts for effective classroom processes
Teachers Visit Children

Teachers prepared student’s profile and worked on their Growth Program:

- family environment and child’s home language
- general health and hygiene - anemia, skin problems and contagious disease
- fears and Inhibitions
- interests and strengths
- dreams and aspirations
- Pictorial depiction of vision

Teachers spend time with community to understand:

- parents and the community to estimate resistance and possible support structures
- caste and power structures and village dynamics
Lending colour to shattered dreams
Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalya Scheme Launched For Dropout Girls

In Not So Distant Past

Lucknow: The Government of India sponsored Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme would have launched on the occasion of Independence Day. A formal announcement of this effect is likely to be made by Education minister Kiran Pal Singh.

Education scheme for girl students

Dropout girls to find school again

The government has finally decided to give it a try to increase literacy among girls of the marginalised community. To achieve the target, the government has decided to launch the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) project. To implement the scheme the Mahila Samakhya and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan will be utilised.

Adolescent girls who have dropped out of school in the past 2-3 years will be covered under this scheme. Around 75 per cent girls would be from SC, ST, OBC and minority community, while the remaining 25 per cent will be for those belonging to BPL families.

The project will be formally launched at a function on Sunday. State Primary Education Minister Kiranpal Singh and the project director, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, JS Deepak will be present. An address will be given by the education minister at the event.

The government has decided to focus on out-of-school 'older' girls, said Sinha. Those who had failed to complete their primary education would be given admission in Class VII and VIII in the residential schools, whereas to quality education was ensured. The project would also help them in continuing education after class X and impart vocational training to make them financially independent. Sinha added.

OCR Text:

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Teachers, content & gender experts team-up to

**Recognize**
- Patriarchy and inequality
- Exclusion

**Understand**
- Equity
- Education and empowerment
- Critical pedagogy
- Role of parents and community
- Community resources
Caste/class/religion based affinities and groups

Developing power of analysis through reasoning, questioning, information led reflection, testing of belief and assumptions, recognizing its impact on work, language and learning deliberations

Building solidarity based on feminism and right based approach to education
Key Pedagogy

• Right to life and education
• Working with body inhibitions: use of sports
• Self-expression: theater, role play, real life stories, songs, case studies
• Theme based sessions: emphasis on exploration and inquiry, questioning encouraged
• Opportunity for active decision making
• Travel and exposure visits
• Subject emphasis on developing:
  – Life skills
  – Thinking skills
  – Leadership qualities
• Lesson Planning: planned for differential ability levels
• Contextualization of subject material

Health and Happiness

A S Neill in his book Summerhill, writes that no happy man/woman ever disturbed a meeting or preached a war, or lynched anyone. No happy person ever nagged his/her spouse, her/his children. No happy person ever committed a murder or a theft. No happy employer ever frightened his/her employees.
Example - Seminar on Cement

• Cement coating from the walls in the class rooms was coming down, churning out a lot of lime dust. There was no possibility of immediate repair from works department or repair grant.

• The teachers decided to repair the room within the school resources. The science teacher with her students did a mini research on cement plastering. They needed a few bags of cement, sand, color, lime etc. skill to prepare mixture, a few trowel, tools and floats.

• The local mason was invited to school and felicitated and introduced to children as their Guest Teacher (GT). He gave children a demonstration in preparation of cement mixture. Explained to them how to mix, do layering, and look after it till it becomes strong. It was like children’s Seminar on Cement Plaster. The science teacher and the GT answered students’ questions on setting, durability, role of moisture and temperature. After this children were facilitated by the guest teacher to do the actual plastering. The class rooms turned out to be beautifully plastered and colored.

• The entire raw material was bought out of Teaching-Learning Material grant and the guest teacher was paid out of Vocational Education fund.

• As a bonus, we had found a friend and teacher in the community who saw children as his own. In similar manner other schools too resolved breakdowns with generator, cycle repair, plumbing, seeds, kitchen gardens, manures etc. linking it to curriculum and community resources.
Strengths

• Program situated within a woman empowerment program

• Right based approach and feminist energy

• The MS as autonomous society of government gave flexibility and freedom for contextual initiatives to evolve.

• Women collectives created critical enabling conditions for girls participation

• Adaptation of MS curriculum for KGBV

• Parents, community, federations involved to understand school curriculum and possible learning outcomes.

• Strong bonding with women collectives

• Rural technicians given role in teaching vocational skills(example on the next slide)
Challenges

Pressure built to roll back practices – adaptations seen as distortion of norms

• Admission to married girls
• Integration of social learning curriculum with core curriculum
• Theme session plans
• Short vacations, exposure visit, vocational summer camps to maintain continuity and prevent family’s diversion from girl’s education.
• Contextually relevant practices
• Selection of teachers
• Male teachers
• Maternity leave
Key Learning

- Woman empowerment/feminist energy of MS as a critical condition for success of girls education
- Process of teacher preparation and empowerment to involve strategies that break psycho-social bases of inequality
- Teachers and parents to understand psycho-social and cultural causation of undernourishment among girls and women
- Teachers to understand the impact of poor health (undernourishment), lack of access to hygiene and sanitation on learning
- Enabling women to participate in formal work
- An enabling framework for program contextualization and adaptation of norms for meaningful implementation
- Solutions need to be culturally sensitive and men need to be involved
- Until we own our children and school, little will change
Central Scheme/State Government rules

Context
active and diverse

Norms could not operate identically across
Required enabling framework for adaptation

Norms adapted
Fixed and rigid norms

Community distrust
Distorted outcome

Trust, better community interest
Desired outcome
Thank you