QUEST IN EDUCATION

Editorial

Indian citizens are euphoric about successful G20 summit marked by India's quest to be the voice of the Global South, promotion of multilateralism and ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, i.e. "One Earth, One Family, One Future for all on this planet.

On the eve of Gandhi Jayanti, the article by Dr. S. Prabhu Shankar titled, 'Reflections on Mahatma Gandhi as a Writer' brings to the fore Mahatma as a greatest communicator of ideas and action.

Qqualitative research based article, 'The Educational Experiences of Women with Visual Impairment (WWVI)' by Sreeja P. S. underscores the urgent need for refining educational strategies and environments to better support these WWVI.

Dr Shamoli Bhattacharya provides her critical reflections on 'National Education Policy, 2020 and the Future of India' in the context of rapid changes in the global knowledge landscape.

Ms. Aanchal S Tejuja in her article titled, 'Promoting Inclusion in Indian Classrooms: A Holistic Approach' provides hands-on methods for the teachers to democratize the teaching-learning programmes.

Review Article by Ms. Vanita Ganesh provides valuable insights on intersectional vulnerabilities of the health emergency the book edited by Ann Smith, Claudia Mitchell (2023) *The Girl in the Pandemic: Transnational Perspectives.*

We request the scholars and experts to send their original research based articles, case studies and book reviews on contemporary challenges faced by the education sector.

Prof. Vibhuti Patel
Editor

REFLECTIONS ON MAHATMA GANDHI AS A WRITER

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Mahatma Gandhi was a prolific writer and has contributed greatly through his writings extensively, encompassing almost all domains; of society, of religion, self, god, truth, health, life etc., his writings are powerful and simple as his speeches; in the present day context there is a vast gap in realising the morale he propagated through his speeches and writings and yet his power of expression persuade oneself beyond all beliefs; it is his true self and scholarliness that carries the legacy of his writings. Gandhi has almost authored nearly forty and plus published works which covers from self-reflections to social service, trusteeship to health, from religion to politics.

'Writing self' of Gandhi

Gandhi's writings are critically acclaimed and was well received by great literary, political and academic figures of his times. The most significant aspect of his writings are consistency and relevance and the way he extends his ideas to all readers. Any of his writings are lucid, eloquent and coherent in its expression, contextual and more significantly plain and precise conveying the core meaning of truth. All of Gandhi's writings holds moral standing and significance where he completely takes up the responsibility of being weighed for the life he lived on. Gandhi's writings are much more relevant in the present day context like how it was relevant through the times. Modern India of the twenty-first century owes a lot to Gandhi's ideas of simple life, minimalistic perspective, truth, prayer, non-violence, regulation of self, persistence, self-help, arts and crafts, girls education, education of the disadvantaged, health and food, peace etc.

Gandhi's sources and perspectives

Gandhi's comprehensive views on nationalism and ideas expressed in works like 'India of my dreams', 'All men are brothers', 'Constructive

programme', 'My non-violence', 'Panchayat Rah' are gems of all times. When viewed from a literarian perspective Gandhi has never failed to enthuse his readers, as he never fails his listeners by his speech; had put in all elements of a good writing which is communicative, coherent, articulate, artistic and well-phrased. As quoted, *'Gandhi was accepted as a very good writer, he never aimed at a style nor flowing words merely to please the ears'.*

Gandhi's style of writing

Gandhi had a forceful style of his own which mirrored his hopes and faith, his sorrows and disappointments, his style of writing was devoid of artificialities as the life of its author'. Great men of his times including some English viceroys admitted that, Gandhi's writings was direct and his expressions in English are presented with a fine appreciation of the value of words he used; more importantly as a critic of his own and the one who reflects on his own self, words and deeds. Gandhi claimed that, *'a thoughtless word never escaped his lips or pen'*. Gandhi accorded by an English professor who had assisted on drafting Gandhi's statements of the Round Table conference during 1930's said that, (as quoted), "I have never met an Indian who had mastered the prepositions as Gandhi has and I took a deal of trouble over this drafting. Mr. Gandhi would glance over my work and would make just one suitable prepositional change, it did its work. It changes my meaning into Mr. Gandhi's meaning". Gandhi is known and may be observed from his writings who his more factual than being imaginative. Most of his writings reflects factuality of content, figures, instance, people and way of life. It reflected the sociality perspective that Gandhi had cared and concerned for and the other most important perspectives that can be seen through his writings are God, Truth, Unity, Non-violence, Beliefs and Existences & more important Peace and Love.

Gandhi's inherent ability of writing

As a great writer and more a great soul Gandhi does criticizes his own writings and reflected on his writings that, (as quoted), '*Gandhi found himself that his writings could not be properly expressed in a condensed form*' and he himself had developed a flair for writing in condensed form as he drafted the congress constitution and many

resolutions. As quoted, *'when any idea gripped Gandhi's mind, he had put his writing with conviction without any fear of being ridiculed; his urge to write made him write'*, it may be noted from the sources that Gandhi has written 'Hind Swaraj' during his voyage from England to South Africa during 1909 and the *'Green Pamphlet'* on exposing the conditions of Indian indentured labourers and coolies in South Africa and regarding their human rights and their conditions was written while on a travel to India during 1896. *'Constructive Programme'* book that Gandhi wrote during 1941 is believed to have written during a train travel. Gandhi's manuscripts had very few notes of correction and seldom needed any change and on this Gandhi quoted himself saying that, *'it is because of the spiritual discipline of a votary of truth'*. Critically observing his writings one can understand that Gandhi writes to the context and expresses himself freely and not at will, there is a self-conversational approach and a strong belief that one can find in all his works.

As a writer Gandhi cared about the matter that needs to be conveyed as strongly as he felt it and it was not that difficult for him as he sticks to truth and spiritual discipline his purity and power of thoughts influenced his writing, (as quoted) *'his flair for picking up apt words for translating an idea into another language was remarkable'*. As an avid reader of global literature, political works of world leaders, Gandhi loved translating works of, Thomas Carlyle, Plato, I. Watts, Cardinal Newman, Agustus Toplady, Tennyson, George Herbert, Richard Baxter, Richard Trench, John Bunyan, Leo Tolstoy, Wilfred Owen, Issac Rosenberg, John Ruskin and from the many studies that he has carried through his years one can understand the vastness of his readings as his writings.

Gandhi's writings an array of areas

Gandhi wrote extensively on concepts that concerned himself on individuals and social betterment. His writing reflects his urge to guide the society and to uplift it from ignorance, intolerance and hatred, violence, politics without principles; He worked towards women empowerment, girls education, restructuring education in general, education of the minority, education of the masses, self-help education, education for self-liberation, insisted in practical, work-based, art-craft based education that can be helpful for one's life.

Gandhi's concern towards uplifting of the disadvantaged, oppression against girls and women of the society, non-violence is found throughout his writings. Gandhi's works as articles ranged from *Ahimsa, Swadeshi, Charkha,* translation of indigenous works on literature, hymns, sayings of great Indian saints and most importantly his skill of transforming ancient wisdom into modern scientific wisdom is reflected in his writings. From his recorded conversations which has been translated into works one can see the depth and clarity of his thought and the power in expressing it with such care without hurting the sentiments of anybody, the critic, the seer and the sought.

Chosen and Sculpted words

Gandhi's writings reflect criticality and depth, his careful choice of words and the use of it without hurting others sentiments, putting it in a right sense scientifically without too much of descriptiveness is his greatness; to a critical comment and questions on the effectiveness of collective and mass prayer and the probable inattentiveness and inability to concentrate and the scope for self-reflection in mass prayer, one can find Gandhi's greatness and his holistic perspective by the reply he mad, (as quoted) *'I hold that congregational worship held by me, is true prayer for a collection of men. The convener is a believer and no hypocrite. If he were (quoting himself) the prayer would be tainted at the source. The men and women who attend do not go to any orthodox prayer from which they might have gain an earthly end. That most or some persons are inattentive or unable to concentrate is very true, that merely shows they are beginners'…he concludes by saying that… 'when a man has got to the stage of heart prayer, he prays always, whether in the secret or in the multitude"* and further the entire writings of the chapter on 'individual prayer' shows his great and true inner spirit. (as quoted from Gandhi's Prayer, P.102-103, 1977) & (Harijan, 22-9-46, p.319).

Droplets from the Ocean of Gandhi's quotes

Each spoken word and every written line by Gandhi reflect his great spirit, to cite a few from the ocean of his quotes, (On being Practical, *'...I shut not my eyes neither do I stuff my ears, no torture do I subject myself…'* (Harijan, 24-6-33, p.5), (On Prayer, *'as the body craves for*

food, the soul should yearn to pray' (The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi – XLIX (1972) p.71.) (On duty, *'the daily duties are like spiritual lighthouse to us…or a right angle which is the standard measurement…'* (The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi – XLV (1971) pp.21-22.), (On Japa, *'I am longing to disappear from the world quietly with god's names on my lips'* (An Autobiography (1969) pp.22-23.) (On Faith, *'Just as the body cannot exist without blood, so the soul needs the matchless and pure strength of faith'*, (Harijan 29-6-47, p.212). (On Secrecy, Gandhi wrote, '*I detest secrecy as a sin'*), (On 'The Sin of Secrecy' , he wrote '*avoid even thinking thoughts we would hide from the world'* (Source: Young India), (On Non-cooperation, Gandhi wrote, *'Non-co-operation is essentially a cleansing process, it deals with causes rather than symptoms),* (On openness, he wrote, *'If we realized the presence of God as witness to all we say and do, we would not have anything to conceal from anybody on earth'*), ('*there is enough in the world for every man's need but not for every man's greed'*), (On development and change, *'Constant development is the law of life, and a man who always tries to maintain his dogmas in order to appear consistent drives himself into a false position')*. One can find the reflections of truth, hope and life in each sentence written by Gandhi. Across Gandhi's works one can find gems of quotes that can be treasured for a good life to be lived.

Gandhi's influence on Western thinkers

As the philosophy of Gandhi, his writings greatly influenced western writers and thinkers. Baruah (2021) highlights that, 'early foreign writings on Gandhi include the works of French writer *Rolland Romain*, Danish writer *Allen Horrups*, American and English writers like *George Orwell* and *Edmund Jones*, among others'. Romain, in *'The Man who Became One with the Universal Being'* saw Gandhi as an ideal nationalist and called upon him to enlighten the youths of Europe. *George Orwell* puts Gandhi to trial until proved innocent, describing him as *"humble naked old man, sitting on a praying mat and shaking empires by sheer spiritual power"*. The greatest contribution of Gandhi, according to most western writers, is his fight against non-violence. *William Rose Bennet* has highlighted the significance of Gandhi's non-violence by criticizing the brutality of violence. Thus, there develops a common understanding between the

East and the West as they continue to be inspired by Gandhi as a persona and as a literarian.

Gandhi's writings: Reality Vs Imagination

Gandhi believed in writings that reflects reality, the happening, the problem. The concept of things, throughout his writings one can find his ability to stick with facts, truth, life, happenings, place, which forms the basis of all his writings. He quoted from epics, the incidents, morals and examples to convey his views on societal happenings, to the fight against the social evils, mainly untouchability, lynching, hooliganism etc. On thoroughly referring to Gandhi's works one can find poems written by him reflects his true sense in a more realistic way than in imaginative forms. He penned many of his prayers in the form of poems and also he has quoted other's poetry widely ranging from *George Herbert, Richard Baxter, Tennyson, Augustus Toplady, I. Watts, Cardinal Newmann, Tukaram, Trench, J. Bunyan*, in the letters he had written.

As most scholars opine on Gandhi's style of writing as 'simple and clear', many among them also finds his writings as 'deep', 'complex' and 'abstract' too; though the meaning of what he intends to convey is conveyed through his writing, many of his works on, '*In search of supreme', 'Moral basis of Vegetarianism*', '*Political and National Life and Affairs',* 'Trusteeship' one could find a metaphysical, abstract approach in his writing with an in-depth meaning conveyed through his lucid style; yet comprehendible it is comprehensive of many other perspectives one could explore. Apart from his regular writings of works that are published as books, Gandhi is known as a great writer of letters, it is believed and has been quoted that he has written nearly one lakh letters (*Source: mkgandhi.org)* which contributes major part of his writing.

Reflections on Gandhi's writings

Gandhi's writings were appreciated and critically analysed by innumerable literary figures of his and the present times, his own reflection on his writings is the one expression that gives a very clear depiction of his writings and that is the greatness of Gandhi; albeit criticism or reflection or appreciation his own analysis stands out from

the rest. As quoted by Gandhi himself reflecting on his writings the following lines will make it clear the essence of his writings, "*I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them, that I am not all concerned with appearing to be inconsistent. In m search after truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh; what I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of truth, my god, from moment to moment and therefore when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject*".

Gandhi's ability of creating pictures, making one to visualize a happening, by clearly bringing his ideas in words that depict vivid pictures and images in one's mind through his words is a great thing to mention. Gandhi could keep close any of his glued to what he writes, what he conveys with the words, create an immediate connect by making the reader feel, reflect and rectify their errors, realize the truth are the major powers of Gandhi's writings. It is noted from the references that, 'as Gandhi is ambidextrous, his handwriting largely varies from each other's styles'. Some of his significant works include, *Hind Swarajya (1909), Indian Home Rule (1910), Sermon on the Sea (1924 – the American edition of Hind Swaraj), Dakshina Africana Satyagrahano Itihasa / Satyagraha in South Africa (1924-25), Satyana Prayogo Athava Atmakatha / An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments With Truth (1924-25), Mangalaprabhata (1930), India's Case for Swaraj (1931), Songs from Prison: Translations of Indian Lyrics Made in Jail (1934), The Indian States' Problem (1941), The Good life (1943), Gandhi Against Fascism (1944), From Yeravda Mandir: Ashram Observances (1945), Conquest of Self (1946), Women and Social Injustice (1947), Self-restraint vs. Self-Indulgence (1947), Gandhigrams (1947).*

Gandhi's contribution as writings, his speeches constitute large volumes of his works to the world of publications. He is active in writing articles in English and Gujarati. Gandhi created a personal and social revolution through his writings and speeches; not only he brought freedom to the nation, he brought freedom to millions of individuals by kindling their self to think, to realize their potential and

lead them to overcome barrier and to unite them for the noble cause *'freedom of the nation'*.

Gandhi's writings for the future

Gandhi's writings stand relevant in the present-day context and it will for the future times. He lives through his writings and continues to inspire millions of people who aims at reflection, change, non-violence, prayer, faith and hope. It is our duty to take forward the teachings and legacy of Gandhi to the future by living as an example reflecting his ideals and his vision towards the future; most importantly our prime duty is to stretch Gandhian ideologies to our children so that they may understand the many purposes of life other than the competitiveness, impatience, arrogance, materialism, and the innumerable modern world distractions. In Gandhi's words, *'there is more to life than simply increasing its speed';* the most needed message for each one of us with regard to the present times. There is an urgent need for non-violent forms of life, speech, and expression in the present-day context for which Gandhi's vision is the way. In this moment of the conflicts and emergencies we observe around the globe, Gandhi's life and thought has acquired a new urgency and depth as on no occasion in the modern times; Education is the only way forward to take the ideology of Gandhi's greater morals of non-violence, peace, tolerance, patience, unity, health, truth, God realization to the young minds; only with which there will be possibility of a peaceful world left for the future generations. The ultimate message of Gandhi's whole philosophy is felt with his words that conveys everything of his great self is, **'My Life is my Message'.**

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THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

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Abstract

Women with disabilities (WWDs) are among the most sidelined in society, often missing out on social, economic, political, and health opportunities. WWDs in developing countries experience even greater marginalization. Many experts concur the factors like inaccessible schools, concerns for safety, or sheer neglect prevent numerous WWDs from pursuing education or vocational training, thus hindering their ability to earn a livelihood. This study examines the educational experiences of Sixteen Women with Visual Impairment (WWVI) from Cherthala Taluk, Kerala. The epistemological assumption of this research is based on an interpretative approach. The everyday experiences of WWVI can be better understood by 'contextual understanding'. The sampling method used for the study was non-probability sampling and Snowball sampling was used to choose the participants. The study highlighted the profound effects of both inclusive and segregated educational experiences on WWVI. Major findings reveal that while teachers generally support inclusion, they frequently overlook the specific needs and interests of WWVI. Additionally, data indicate that a significant portion of inclusive schools are not adequately prepared to cater to the unique educational needs of WWVI.

Keywords: Women, Visual impairment, Inclusive School, Peer, Teachers, Parents

Introduction

People with disabilities (PWDs) encounter societal neglect, marginalization, and stigma. They often live challenging lives, being deprived of essential facilities like healthcare and education. Labelling them "disabled" perpetuates negative stereotypes, deepening gender

and disability disparities. PWDs in India have historically been subject to negative attitudes, leading to further exclusion (Jonson R. Susan 1996; Chilwarwar & Sujatha, 2018).

WWDs face discrimination stemming from both gender and disability, heightening their vulnerability to violence and neglect. While policies and programs aim to address women's rights, they often overlook WWDs. Further, gender inequality remains a barrier to women's education and economic advancement in developing countries.

WWDs encounter heightened educational disparities. For instance, the challenges they face, such as school fees, transportation costs, and parental accompaniment requirements, further deepen these inequalities. This is further supported by a World Bank Report (2009) which showcased that educational disparities for CWDs are four to five times greater than their counterparts from scheduled tribes and castes.

Rousso (1999) report for the World Bank pointed out the oversight of WWDs in both gender and disability equity initiatives, leading to their educational outcomes falling behind. Moreover, studies by Devi & Swain (2022) unveiled the unique challenges WWVI faced, such as limited access to braille books, audio journals, and e-books. This often confines their academic choices primarily to Arts and Social Sciences. Dawn (2014) further stresses the importance of creating an inclusive environment, highlighting aspects like physical school access, transportation, and sanitation.

Visually Impaired (VI) individuals often lag behind educationally and vocationally when compared to their peers. Despite the transformative power of education, many WWVI face educational neglect, social ostracization, and information inaccessibility, intensifying their hardships (Hasazi et al., 1989; Naneetha & Srihari, 2021). These challenges are set against a backdrop of broader societal barriers.

Deep-rooted cultural, social, and economic reasons further compound these barriers, painting a complex picture of the struggles WWVI faced in their pursuit of education. This study focuses on understanding the educational journey of WWVI and the unique academic challenges they confront.

Rationale of the Study

In India, despite strides toward gender equality, women continue to face barriers to accessing education due to cultural, social, and economic reasons. The journey to achieve educational parity remains steeped in challenges. Singh (2007) critically discussed the status of the girl child, highlighting instances of biased educational funding which consequently leads women to enrol in institutions of lower quality (Satapathy,2020).

Historically, the education of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) wasn't prioritized in primary or secondary levels, resulting in prevalent accessibility issues in many educational institutions today. Oswald et al. (2003) accentuate that Women with Disabilities (WWDs) experience even heightened educational barriers. Singh (2007) points out that these disabled women encounter multiple hindrances, such as limited accessibility, which is evident from their reduced enrolment in specialized schools in comparison to disabled boys. Spinath (2012) suggests that while visual impairments can pose significant challenges in accessing and disseminating information, with the right tools and support aids, these challenges can be surmounted. It's therefore imperative to create a supportive academic environment equipped with necessary resources for Women with Visual Impairment (WWVI). However, discussions and studies focused on the educational experiences of WWVI in the Indian setting are sparse. Very few researchers delve into their lived academic experiences and the obstacles they face. The primary objective of this study is to spotlight these unique experiences of WWVI and probe into the academic barriers and challenges they confront.

Methodology

The study is situated in Kerala, chosen for its pioneering efforts in promoting the empowerment of persons with disabilities and its remarkable socio-demographic indicators, especially concerning women. Adopting a constructivist paradigm centered on understanding human experiences, this research employs an interpretative approach, emphasizing 'contextual understanding' of the lived experiences of WWVI. Guided by this ontological and epistemological stance, a qualitative research paradigm was chosen, which aligns with how

participants perceive and interact with the world. As a segment of a broader qualitative exploration, this research employed a non-probability sampling method, where units are selected based on specific features rather than statistical representativeness, as described by Ritchie & Lewis (2003). Snowball sampling further refined the participant selection process by relying on referrals from initially interviewed participants. Data from sixteen participants across diverse socio-economic backgrounds were collated, prioritizing confidentiality. The collection methods included in-depth interviews, guided by interview guide, to discern emotions, challenges, coping mechanisms, and overall experiences. Additionally, data were gathered from parents of WWVI to ensure comprehensive insights. While the study's scope is confined to women with visual impairments, it seeks to present their experiences across various social domains, elucidating the challenges they encountered and their subsequent reactions. Ultimately, this research aims to augment the understanding of the situations and educational experiences of WWDs in the Indian milieu.

The following criteria were used to narrow down the participants:

1.   Women belonging to the age group 20 to 40 living in rural areas.
2.   WWVI as per the Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016 by birth disability and not acquired disability.
3.   Women with Single Disability
4.   Women who are pursuing higher education or working will be included in the study.

Profile of the Participants

Understanding the background of the respondents provides insight into the participant's nature and background. For confidentiality, names have been altered. The research includes sixteen WWVI. The following table details their age, educational history, present situation, extent of disability, and the age when the disability was identified.

Sl. No.	Name	Age	Special school (Grade)	Inclusive school (Grade)	Education	Occupation	Age at which disability was identified
1	Sandra	24	1st -7th	8th -12th	BA, MA, B.ED -pursuing	Nil	By Birth
2	Ajitha	32	1st -7th	8th -12th	BA, MA, B.Ed.	Asst. Bank Manager (Indian Bank)	By Birth
3	Chitra	26	1st -7th	8th -12th	BA (pursuing)	Nil	By Birth
4	Sreelakshmi	28	1st - 7th	8th -12th	BA,MA	Music Teacher (contractual post)	By Birth
5	Afna	25	1st -7th 11th-12th	8th - 10th	BBA, Certificate course in Data Entry	Data Entry Operator	By Birth
6	Ashwathy	24	1st -7th	8th -12th	BA Economics, BA Music (pursuing)	Online music tutor	2 years
7	Vinaya	21	6th - 7th	1st -5th 8th -12th	BA	Nil	1.5 years
8	Jisha	24	1st - 7th	8th -12th	BA, MA, B.Ed.	Internship	By Birth
9	Revathy	23	1st - 7th	8th -12th	B.A, M.A, Ph.D. Scholar	Nil	By Birth
10	Suryalatha	33	1st - 7th	8th -12th	BA, MA, MPhil, PhD Scholar	Nil	By Birth
11	Jomol	25	6th - 7th	1st -5th 8th -12th	BCA,MBA	Technical Recruiter	1 year
12	Harishree	27	1st -7th 11th -12th	8th -10th	BA,TTC (Pursuing)	Worked in customer care	3 years
13	Sayunjya	25	1st-4th	5th -10th 11th - 12th	BA, MA, PhD Scholar	Nil	1 year
14	Simi	33	5th -6th	1st -4th 7th -12th	BA, MA, B.Ed., NET	Assistant Professor	1 year

| 15 | Anjana | 31 | 1st -7th | 8th -12th | BA,TTC (Pursuing) | Nil | By Birth |
| 16 | Pathu | 20 | 1st -7th | 8th -12th | BA (pursuing) | Nil | By Birth |

Findings and Analysis

1. Perceptions of WWVI regarding their experiences with teachers.

Teachers' Pedagogy

Teachers play an essential role in educating children with visual impairments (VI). Navigating their needs in a classroom with diverse learners can be daunting (Miyauchi,2020). The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasizes that inclusive education is a right, not merely a privilege. It promotes curriculum accessibility and encourages social bonding among students. While inclusive education generally occurs in standard classrooms, the predominantly visual-centric learning environments might hinder the availability of specialized teachers to assist students with visual impairments.

The following voices of the participants bring out the difficulties faced by WWVI in inclusive setup.

"I was the sole blind student in our class. The teachers seemed to treat me with sympathy. Being outgoing, I actively chose to partake in nearly every activity I could."

"Subjects such as Maths, Physics, and Chemistry were challenging for me. Teachers relied on blackboards to teach these subjects back then, which posed a significant obstacle to my learning."

Even though WWVI can study all subjects like their peers, they often feel excluded from participating in subject-related activities due to inadequate resources and instructions. The voices indicate that the teachers need to take the challenge of serving an academically diverse population in regular classrooms. Teachers need to have various teaching strategies to effectively educate WWVI.

Strategies adopted by teachers

WWVI faces challenges in understanding various subjects as a result of their loss of vision. Implementing effective teaching strategies is vital to enhance their comprehension. Adapting content, methods, and materials can help VI children grasp abstract concepts, promoting inclusion and equal opportunities (Dheeksha,2022).

These are some of the voices of the participants when asked about the support received from the teachers:
"Some teachers would ask me to come to the staff room if I had any doubts and I was allowed to meet them and clear doubts whenever they were free."
"I was made to sit with a friend who was good in academics when I was at school and she would help me with reading and writing"
"Some teachers were supportive and used to send notes of other students with us to home."
The research indicated that while many teachers aspired to create inclusive classrooms, they often lacked the essential techniques and approaches. Das & Ghosh (2018) found that a significant number of teachers felt ill-prepared to instruct children with disabilities WWDs. They wished for more time to offer effective aid. Additionally, many teachers didn't possess the required skills or the right mindset to effectively support these students.

Teachers' attitude towards disability
The participant feedback suggests that even though students with VI were physically present in the classroom with their peers, the data revealed their exclusion from certain activities.
" While attending YY school, I was initially chosen for a group song. However, my teacher decided to replace me, stating that I wouldn't manage to climb the stairs independently and would require assistance."
"I had a keen interest in co-curricular activities during my time at a special school. I engaged in numerous sports events, was part of the school choir, performed mono acts, and more. However, after transitioning to XX school in the 8th grade, the scenario changed drastically. They prevented me from participating in any activity, fearing I might injure myself. Those days were tough, and I found myself in tears often. "

A teacher's attitude toward disability is a pivotal factor in the education of children with disabilities CWDs (Smith, 2000). How teachers perceive and judge CWDs can profoundly impact their cognitive, emotional, and social growth (Parasuram,2006). The limited engagement of CWDs in physical activities is often due to their teachers' inexperience in this area. This gap arises from teachers' concerns about the children's safety, a preference for academics or specialized services over physical activities, and a limited comprehension of the significance of physical activity (as noted by McHugh,1995 and McHugh & Pyfer,1999).

2. **Academic Experiences**
<u>Academic Performance and Inclusion</u>
Despite government efforts to integrate WWVI in inclusive schools, they still face challenges in inclusive education due to issues like instructional methods, insufficient teacher training, teacher attitudes, and lack of teaching materials. The following verbatims substantiate the same.

"There are difficulties because when the other students learn, we may be writing the notes in braille and when it is time for them to sleep, we might have only started learning"
"I used to not have half of the notes and not understand half of the things and somehow I will manage it and write the exam."

Research showed that teachers experienced in teaching visually impaired students had more positive attitudes towards WWVI, making lessons more understandable for them. The study recommended alternative teaching methods for subjects like Mathematics and Science for WWVI and emphasized the need for inclusive teacher training.

Research indicates that subjects emphasizing visual content can be problematic for students with visual impairments (Franklin et al., 2001). This is especially the case for abstract scientific and mathematical ideas often depicted in two-dimensional ways (Cryer, 2013). Consequently, VI students typically experience restricted access to math and science education, resulting in their underrepresentation in advanced science courses and STEM professions (Martin et al., 2011). These are some of the voices of the respondents:

"If I opt for Mathematics, I knew that there should be someone who can guide me with this…. then I decided to opt for commerce"
"Relatives told my father that blind students mostly opted for commerce"
"I wanted to study science but I had gone till court for getting my right…an NGO helped me with this"

Often, teachers use visual techniques to teach mathematical and scientific concepts. These techniques exclude WWVI. They also may discourage the students about the feasibility of taking courses in these areas of study (Silverman & Bell,2019).

3. Educational Resources and School infrastructure
WWVI had to face different types of barriers in an inclusive setting. These are some of the voices of the participants which indicate the same:

"If I remember there was nothing that I could say that would make my school inclusive. They give the same textbooks that other students get. I learned by listening."
"As such there was not much technological support or equipment to support in inclusive schools."

Research indicates that subjects emphasizing visual content can be problematic for students with visual impairments (Franklin et al., 2001). This is especially the case for abstract scientific and mathematical ideas often depicted in two-dimensional ways (Cryer, 2013). Consequently, VI students typically experience restricted access to math and science education, resulting in their underrepresentation in advanced science courses and STEM professions (Martin et al., 2011). These are some of the voices of the participants when asked about school infrastructure.

"*There were no handrails were there in the verandas*"
"*In the beginning, I was dependent on my friends for everything later after one or two months I got adjusted to the physical environment still sometimes I used to get confused*"

Participants in the study found it difficult to move around independently in school and had to depend on their friends or teachers. The study indicated that most of the schools didn't have handrails in the walkways which was one of the barriers pointed out by the participants. Access to toilets was another major barrier most of them faced.

Conclusion and Recommendations

While both men and women with disabilities frequently encounter devaluation, isolation, marginalization, and discrimination, their experiences manifest distinctly. WWDs face an intensified challenge, dealing not only with disability-related discrimination but also compounded gender-related disparities. (Dawn,2014)

The research indicates that both inclusive and segregated schooling profoundly impact the lives of students with visual impairments (WWVI). Teachers' attitudes towards disability are crucial for inclusive education due to their significant role in WWVI's lives. All teachers should undergo both pre-service and in-service training to promote inclusive education. Although every school should feature a resource teacher for students with disabilities, only a few have such facilities. While teachers often support inclusion, they may neglect the specific interests and needs of WWVI, focusing mainly on academics and excluding them from co-curricular activities.

Data indicates that the majority of inclusive schools aren't adequately equipped for the teaching and learning needs of the visually impaired. While efforts at both global and national levels aim to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream education, there remains a significant gap in providing a barrier-free setting for WWVI. This underscores the need for policymakers and administrators to refine existing policies to craft a more conducive environment for WWVI.

Policies and legislative acts have advanced learning opportunities for WWVI. However, to further enhance inclusive practices, it's imperative to address the existing barriers promptly.

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NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY, 2020 AND THE FUTURE OF INDIA

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The world's knowledge landscape is undergoing rapid change. Many unskilled jobs may be replaced by machines as a result of big data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence. At the same time, there will be a rapid increase in demand for skilled labour with multidisciplinary skills across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, particularly in areas like mathematics, computer science, and data science. The New Education Policy 2020 came into effect on July 29.

Introduction

The country waited 34 long years for this document to be approved. After the COVID-19 crisis we have seen the educational institutions are dealing with multiple challenges, the extent to which this new policy will reshape the country's needs remains to be seen. Now, teaching and learning are done differently. Online instruction has replaced offline instruction. The recognition of new software and courses opens up new avenues for exploration. All things considered; the New Education Policy was implemented at a time when global GDP declines were cause for concern. The objective must be to have an education system in India that provides equal access to the best education for all students, regardless of social and economic status. To accomplish this, immediate and quick actions are required. Major reforms must be implemented to bring the highest quality and integrity into the system, from early childhood education to higher education, in order to close the gap between the current state of learning outcomes and what is desired (Kumar, K., Prakash, A., Singh, K. (2020)

As a result, education must focus less on content and more on learning how to think critically, solve problems, be creative and multidisciplinary, innovate, adapt, and absorb new information in new and evolving fields. Even though learning by doing can be helpful in some situations, teaching needs to change to make education more

hands-on, holistic, integrated, discovery-focused, learner-centred, flexible, and, of course, enjoyable. To develop all aspects of students' brains and make education more well-rounded, useful, and fulfilling for the learner, the curriculum must include basic arts, crafts, humanities, games, sports, and fitness, languages, literature, culture, and values. Students must be able to be ethical, rational, compassionate, and caring through education, which must also prepare them for rewarding employment (Goel, M.M, 2020)

When the government of Rajiv Gandhi changed education policy in 1986, the focus was on strengthening the primary school system through "operation blackboard." The NEP 2020 now aims to provide education that is focused on skills in response to shifting requirements. To assist young people in making educated decisions, what appears to be an idealistic policy will need to be properly implemented.

National Economic Policy and its vision for the future

The education system in India (Bharat), which is based on the Indian ethos and directly contributes to the transformation of India, is the subject of the National Education Policy 2020. By providing everyone with equal access to high-quality education without regard to race, religion, gender, caste, or creed, it aims to maintain and care for the current knowledge society. It is also a step toward making India a world leader in knowledge. The Policy envisions that all the educational institutions' uniform curriculum and teaching methods must cultivate in students a profound respect for the Fundamental Duties, Constitutional values, a sense of nationalism, and an awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world. The Policy's goal is to help students develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support a responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen, as well as a deep-rooted pride in being Indian and love for the country in thought, spirit, and deed.

History of National Education Policy 1986

The National Education Policy of 1968, based on the Kothari Commission's report, was Indira Gandhi's first significant education policy change in India. The following were its goals:

Better cultural and economic growth can result from national integration.
In India, compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 special qualifications and training for teachers.

The "Three Language Formula" places an emphasis on the language of the region. urging people to learn as much Hindi as they can. The syllabuses include Sanskrit. Up to 6% of national income was recommended for the education budget.

As the National Education Policy (NEP) of 1986, the Rajiv Gandhi administration introduced a new and improved education policy that emphasized equal access to education for all, particularly women and SC/ST individuals. The following points were covered:

Start "Operation Blackboard" to improve primary schools across the country Attach open educational system to the general public education system with the help of IGNOU Promote economic and social development at the grassroot level by implementing "rural universities" Note that the PV Narasimha Rao government brought some changes to this policy in 1992, and the UPA government changed it further in 2005. Explore the possibilities of adult education. Provide more scholarships. Recruit more teachers from backward classes. Induce incentives for the poor to send their kids to school.

Major reforms in National Education Policy 2020
Some of the major reforms of National Education Policy 2020 are:

a) Early Childhood Care and Education: The National Education Policy (NEP) calls for the development of a national pre-primary education curriculum framework and places an emphasis on the significance of early childhood education and care. Pre-primary education should be incorporated into the primary education system as well.

b) School Education: The National Education Policy (NEP) calls for a significant overhaul of the educational system, with an emphasis on experiential learning and critical thinking abilities. It suggests a 5+3+3+4 education structure, in which the first five years of school focus on foundational learning, followed by three years of middle

school, three years of high school, and four years of higher education. This allows students to choose from a variety of academic and vocational subjects.

c) Higher Education: A common higher education system with a single regulator for both public and private institutions is what the NEP proposes. It also recommends establishing a National Research Foundation to support the promotion of research and innovation in higher education.

d) Teacher Education: The NEP recommends the creation of National Professional Standards for Teachers and places an emphasis on the significance of teacher education and professional development. Additionally, it proposes incorporating technology into teacher education and establishing a National Teachers' Portal to provide teachers with access to resources and support.

e) Multilingual Education: The National Education Plan acknowledges the significance of bilingual education and the potential role it can play in fostering national unity and diversity. It encourages the study of Indian languages and classical languages, as well as the use of the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction up until at least grade 5 (Sawant, Dr Rupesh G., Sankpal, Dr Umesh B., 2021)

Few of the advantages of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 for the benefit of Indian education system:

The curriculum is adaptable and multidisciplinary of The NEP 2020 which encourages and focuses on students' overall development, and prepares them for the 21st century. The NEP 2020 also stresses the significance of experiential and hands-on learning methods, such as inquiry-based and project-based approaches, for engaging students and fostering their capacity for critical thinking and problem-solving. Another praiseworthy advantage of The NEP 2020 is to ensure that all teachers are trained to the highest possible standards, the NEP 2020 calls for the establishment of National Professional Standards for Teachers. The NEP 2020 aims to make higher education more accessible by making degree programs more adaptable and diverse and increasing the number of colleges and universities. Students will have

more chances to go to college and achieve their academic and professional goals as a result of this. Equity and accessibility are another goal of the NEP 2020 to make it easier for all students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to get an education. In order to provide students in need with financial assistance, it calls for the establishment of a National Scholarship Portal and the expansion of school infrastructure in underserved areas. As a result, educational barriers will be lessened and the educational system will be more equitable. The NEP 2020 acknowledges the significance of preserving and promoting India's cultural and linguistic diversity. In the early years of education, the mother tongue or regional language should be used as the medium of instruction, and Indian languages and cultures should be studied at all levels of education. India's rich cultural heritage will be preserved and promoted as a result of this.

Limitations and challenges to the implementations of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

At first we can see there is a teacher shortage in India, particularly in remote areas. The NEP 2020 calls for more teachers to be recruited and trained, but it might be hard to find and keep enough qualified teachers to meet the increased demand. The NEP 2020 also calls for significant education sector investments. However, whether or not the government will be able to provide the resources and funding required to fully implement these reforms remains to be seen. The NEP 2020 is a significant shift in India's approach to education, and some educators and stakeholders who are accustomed to the current system may oppose it. It is also concerning that the NEP 2020 encourages the use of experiential and hands-on learning methods and places an emphasis on the significance of flexible and multidisciplinary curricula. Assessing student learning and holding educators and schools accountable for student outcomes may become more challenging as a result of this. In order to guarantee that schools and educators are held accountable for student progress and that learning is accurately measured, it will be essential to develop appropriate assessment tools and systems (Sawant, Dr Rupesh G., Sankpal, Dr Umesh B., 2021)

National Education Policy 2020 and its future in India

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India will depend on a number of things, including the level of support and funding provided by the government, the willingness of educators and other stakeholders to embrace the reforms outlined in the NEP 2020, and the success or challenges of implementing these reforms. As a result, it is difficult to predict the exact future of the NEP 2020 in India. The NEP 2020's reforms are ambitious and extensive, and if they are effectively implemented, they have the potential to transform India's education system and enhance education quality for all students.

The NEP 2020 portrays the importance of a flexible, multidisciplinary curriculum which is beneficial for the students of the 21st century and it also prepares them for the future. It also encourages the use of experiential and hands-on learning to engage students and help them develop their ability to think critically and solve problems. Students could be better prepared for success in a world that is changing quickly through these methods, which could also help them learn the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in the 21st century (Goel, M.M, 2020)

The policy places a strong emphasis on co-governance, equity, and quality. The first policy of its kind in India's history, the National Education Policy 2020, will have a significant impact on the nation. In order to ensure that students are prepared for an interconnected world, it establishes a new framework for education based on current trends and developments. In terms of access to education, education quality, and education financing, this new education policy is likely to have a significant impact on the nation.

Conclusion

Institutions and policymakers need to reevaluate the learning systems that are truly relevant for the younger generations and reevaluate the desired educational outcomes in light of the evolving future of work. Skills necessary for innovation, such as analytical and digital skills, should be developed through the education imparted. To face the various threats posed by the crisis, both now and in the future, universities must produce students with resilience, a propensity for flexibility and adaptability, interpersonal emotional intelligence, a positive outlook, and creative and critical thinking skills. For scalable,

sustainable, and inclusive blended education, it is necessary to establish new engagement models like learning consortiums and coalitions made up of various stakeholders like governments, institutions, publishers, alumni, technology providers, corporate professionals, and telecom operators. It is past due to teach students and faculty about evolving digital competencies so that they can use technology responsibly and become digitally fluent. In order to make use of the best of both worlds—blended learning—institutions must diligently work on producing or procuring high-quality content, effectively utilizing resources, and methodically planning concrete tasks in accordance with the institution's vision and policies. Relevant and dynamic training programs must be provided to teachers so that they are aware of educational requirements in order to effectively implement the promised curriculum. The policy paints perfect picture, despite the fact that the NEP is unquestionably a step toward a brighter future.

The NEP 2020 is an ambitious policy document that aims to modernize and reform India's educational system. Even though putting the policy into action will require a lot of time and money, it has the potential to significantly raise the country's education standards and ensure that every student has access to learning and personal development opportunities.

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PROMOTING INCLUSION IN INDIAN CLASSROOMS: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

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In recent years, the concept of inclusion has gained significant traction in the field of education, not just in India but across the globe. Inclusion refers to the practice of accommodating and embracing diverse learners, including those with special needs, within the mainstream educational setting. This approach is rooted in the belief that every student, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, has the right to receive a quality education in an environment that nurtures their growth and development. In the context of Indian classrooms, where diversity is a defining characteristic, the implementation of inclusive practices holds immense importance.

Introduction

As an educator with a specialization in special needs and diversity, equity, and inclusion, your role is pivotal in driving positive changes in Indian classrooms. Your expertise encompasses various dimensions, from understanding the unique needs of diverse learners to training fellow teachers in creating inclusive spaces. Let's delve into the key aspects of promoting inclusion in Indian classrooms and the strategies that can be employed to realize this vision.

Understanding the Diversity in Indian Classrooms:

India is a nation of rich cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity. Within the same classroom, one can find students hailing from different regions, speaking various languages, and belonging to varied socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, there are students with varying learning styles, abilities, and special needs.

Acknowledging and celebrating this diversity is the first step toward fostering an inclusive environment.

Inclusive Curriculum and Instruction:

An inclusive curriculum is one that caters to the needs of all learners. This involves differentiating instruction to accommodate various learning styles and providing multiple entry points to content. As an educator, you can collaborate with fellow teachers to design lessons that consider the diverse needs of students. Utilizing a variety of teaching strategies, such as visual aids, hands-on activities, and peer collaboration, can enhance the accessibility of the curriculum.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL):

Universal Design for Learning is a framework that promotes inclusive education by designing instructional materials and activities that cater to diverse learning preferences. UDL suggests providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression. For instance, providing audio, visual, and kinesthetic options for content consumption, allowing students to demonstrate understanding through various modes, and offering flexible learning pathways can greatly benefit students with different needs.

Teacher Training and Professional Development:

As a teacher trainer and leader, your role extends beyond your own classroom. Organizing workshops and training sessions for teachers on inclusive practices can have a cascading effect on the entire education system. Providing educators with tools to identify and address diverse learning needs equips them to create more inclusive classrooms. This can involve sessions on differentiated instruction, assistive technology, behavior management strategies, and fostering a positive classroom climate.

Collaboration and Co-Teaching:

Collaboration among educators is essential in an inclusive classroom. Co-teaching, where a special education teacher works alongside a mainstream teacher, is an effective strategy. This enables students with

special needs to receive targeted support while remaining in the mainstream environment. Collaboration also extends to involving parents, specialists, and support staff in the educational journey of each student.

Addressing Barriers to Inclusion:

In the Indian context, there are certain challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive practices:

1. **Awareness and Attitude**: There might be misconceptions and biases among teachers and parents regarding special needs and inclusive education. Organizing awareness campaigns and sensitization workshops can help dispel myths and foster a more inclusive attitude.

2. **Resource Allocation**: Inclusive education often requires additional resources such as assistive technology, learning materials, and support staff. Advocating for proper resource allocation at both institutional and policy levels is crucial.

3. **Infrastructure and Accessibility**: Physical barriers in schools can hinder the participation of students with disabilities. Ensuring that schools have accessible infrastructure, including ramps, accessible toilets, and sensory-friendly spaces, is essential.

4. **Linguistic and Cultural Diversity**: In a country with multiple languages and cultures, ensuring that educational materials are available in various languages and culturally sensitive is essential for inclusion.

5. **Teacher Preparation**: Pre-service and in-service teacher training programs should incorporate modules on special needs and inclusive practices. This will equip teachers with the necessary skills to cater to diverse learners.

The Role of Leadership:

As a teacher leader and leadership trainer, your influence extends to shaping the policies and practices of educational institutions.

Leadership plays a critical role in creating an inclusive school culture. By advocating for inclusive policies, setting a positive example, and fostering a collaborative environment, you can inspire other educators to embrace inclusive practices.

Finally, to close on this, would say;

Inclusion in Indian classrooms is not just a goal but a necessity. The diverse landscape of Indian education demands an equally diverse and flexible approach to teaching and learning. As an educator with expertise in special needs, diversity, equity, and inclusion, your role is pivotal in transforming classrooms into inclusive spaces where every student can thrive. By championing inclusive practices, offering targeted training, and collaborating with stakeholders, you can contribute significantly to the realization of this noble vision.

Remember, an inclusive classroom is not just about accommodating differences; it's about celebrating diversity and empowering all learners to reach their fullest potential.

REVIEW ARTICLE

Book: Ann Smith, Claudia Mitchell, Editors (2023) *The Girl in the Pandemic: Transnational Perspectives*, USA: Berghahn Books, pages: 224, ISBN 978-1-80073-807-2

By VANITA GANESH,
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Introduction, Context, and Themes

"*The Girl in the Pandemic*" is a collection of essays compiled by Claudia Mitchell and Ann Smit that offers much-needed perspectives on the challenges and resilience of gender justice and development practitioners and scholars in the 'Global South' as they navigate the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic in young women and girls' lives. In this review, I will delve into the main themes and contextualize this gender justice work in the Indian context and also look at the overall impact of this gender justice work.

I am composing this review based on a comprehensive analysis of educational patterns and access for girls, drawing from my observations and the collective knowledge and expertise of the community leaders affiliated with the organization I represent, Shadhika.

After over three years since the first pandemic-induced lockdown came into place in India in March 2020, we are yet to recover from the lasting impact the pandemic has had on the communities we work with. Not to forget that individuals belonging to underserved and minority communities face a significantly higher incidence of physical, emotional, and other kinds of violence and apathy, directly linked to gender, sexuality, caste, religious, or socioeconomic identities.

This volume helps draw a picture of what the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns were like for girls and young women in eight countries located in the so-called 'global south'[1]. The chapters, as the author's

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[1] Teixeira da Silva JA. Rethinking the use of the term 'Global South' in academic publishing. European Science Editing 2021;47.

introductory note states, were written in the early stages of the pandemic, just before COVID-19 vaccines came into the public discourse, and as the world was still struggling to bring the virus under control.

The volume and the essays it contains reflect the complexity of working in the gender justice sphere, especially during times of disasters or crisis: the nature (and complexity) of time and the way 'context' can change in the blink of an eye, and of the nature between research/academic writing and praxis and the constant fight to keep both connected. As the authors have quoted Sathyaraj Venkatesan and Ishani Anwesha Joshi (2022:1): "*The pandemic also implies a dismantling and rearranging of the fundamental structures of time within which human beings interacted with the world. Such a discontinuity in the linear trajectory of chronological time engenders an epistemic and ontological reconfiguration of the very sense of time itself.*"

The book is organized into three parts— *Part I: Reflections; Part II: Continuing Education; and Part III: Vulnerabilities*, which highlights the authors' emphasis on the evolving and (somewhat) nonlinear nature of scholarship in the development sector.

Telephone calls and document/data analysis have substituted in-person interviews, as highlighted by numerous scholars in this volume. This shift, along with the author's own experiences in the field has blurred the definition of the 'field' and disrupted the presence of respondents in research. Historically, reduced proximity to the 'field' and respondents has resulted in a disconnect between policies/learnings and genuine needs. The authors of the volume acknowledge this gap by noting the absence of girl-led narratives in their collection.

Logistical roadblocks during the pandemic have impacted researchers globally. It is important to examine representation in academia and research of the communities studied. Would a decolonized approach have influenced the response of development practitioners to the pandemic and lockdown differently? Nonetheless, the scholars and practitioners in this volume prioritize seeing people and communities beyond numbers.

The authors and scholars make a compelling case for social scientists and practitioners to look at research as collaborative, evolving, and nonlinear, and to not see this as a stumbling block or halt in the work we do, but as opportunities to better inform our work and policies going forward.

The works featured in the volume and the retrospective bent of mind the reader is pushed to read them from is a reflection of the unanswered questions and unclear futures that many girls as well as development practitioners and gender justice advocates are trying to grapple with in a seemingly 'post pandemic' world: *Where do we go from here and how do we start?*

Chapter One by Nidhi Kapur revisits the 2018–20 Ebola epidemic in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to shed light on the disproportionate impact on girls and young women during disease outbreaks. Kapur's essay utilizes reflective analysis of evidence from gender and age-disaggregated group discussions and primary data from women and girls in the DRC to draw lessons for addressing the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide.

Kapur emphasizes the significance of qualitative data in highlighting the skewed effect disease outbreaks have on women and girls, be it Ebola or COVID-19. The five lessons outlined by Kapur underscore the exacerbation of existing gender disparities, the need to address biases in scientific research and resource allocation, and the persistent invisibility of girls in crisis situations.

Women and girls, alongside gender and sexual minorities, bear the initial brunt of the crisis across various domains such as home, education, healthcare, and employment. The fallout from the pandemic, including increased dropout rates and reduced access to education, raises concerns about early marriages and neglect of menstrual, sexual, and reproductive care. In India, the proportion of out-of-school girls in India has dropped to 2% in 2022[2], the lowest-ever rate. Gender-sensitive interventions are imperative in addressing these issues.

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[2] Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2022

Implicit biases in policies and interventions pose a significant threat to gender justice efforts during crises like Ebola and COVID-19. Kapur's lessons highlight the lack of representation and commitment to economic, social, and political policies globally.

Kapur's work underscores the importance of making data readily available, analyzed, and actionable for on-the-ground actors, both in India and worldwide, as we navigate the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter Two, titled 'How to Build "Meaningful Bonds" with Poor Young Women? State Interventions during the Lockdown in Argentina' by Ana Cecilia Gaitán, moves the reader to the situation unfolding in the South American country of Argentina.

Gaitán's chapter looks at the ways in which the Argentinian state authorities had to invent and reinvent themselves. Coming from a place of precarity, having just been established some months before the pandemic struck, the *National Ministry of Women, Genders, and Diversity* and its provincial counterpart in Buenos Aires (Argentina's capital city) and given the decentralized nature of the government, as cited by Gaitán, the local governments and state authorities were at the forefront of making sure measure to slow down the spread of the virus and mitigate the socio-economic issues that came with it.

Gaitán uses these two questions to explore and measure the effectiveness of state action to prevent and mitigate violence against women and girls: "*How does the state provide care and support with limited territorial interventions?*" and "*How does the state maintain this bond when it must dispense with the facilities and types of interaction that are built on daily life and proximity?*"

This essay, through three distinct sections, examines the Argentinian government's accountability and flexibility in the face of a crisis, what a decentralized approach to care can look like through the example of a commercial middle-class district that goes by a pseudonym in the chapter (Las Luciérnagas), and lastly examines the "persistent invisibility" (to borrow Nidhi Kapur's words) of women and girls' issues amidst this.

The data looks at digital or virtual lines of action— from social media posts by government agencies to distributing relief materials and information locally— to understand the state's approach to mitigating the effects of the deadly pandemic. The study of the Las Luciérnagas District and the examination of state action, especially in making social care accessible during shelter-in-place orders, points us to the effectiveness and scalability of community care, or "*The neighborhood looks after the neighborhood.*"

Gaitán's chapter prompts practitioners and development scholars in India to examine how we rely on community-based collective care: How community and collective care[3] rather than state-sponsored care has been used in other contexts as well.

 Chapter Three by Nokukhanya Ngcobo, Zinhle Nkosi, and Ayub Sheik explores the experiences of young female rural students during the COVID-19 lockdown when they were sent home due to university residence closures. This chapter sheds light on the often-overlooked psychosocial challenges faced by young women and girls while sheltering in place.

The authors focus on the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where scarce resources, rising unemployment, and salary cuts have resulted in economic hardships. These hardships have further exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities, including increased incidents of domestic violence, limited access to education and healthcare, and food and nutrition insecurity. The authors provide qualitative insights into the experiences of eight undergraduate women who were forced to return home to rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal following the lockdown.

The study reveals three main themes—home environment experiences, societal experiences, and personal experiences—each with its own sub-themes. While not all sub-themes will be discussed here for brevity, a few specific sub-themes stand out.

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[3]https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/04/11/women-self-help-groups-combat-covid19-coronavirus-pandemic-india

One notable sub-theme explores how living conditions during the pandemic disregarded physical distancing norms, leading to increased instances of domestic violence, intensified household chores, and prioritization of care work over education for women and girls.

Another significant sub-theme focuses on the psychosocial effects of the pandemic on youth, particularly young women. It highlights the prevalence of fake news, the impact of salon closures, the social stigma associated with being a government aid recipient, the stigmatization of COVID-19 infection, and the adoption of unhealthy lifestyles.

The respondents reported adverse effects on their mental health and social ridicule due to salon closures and receiving government aid. The authors emphasize the need for empathy in addressing these issues, particularly those faced by young women and girls. Social stigma and isolation resulting from COVID-19 further exacerbate the risk of conflicts and domestic violence[4], emphasizing the urgency of a compassionate approach.

Section two opens with a chapter on building and fostering alternate models to sustain education, which sets the tone for the entire section.

All four chapters in this section highlight the psychosocial and psychological impact that the pandemic and lockdowns have had on young women and girls from different countries and contexts.

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[4] Psychological Consequences of Social Isolation During COVID-19 Outbreak by Pietrabissa Giada, Simpson Susan G. (2020)
https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02201

Chapter Four, titled 'Women Teachers Support Girls during the COVID-19 School Closures in Uganda' by Christine Apiot Okudi introduces the *Senior Woman Teacher (SWT)*. In the absence of support mechanisms to guide and counsel young women and girls in school during the COVID-19 lockdowns and to guide them through school reopening and re-enrolments, or to support "*child mothers and pregnant girls*", SWTs have been recognized by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in Uganda as "*as one of the basic requirements and minimum standards for the operation of schools (MoES, 2013)*."

The author expounds on the continued need for SWTs in schools across Uganda to identify and address issues affecting young women and girls in the face of school closures. This is backed by findings from the survey conducted which pointed out that: Access to guidance and counseling from SWTs stood at 91% of the school girls interviewed and 85% of the LC1 women representatives appreciated the support of the SWTs.

Like *Anganwadis (a type of rural child care center)* and ASHA workers[5] in India, the SWTs have better access and inroads to the community and the people. The SWTs also have a better chance of making interpersonal and social connections with the girls and their families. The author illustrates the significance of adolescent health information and a robust support system in mitigating challenges faced by young girls. This evidence underscores the transformative impact that access to such resources can have on young women and girls.

Chapters five, six, and seven examine, among socio-economic factors, the psychosocial impact, among other indicators, of the COVID-19-induced lockdowns on young college-going women in Poland, across rural Ethiopia, and New Delhi.

Chapter Five uses *Dinners in the Time of Pandemic,* defined as a "*grassroots initiative based on the concept of care*" in Poland by the authors as a case study to understand the very concept of care. "*We*

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[5]https://theleaflet.in/asha-and-anganwadi-workers-are-the-backbones-of-indias-rural-health-and-care-services/

created Dinners in the Time of Pandemic to facilitate supporting people in urgent need of food by connecting them with individuals who were willing to share their supplies," write the authors, while also stating that the initiative has only been operating for four months (A/N: since the time of publishing of the volume). This chapter stitches together the theoretical understanding of 'care' with the context in Poland, and finally with the authors' findings and understanding of care after having engaged with the initiative.

Chapters Six and Seven specifically look at the experiences of college-going students in Ethiopia and India. While differences in context remain— geographical, cultural, religious, sexual orientation, and legislative— the problems arising from the lockdowns, unfortunately, resonate across both countries.

Cut off from campuses, peers, and classes, the young women from across Ethiopia and New Delhi have to reckon with increasing domestic and care work, patriarchal bias in accessing online education, diminishing financial and job prospects, early and forced marriage, gender-based violence within and outside homes, and mental and physical health issues, among other socio-political problems.

"*The girls who participated in our study had many fears and uncertainties about the future, but every one of them said that she was looking forward to continuing her education*," reported the chapter by Hannah Pugh, Eleni Negash, Frehiwot Tesfaye, and Madalyn Nielsen from agriculture, technical, vocational, education, and training ATVET colleges across Ethiopia.

"*Anxiety related to their academic lives, to the loss of income, and to the increased fear of losing out on educational opportunities in a country that prioritizes boys' education*," note Richa Rana, Poonam Yadav, and Shreya Sandhu— authors of chapter seven titled 'Exploring the Psychosocial Experiences of Women Undergraduates in Delhi, India, during the COVID-19 Pandemic'.

In both chapters, we see respondents describe their experience during the lockdown as *"feelings of frustration and hopelessness," "loss of goals"* and *"just a lot of monotony right now"* (sic).

College campus spaces to break free from patriarchal norms were lost, along with the sudden shift back to a hetero-patriarchal set-up at home. "*In the back of the mind, there is a lingering tension that when there was a college there was some joy in our life. Going to college daily, traveling daily. And for me, they were mainly solo trips*," said a college student in Delhi, lamenting the time she had to herself- a luxury during lockdowns.

The study of ATVET students from across Ethiopia and the undergraduate students in Delhi underline warnings given by social scientists since the beginning of the pandemic and lockdowns: That already existing socioeconomic inequalities combined with the consequences of the pandemic will push back any progress made to bolster women's presence in higher education. To ensure the full participation of young women in colleges after the lockdowns were lifted, both chapters underline the need to address academic anxieties and provide support for the various forms of distress, including financial, social, psychological, and psychosocial challenges.

In the third section of the volume, titled "Vulnerabilities," the focus is on examining the experiences of gender and sexual minorities in accessing the medico-legal infrastructure during the global implementation of lockdown measures.

This section juxtaposes real-life incidents with the legal framework to highlight the importance of social change and robust political will. It underscores that, without these catalysts, marginalized and underserved populations will continue to be reduced to mere statistics, rendering the strength of the law on paper ineffectual.

Chapter Eight 'Lockdown and Violence against Women and Children: Insights from Hospital-Based Crisis Intervention Centers in Mumbai, India' is based on the experiences of survivors of violence who sought help at Dilaasa centers[6] during lockdown. The authors use the challenges faced by adolescent and young women survivors in seeking help and those faced by counselors in providing it to demonstrate the need for effective and prompt state response during times of crisis.

[6]https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/dilaasa-crisis-centres-prove-a-haven-for-women-facing-domestic-violence-118100500109_1.html

A UN survey conducted in 13 countries reports that nearly 1 in 2 women and girls report direct or indirect experiences of violence since the start of the pandemic[7]. Violence against women (VAW) is associated with a wide range of adverse physical, sexual, and mental health impacts (Rege and Bhate-Deosthali 2018).

With the public health system overwhelmed, private healthcare providers overcharging or shutting down services termed as 'non-essential', and despite directives by the government to continue the provision of VAW/C (violence against women/children) response services, shelter homes, child welfare services, child welfare officers, and other services were not available or slow to respond.

The authors of this chapter turn to one of the few functioning and responsive services during the time of lockdown— the Dilasaa Centers in Mumbai. "*At Dilaasa centers, survivors of violence are provided with psychological support through empowerment counseling, an emergency shelter in the hospital, police aid and legal intervention, and medical and medicolegal support. Dilaasa counselors liaise with other support agencies…*" These centers continue to provide support over the phone or in person when needed.

The authors of this section provide us with a thematic breakdown of the challenges faced by survivors of violence who approached the Dilasaa centers, and also about the challenges faced by support personnel at these centers. State apathy combined with entrenched patriarchal beliefs, restricted mobility, restriction of services, and uncertainty proved to be a deadly combination for women and girls facing different kinds of violence within and outside their homes.

Chapter Nine looks at another aspect of violence faced by young women and girls during the pandemic: early and forced marriages. A 2020 report by UNICEF warns us that ten million additional child

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[7]https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2021/11/covid-19-and-violence-against-women-what-the-data-tells-us

marriages may occur before the end of the decade due to the pandemic and its fallout[8].

What this chapter, by Gayatri Sharma and Ayesha Khaliq, along with the other chapters in this section aim to do is to map out the ways in which communal strife and discrimination along with preexisting lack of access to support and rights have pushed back progress made in the sphere of girls' education.

Girls from underserved and marginalized communities whose access to education and social services has been neglected are at a higher risk of early marriage or trafficking[9]. The National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) tells us that 48% of girls in India with no education were married below 18 years of age, as compared to only 4% among those who attained higher education.

Unfounded beliefs and practices, and communal tensions compounded the issues faced by women and girls from Muslim and historically oppressed caste communities. "*The social impact of the marginalization of Muslims was first felt when Muslim women had difficulty in accessing medical services*[10]," state the authors.

Reverse migration, religious bias against Muslims, poverty, fear of loss of control, and the devastating effects of the second COVID-19 wave in India have been rightly flagged by the authors as contributing to the reversal of progress made to end child marriage in India, especially among historically oppressed and marginalized communities. The authors also flag that the central government's increase in the legal marriageable age of girls from eighteen to twenty-one, while well-intentioned, might be misplaced. Unless the distance between the

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[8]https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/10-million-additional-girls-risk-child-marriage-due-covid-19#:~:text=NEW%20YORK%2C%208%20March%202021,analysis%20released%20by%20UNICEF%20today.

[9]https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1783/Child_marriage_in_India_law_guide_and_directory.pdf

[10] https://thewire.in/communalism/rajasthan-muslim-woman-baby-dies-doctor

government and its services with the people who need it the most is bridged, the laws will only remain effective on paper.

Chapter Ten, which looks at the child domestic workers in Ethiopia serves as a sobering reminder of the consequences that arise when child labor laws and other intersecting issues are disregarded amidst the ongoing pandemic. The *Biruh Tesfa for All* program serves as the site of research for this chapter. This program operates for extremely marginalized and disadvantaged girls in poor urban areas of Ethiopia, with adult female mentors trained to facilitate sessions on basic education and life skills for the children forced to work. Under the Labor Law in Ethiopia, the chapter states, children under the age of fifteen are prohibited from working and those aged fifteen to seventeen are considered young workers.

Like the Senior Woman Teacher (SWTs) from Chapter Four (Okudi, 2020), these mentors have the space to negotiate with the employers and families of the girl domestic workers, once again demonstrating the excellent reach of decentralizing response needs. "...beneficiaries and mentors from this study described such programs as giving child domestic workers hope and a positive outlook for a better future."

While the significance of prevention and support programs for child domestic workers cannot be overstated, the current reality is that such initiatives remain limited in scale and fragmented. Consequently, their ability to effectively reach and assist the vast number of marginalized girls engaged in domestic work is uncertain. This chapter is an excellent primer for practitioners and policymakers looking to study and improve the reach of protective and preventative programs for young women and girls in marginalized communities the world over.

Chapter Eleven is the only piece in this volume that centers on individuals who openly identify as transgender women and centers around the program and policy needs of individuals outside mainstream sexual and gender identities.

The participants included transgender women from eighteen to twenty-five years of age in Thailand and included students as well as full-time and part-time workers. Through the interviews, five prominent themes surfaced: the adverse economic repercussions of COVID-19,

heightened tensions experienced during self-quarantine, discrimination encountered in online learning, the breakdown of relationships due to the pandemic, and challenges in accessing hormone treatment.

Already stigmatized and discriminated against, the pandemic and lockdowns only meant limited economic and career opportunities for those already in the margins. This also started a domino effect starting from shrinking job and financial opportunities, which led to worsening healthcare, which led to diminishing mental and psychosocial health and isolation.

What is also interesting to note is the effect the lockdowns had on relationships: "*The state quarantine has not only affected economic lives but has also resulted in the separation of many couples who still have no legal status because their union is not recognized in law.*" This chapter has highlighted the imperative for human rights movements pertaining to the LGBTQ+ community to enhance inclusivity and advocate for improved social support and rights-based inclusion.

Conclusion

There is no clear or easy answer, as the contributors of the book point out— the progress made before COVID-19 wreaked havoc was hard-earned over decades, and the pandemic has only exacerbated inequalities based on gender, religion, caste, economic status, and geography. But the need of the hour, this volume and the chapters reiterate, is to acknowledge that exclusion leads to vulnerability and exploitation.

In addition to the challenges highlighted by the contributors, it is important to recognize the important work being done by organizations like the grassroots nonprofits supported by Shadhika to combat gender injustice. By providing educational opportunities and investing in community-based grassroots leadership, Shadhika aims to break the cycle of exclusion and vulnerability that can lead to exploitation. Shadhika believes education is the most effective vehicle for women and girls to move out of chronic disenfranchisement and towards self-determination.

An important aspect that enables this work, something pointed out by the authors in the preface, is to apply a decolonized and intersectional lens within global development and turn to community leaders to lead the way for development work. This has helped organizations like Shadhika draw from the wisdom and experience of leaders on the ground to respond to emerging dynamic and contextual needs.
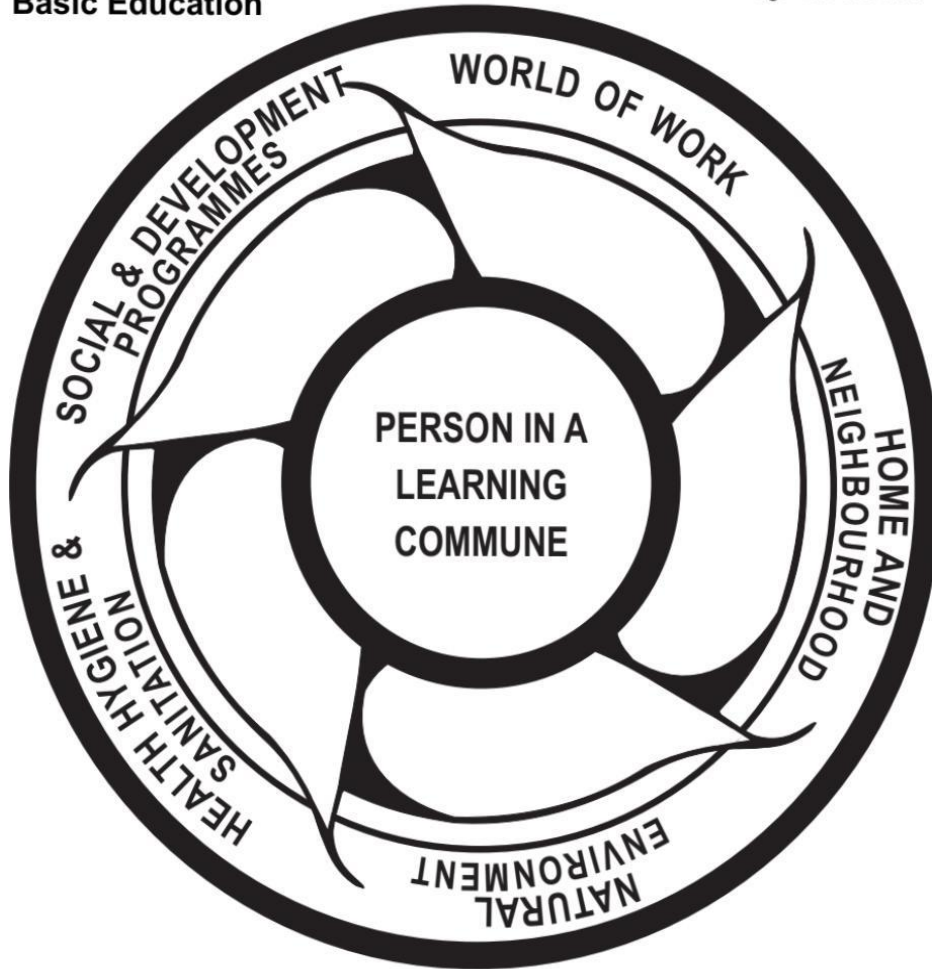
This book is a must-read for gender justice and development scholars and practitioners who want to understand the effect of the pandemic on young women and girls through the loss of or effect on education. It is also a great resource to understand the psychological and psychosocial effects of the pandemic on girls.

GANDHI SHIKSHAN BHAVAN

Functional Education

Indian Council of Basic Education

Regd. No. 9331/64

Circular diagram with "PERSON IN A LEARNING COMMUNE" at center, surrounded by: SOCIAL & DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES, WORLD OF WORK, HOME AND NEIGHBOURHOOD, NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH HYGIENE & SANITATION.

Develpment of well-integrate personality is possible if :

a. Educational experiences and work experiences interweave, intersect and reinforce each other.
b. Students and teachers participate actively in the community services such as adult education, promotion of better health, hygience and sanitation etc.
c. Curriculum provides for self-directed learning and
d. Education concerns itself with the development of the human person.