

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 433

SO 030 344

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 TITLE Women in Modern Indian Literature: High School Level.  
 PUB DATE Jan 90  
 NOTE 28p.  
 PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS Fiction; Foreign Countries; High Schools; Instructional Materials; Learning Activities; \*Secondary School Curriculum; Social Studies; Teaching Methods; \*Womens Studies

IDENTIFIERS \*India; \*Indian Literature

ABSTRACT

Secondary school lessons on women in modern Indian society as they are portrayed in 20th century works of literature are presented. The lessons focus on four novels, and could be read in conjunction with the study of a period of Indian history. Each lesson features background on the author, a list of discussion questions, and suggested writing activities. An annotated list of works featuring 20th century women authors who have been recognized by the world community for their achievements also is provided. As background reading for teachers, a lecture on the status of women and a brief history of the womens' movement in India is appended. (DB)

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Women in Modern Indian Literature  
High School Level

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January, 1990

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This project was completed under a  
U.S. Department of Education  
Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminar Abroad Grant, 1989,  
MS. Lunning Chiao, Project Director

Indian women are not well understood by people in the West. In a similar vein Indian literature is unfamiliar to many. Before I started this project I did not have a clear picture of Indian women or an appreciation for Indian literature. Indeed as I proceeded I felt my preconceived images of Indian women being challenged. I had held in my mind the image of a dark beauty draped in a colorful sari. She is submissive and obedient to her husband who takes care of all her needs. Or I pictured the peasant woman with a horde of hungry children whom she can not adequately feed, shelter or clothe. She struggles in the fields and is often seen carrying an urn of water on her head from the village watering hole to her residence. For both, I pictured the arranged wedding where she is forced to remove herself from her mother's home and goes off to live in a new household where she is not often openly welcomed and integrated into the family structure. She is bound by the beliefs, customs, and rituals of a religious system. Antithetical to this I had the image of Indira Gandhi, a powerful woman and prime minister, who challenges the image of the woman strictly a the keeper of the house.

During my visit to India under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Education's Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad Program and under the leadership of U.S. Educational Foundation in India, my perceptions of Indian women were transformed. I developed a deep respect for these women who face untold challenges every day whether rich or poor. Their struggles are both inner and outer. They struggle to gain equality in educational and employment opportunities that are guaranteed by some of the most modern laws and a constitution. They struggle to maintain equanimity as they live in a more modern world which espouses new attitudes about women's positions in caste and community or jobs and family, but where society at large does not easily live according to them. The pioneers pay the highest price in their personal suffering. The literature of modern women writers such as Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, and Ruth Praver Jhabvala record the pain and loneliness of those women struggling to forge a place for themselves in the New India. The mixture of old traditions and modern attitudes causes many conflicts.

I was stuck by the wide variety of lifestyles among women. Not only are there large Hindu and Muslim populations in India, but there are Sikh, Jain, Parsi, Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist peoples who work to maintain their identity. Religion governs their lives, as does the region and environment in which they live. The differences are much greater than in the United States. Nevertheless, women share many of the same dreams and hopes. The attitudes that guide them, help them, or restrict them are different.

Through lectures sponsored by USEFI about the women's movement in India; through conversations with high school students in Delhi, Bombay, and Madras; through interviews with professional women in the cities; through interviews

with peasant women in the rural areas; through a conversation with the editor of Femina, a major women's magazine; and through the reading of newspaper articles on women in advertising, women in the media, the legal status of women, the increase of brideburning or dowry deaths; through my reading of novels, poetry, and short stories by Indian authors, especially women authors; and my observations of the treatment of women in the streets, I have gained a new picture of the Indian woman. There is not one, but there are many. Each with her own story to tell. Literature offers a plethora of stories.

I chose to investigate this subject because I live and teach in a rural area where children do not have many personal experiences with cultural or ethnic differences. Our community is rather homogeneous. As these children graduate and go off to new places, especially the girls, will meet new challenges. By exploring and gaining an understanding of the struggles of Indian women, my students, whether male or female, will understand the contributions of all people to our world. And they will appreciate the value of each individual. By investigating women in a distant place, perhaps they will gain a greater appreciation for women in our culture. I chose fiction as one vehicle for gaining an understanding of Indian women and as a means to expose the students to contemporary Indian literature. I chose mainly the women authors of India as the speakers for their sisters. They have lived being a woman in Indian society. They have been shaped by it.

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METHODOLOGY  
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The teacher will find an annotated list of works which can be read by high school students. Selections focus on the works of twentieth century women authors who have been recognized by the world community for their achievements.

The lessons included focus on four texts which could be read by the entire class in conjunction with the study of a period of Indian history. They depict the traditional view of Indian women as represented by Sita, the wife of Rama in the Ramayana; the rural woman forced to live a marginal existence in dire poverty caused by modernity; the urban woman who lives in the midst of poverty; and the middle class woman who is so often unfulfilled and lonely in her arranged marriage that offers little other than economic security. Other books could be assigned to individual students for special reports.

As background reading for the teacher I have transcribed a lecture on the status of women in India and a brief history of the women's movement presented by a woman activist in Calcutta in July, 1989.

As openers for this study of Indian women I put together a series of slides which depict the vast variety of environments, jobs, and situations that Indian women confront

in their daily activities. I show these accompanied to a tape of Indian music.

- SLIDES:
1. Rajasthani landscape
  2. Ghats (hills)
  3. Himalayas
  4. Goddesses from Temple Sculpture: Parvati, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kali
  5. Moghul Paintings of Women
  6. Kutch woman stitching
  7. Jaipur: woman in outline of palace arch
  8. Rajasthan: woman carrying urn on head  
woman in the fields  
Muslim woman at village meeting  
w/men
  9. Mother and child on mosque steps
  10. Placard on mosque denying entrance to women
  11. Sikh girl at temple pool  
Sikh temple in Delhi
  12. Bombay: schoolgirls at Godrej school  
Kindergarten Class  
Sewing Class  
Movie advertisement
  13. Delhi: Muslim schoolgirls at Qutab Minar  
High school girls at school assembly  
Harajan girls dancing  
Woman in sari on city streets  
Woman in salwar  
Woman in western dress  
Couple on rickshaw  
Couple on motorbike  
Female police officer  
Women working at construction site  
Women carrying firewood
  14. Mysore: women selling vegetables  
Women selling garlands  
Women selling kumkum powder
  15. Srinigar: Muslim women behind their veils  
Kashmiri girls in the mountain's  
hillside  
Muslim women on the bullock cart  
Pilgrims on their journey
  16. Indian classical dancers
  17. Professional women: Sharada Nayak, USEFI  
Vamil Patel, editor Femina  
Kuntala, biologist  
Malvika Karlekar,  
anthropologist
  18. Hindu wedding: Bride and groom on throne  
Bride and groom before the Brahmin
  19. Mothers with children
  20. Mother Theresa in Calcutta
  21. Varanasi: Widow with a shaved head  
Women bathing on the ghats

## 22. The Ganges

The slides provide wonderful visual images that compliment the literary sources.

The teacher may compile a series of slides from the plethora of books and magazines available on India. There are a vast number of films about Indian society which could also set the tone. These include the Indian classic, The World of Apu; A Passage to India; Gandhi; Chachaji: My Poor Relation; or Salaam, Bombay.

A fashion show is also a wonderful opener. Wrapping a student in a sari, putting bindis on girls' foreheads, or creating hand paintings (mehandi) are all fun activities. Indian folk crafts which are often done by women can be a way to show the talents of Indian women. The text, Shilpa, provides a number of classroom activities from including block printing, floor design, wall decorations, puppet making, folk dancing, and folk singing.

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### OBJECTIVES

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The student will:

- 1) identify the roles of women in Indian society
- 2) describe the traditional attitudes toward Indian women
- 3) describe the differences in lifestyles of the urban and rural Indian women
- 4) understand the process of modernity on Indian women
- 5) describe the impact of poverty on the poor women of India
- 6) understand the impact of religion on Indian women
- 7) compare Western attitudes towards women with those of Indians

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### LIST OF LITERARY SOURCES

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Ramayana. by Vaimiki. Retold by R.K. Narayan. New York: Norton, 1977.

The Ramayana is one of the two Indian epics, the other being the Mahabharata. In the Ramayana is a love story about Lord Rama, a beloved prince who is denied the right to inherit the throne from his father. He goes to live in the forest in order not to disrupt the passage of power to his brother. Rama does his dharma. His devoted wife, Sita, also renounces her comfortable, luxurious lifestyle in the palace to go serve her husband in the forest. She, too, does her dharma. In love there is dharma. She lives her life as the

perfect Hindu woman and, therefore, becomes the model for others. During her stay in the forest she is kidnapped. Rama gathers many forces to regain his wife. Upon her return, because she has lived under the roof of another, her purity is questioned and she must be tried according to custom. The trial is by fire. After the flames which have surrounded her die down, she is left untouched. Agni, the god of fire, has atteseted to her purity and faithfulness to Rama.

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Tagore, Rabindranath. Home and the World. Madras: Macmillan, 1980. or Collected Works. New York: Gordon Press, 1977.

This is the story of a husband and wife who are personally challenged by the new attitudes of the modern world. It is set against the backdrop of the nationalist movement in India. Bimala has been brought in the custom of purdah. Accordingly she has had no contact with men outside of the members of her own family. Her husband, Nikhil, is an exceptional landlord who has revolutionary ideas about his relationship with his wife. Sandip, a leader in the nationalist movement, comes into their home and sets in motion a series of changes.

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Markanadaya, Kamala. Nectar in the Sieve. New York: Signet Paperback (New American Library), 1982.

A simple peasant woman, Rukmani, in a village in India struggles to care for those she loves. As a child she was married to a tenant farmer whom she had never met. She leaves her village to go live with hm and work side by side with him in the fields. She lives in the midst of changing times that present her with many hardships. One of her children dies from starvation. Another becomes a prostitute. Her sons are forced to leave the land for jobs in a factory and finally for jobs in the city. Poverty finally forces her along with her husband to leave the land they have worked for so long. The new hardships they encounter are incredible.

\_\_\_\_\_. A Handful of Rice. New York: Crowell, 1966.

This depicts life in the modern city. It is a life of continous struggle and demoralization. The son of a peasant who had no hope of surviving in his village joined the exodus to the city. This is the daily occurrence in Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and other large cities in India. People live on the streets or in shanties without basic sanitary facilities or access to clean water. The peasant, Ravi, settles into a life in the underworld. Nalini, a woman of upper caste, becomes his wife and tries to change him, but to no avail. He struggles to provide for his children, but the



circumstances of poverty become too much.

\_\_\_\_\_. Two Virgins. New York: Crowell Press, 1973.

Told through the eyes of a younger daughter, Saroja, we have the story of a family. Their origins are in the village imbued with the values of traditional life and ancient beliefs. Saroja grows up with her older beautiful sister, Lalitha, who attracts the attention of a filmmaker. The girls develop conflicts with their parents as they encounter love and new material values. Relationships, not only with their family, but also with their village, are challenged as they struggle to find their place in the world. The city calls and the girls go, struggling with the changes.

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Desai, Anita. Cry, The Peacock. Delhi: Orient Press (Ind-US, Inc.), 1980.

Available through India-US, Incorporated  
Box 56  
East Glastonbury, CT. 06025  
203-663-0045

A young girl, Maya, has lived a privileged life. She has enjoyed the sheltered life her father created. Married off to a busy lawyer she lacks the attention she had grown to enjoy from her father. Her daily life becomes a struggle as she is unable to resolve her marital discord and is obsessed with a childhood prophesy of disaster. She is a lonely woman with a strong streak of neurosis. The tragedy that entails could not be averted.

\_\_\_\_\_. Fire On the Mountain. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

An elderly woman, Nanda Kaul, decides to spend the last years of her life in the mountains. Her life was filled with the business and responsibilities of being a good daughter, wife, and grandmother. She has tired of those demands and sought solitude in the comfort of the mountains. When a grand daughter experiences a breakdown, her great grand daughter, Raka, comes to stay with Nanda Kaul. This fragile, secretive girl intrudes upon Nanda's life causing great resentment. With time Raka changes things and awakens new needs within her great-grandmother. Furthermore Nanda Kaul admits the truth about her own life, but only when faced with the horror of the violent ending.

\_\_\_\_\_. Voices in the City. Delhi: Orient Press (India US, Inc.), 1982.

## HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

This story describes the demoralizing effects of city life on an Indian family. Nirode, the bohemian son, was raised by an over indulgent mother. He chooses to settle down in Calcutta to a life of austerity, when in fact he could enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. His older sister, Monisha, endures a servile lifestyle within the suppressive and rigid limits of the traditional Hindu family. Amla, the second sister, pursues a career in the city in contrast to her sister's life. She develops a haunting relationship with an artist. Monisha's dreadful decision is one that is lived out often among middle class women who can find no way of resolving their inner conflicts. This is reflection of the social transitions which India is experiencing and its impact on woman. The old social values are not completely dead and the new ones are not fully formed.

\_\_\_\_\_. Where Shall We Go This Summer. Delhi: Orient Press (Ind-US, Inc.), 1982.

In this story a lonely, married woman, Sita, attempts to change her life rather than accept an ordinary existence. On the outside she has a comfortable life with her family in an apartment in the city. She has healthy, prospering children and is about to have another. The prospect of another child and the daily suffering of boredom and hypocrisy of the people around her empower her to take action. Gathering her children together she takes them for a vacation on the island than was her home in childhood. On returning to the island she finds it is not the place she remembers. Her anguish increases as she realizes what she has brought her children to and faces the disillusioning truth about her own mother and father. She also finds that she cannot easily forsake the bonds she has to her middle class existence.

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Jhabvala, Ruth. The Householder. New York: Norton, 1985.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is a German of Polish parents who was later raised in England. She married an Indian gentleman and has lived in India since with her children and husband. Her writing is filled with much wit and humor.

This tells the story of a young middle class couple, whose marriage was arranged, come to love and cherish each other after the event.

\_\_\_\_\_. How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories. New York: Penquin, 1981.

This is a collection of short stories which explore the

inner struggles of a variety of Indian women. "A Bad Woman" tells the story of a woman who is the mistress of a man living in another city. He provides a place for her to live and visits periodically. During one of his absences she develops a romantic relationship with another man. Her feelings are torn between both. "The Housewife" depicts the life of an ordinary woman who takes up singing lessons as an outlet for her boredom. It becomes a passion and leads to dependent relationship with her teacher. "In the Mountains" explores the struggles of a woman who has shunned the comfort of family life and hypocrisy of middle class values to pursue a life close to nature. Her family still manages to intrude and for a time upset the balance she has found. Her habits and values challenge the accepted norms.

\_\_\_\_\_ . The Nature of Passion. New York: Penguin Books, 1983.

Lalaji, a selfmade contractor, who indulges his children with everything they want and more, comes into conflict with them. The children Vididi, the son, and Nimmi, the daughter, wish to pursue other interests and possess different values more in line with the "New India." Nimmi wishes to marry the man of her choice, while Vididi wants to be a writer and have nothing to do with his father's business. Lalaji sticks to his belief in the traditional Indian values. He despises the Western fads and fashions which the super rich of Delhi flaunt. These status symbols hold no appeal for him. The older women in the family abide by the same values. Through the struggles each side comes to understand the other better and makes compromises.

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ACTIVITIES

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Included for the teacher are discussion questions and suggested activities for four of the literary works. I chose these works because they represent the issues of modern Indian women. There are a great variety of women in India. Whether they be Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh; whether they be living in a village or city; or whether be wealthy or poor, Indian women are faced with the complex issues. They are dealing with their bonds to the values and beliefs to traditional India which have not completely died and their aspirations to enjoy the rights and amenities of the modern world. Poor women are being pushed to a marginal existence in poverty, while upper class women struggle for their mental well being. The struggles are similar across the globe, but those of India have their unique qualities. Through the stories we gain a picture of these struggles and triumphs.

I have chosen the Ramayana from the ancient world because it gives the foundation of the traditional values of

India. Then I have moved to the era of the independence movement in Tagore's Home and the World, because at this time men began to change some of their attitudes towards women. Contacts with the West and recognition of the contributions of Indian women to the nationalist movement play a part in the changes women would experience. Laws gave them rights and modern thinkers espoused freedom for women, but society in reality is in a slow process of transition. It is faster in the city than in the village. Next I have moved to the contemporary era which has witnessed the greatest problems for women in India. The modern world has raised some to new freedoms and opportunities while denying them equanimity, but plunged many more into abject poverty. Nectar in a Sieve and Voices in the City depict these transitions. In these a female author speaks for her fellow Indian women. Only in the twentieth century could this happen.

## I. Ramayana. R.K. Narayan

### A. Background

R.K. Narayan is one of the most respected novelists in India. He was born in Madras and educated in Mysore. In his novels he has created the fictional world of Malgudi. His work, The Financial Expert, which is set in Malgudi depicts the negotiations for an arranged marriage. He is also well known for his storytelling of the Hindu myths and epics. He has been the winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award, India's highest literary honor.

Activities in chapter five of India: A Teacher's Guide published by Focus on Asian Studies through the Asia Society; 725 Park Avenue; New York, N.Y., are wonderful for investigating marriage practices in modern India. It connects well with the Ramayana. Chapter 4 on articulating values is also excellent. I recommend both.

### B. Discussion Questions

Sita, the wife of Rama, is the ideal Hindu woman

1. List the qualities of the ideal traditional Indian woman as shown by Sita.  
List the expectations that religious norms place on her.
2. Cite passages from the text which exemplify each of these qualities in Sita.
3. Make a statement explaining what ancient India valued in women- with Sita as your guide.
3. Which qualities do you admire in Sita? Why? Which qualities do you find weak? Why?
4. What qualities do you admire in women today?
5. Compare Sita to the Greco-Roman heroines and

character. Each was a wife of high standing faced with difficult circumstances.

Penelope, the wife of Odysseus  
Helen, the wife of Menelaus and taken to Troy  
Antigone, champion of her ideal  
Dido, Queen abandoned by Aeneas  
Clytemnestra, the wife of Agamemnon  
Hecuba, Queen of Troy

6. How does Rama treat Sita? Why?  
What is Sita expected to do for Rama?  
How does Rama feel about Sita?
7. Why does Sita agree to the trial by fire?  
What does her agreement reveal about her?  
How does she deal with personal adversity and conflict?  
How are women today taught to deal with difficulties?
8. How does the community view Sita?  
How does the community treat her?  
In our world and in our media how do we treat women like Sita? Princess Di  
Rose Kennedy  
Mrs. Bush  
etc.  
How do we treat stars? Marilyn Monroe  
Madonna  
etc.  
How do we treat women in adversity?  
the central park jogger  
rape victims  
welfare mothers  
the homeless  
etc.

### C. Writing Activities

1. Make a diary for Sita.  
Write entries concerning important events in her life.
  - a. Marriage to Rama
  - b. Life in the palace
  - c. Move to the forest
  - d. Kidnapping
  - e. Her return to Rama
  - f. Trial by Fire

Assuming her persona keep a record of her personal experiences, observations, feelings and reactions to events.

2. Write a skit in which you depict her reunion with

Rama.

3. Write an imaginary letter to Rama that recreates her emotions during one of the events.
4. Write a marriage advertisement imagining you are Rama.
5. Create a poster that typifies the ideal traditional Hindu woman with examples of the expectations and pressures imposed by outside forces.

## II. Home and the World. Rabindranath Tagore

### A. Background

Tagore, born in 1861, came from a famous family of religious and social reformers, musicians, and artists. He spent his childhood in a literary atmosphere in the Bengal region around Calcutta. This was recognized as the literary center of India. He wrote in Bengali. In 1913 he was awarded the Nobel prize for literature.

The filmmaker, Satyajit Ray, has created a wonderful film version of the novel. It is not readily available from a distributor, but periodically is shown in "art" circles. I recommend seeing it, if you have the opportunity.

AT the time in which this novel is set, purdah was common in many parts of India. Women were totally excluded from the outside world and lived their lives sheltered behind veils and screens. This novel depicts the impact of change on one woman.

### B. Discussion Questions

What is different about the structure of this novel?

1. Describe Bimala's relationship to Nikhil.  
In what ways is she a typical Hindu wife?  
In what ways is Nikhil an atypical husband?
2. What are Bimala's responsibilities in the household?  
Who else lives in the household with them?  
Describe Bimala's relationship to the others.  
How does she act as a balancing mechanism within the family?
3. How does Bimala view her world?  
How does she view the outside world?  
What attracts her to the outside?  
What makes Bimala happy? What disturbs her?
4. What role other than husband does Nikhil play in Bimala's life?  
How does Nikhil treat her? Why?



- Does Bimala understand him? Why or why not?
5. How does Sandip change Bimala's perception of the world?  
Why does Bimala pursue their relationship?
  6. Bimala experiences a tragedy. How does it change her life?  
What must she confront in herself?
  7. What do you admire in her?  
What do you find weak?
  8. What similar problems are women in our world confronted with today? How do we deal with them? Are there limits to what is considered acceptable attitudes and behavior for American women? What price is paid by those who step over the line?

### C. Writing Activities

1. Write a diary from Bimala's point of view.
2. Be an investigative reporter and write an account of the tragedy.
3. Write an imaginary letter to Bimala expressing your opinions on the choices she has made. React to her situation and offer advice or encouragement.

Or assume the role of a devout Hindu and write to her about her situation. What has she done wrong?

4. Create an editorial by Nikhil about the new roles of Indian women.

### III. Nectar in a Sieve. Kamal Markandaya.

#### A. Background

South India was home to Kamal Markandaya as a child. She attended Madras University and worked as a journalist and writer in both India and England. Nectar in a Sieve was her first novel and received wide critical acclaim.

Prereading activities might include a viewing of Salaam, Bombay available from Cinecom Films in New York; India's Working Women from the Asia Society; or Chachaji: My Poor Relative from Icarus Films in New York. Each of these give a view of the efforts of ordinary people to survive in the throes of poverty.

#### B. Discussion Questions

1. What activities is a woman expected to do in the American household? What does she have to aid her? What specific roles do wives and mother play in

- the American family. Keep a list.
2. What activities are Rukmani responsible for in her household? What roles does she play in her family?
  3. Compare Rukmani's daily life with a typical American's.
  4. What does Rukmani value in her life? How does she show this?  
Compare her values to those in America.
  5. How is her marriage arranged? What are her feelings about it?
  6. What are her attitudes and feelings for her children? In what ways are they the same as American mothers'? Do Americans value children in the same way as this Indian family? Give examples.
  7. How does Rukmani deal with the losses in her life? Death and movements. loss of material goods  
How do Americans deal with such things?
  8. What do you admire and respect in Rukmani? Has she had a full life?
  9. What are her attitudes toward change in her life? What causes the changes?
  10. What outside forces that impact her life are beyond her control? What contributes to her loss of status and decline into poverty?

### C. Writing Activities

1. Write a skit about an imaginary panel for a talk show. Oprah or Geraldo.  
The panel consists of Rukmani's family-  
Rukmani, her husband Nathan, her daughter Irawaddy, her son Maragun  
The topic is "The Plight of the Tenant Farmer"  
Relate the struggles of these people to survive and the impact of the modern world on their lifestyle.

2. Imagine you are a government official responsible for providing services to the rural poor women.

Write a document in which you:

- a) list the needs of the poor women
- b) explain an action plan to provide programs to alleviate the problems
- c) explain how you will evaluate the success of your programs



#### IV. Voices in the City. Anita Desai.

##### A. Background

Born to a Bengali father and German mother, Anita Desai was educated in Delhi. She is among the handful of women novelist in India. Her work has received great acclaim around the world. For her novel, Fire On the Mountain, she won the Sahitya Akademi Award.

The Apu Trilogy- The World of Apu are films that provide a good view of the dilemmas that urban life have presented the middle class as they struggle with the transition of social norms in India. They are available from Films Incorporated in California. Salaam, Bombay provides a view of the seediness of the rapidly growing Indian cities.

##### B. Discussion Questions

1. Describe Nirode's lifestyle and how his mother and sisters view it. How do their attitudes fit the role of "family adjustor?"
2. Does he have freedoms or rights that his sisters are denied? If so, give examples. How do they view the differences.?
3. What are the concerns his family has for him? How does he react to their concerns and how does he treat his mother and sisters?
4. Describe Nirode's relationship with his sisters.
5. How do Amla and Monisha differ? What is good in each of their lives? What is bad? or what makes them unhappy?
6. Describe Monisha's relationship to her husband and his family? How does she fit into the family structure? Are her relations with her husband and extended family good? Why or why not?
7. What is the source of Monisha's pain? Could her pain have been avoided? Are the people around her aware of her suffering?
8. Monisha made a dreadful choice. What were her other options in the world in which she lived?
9. What level of responsibility do her sister, her brother, her mother, her husband and his family play in her death?
10. Can society be held responsible? Why or why not?

##### C. Writing Activities

1. Assume the role of Nirode, write an article for his magazine about his vie. of women in India.
2. Write a letter to Monisha about her situation. Share your thoughts and feelings with her.

3. Write a newspaper feature story about the sudden death of Monisha as an example of a new phenomenon in Indian society. Others examples are the dowry death burnings. Interview the family and friends so that you may present a round picture of her.

Lecture and Interview with Women Activists;  
Calcutta, India; July, 1989

Talking about Indian women is a rather tough assignment. We are talking about 400 million people who live in varied circumstances. Not that your country is not much larger. We have a country of driving traditions and beliefs. Anything that you can think of that makes this a much more difficult subject to tackle.

For example, someone like me lives in a house, can have two showers a day, can have a flush toilet, and a little garden. Then you have people in the same city who fight over buckets of water and then you have other areas where women walk over five miles a day to get clean drinking water. You have that kind of variety. Then you also have the kind of variety in a village, say in Kerala, which is in the south of India. About 80% of the women will be literate, reading the newspaper. Then in another region, say Bihar, not one woman would be literate. So you have that kind of variety. Or within the same city, within the same class or caste, you have women who are now pilots of airplanes and going to the bazaar. Within the same group you have a woman who would not be allowed to go to the bazaar without someone going with her. So you have all this to cover. And that's why I'm going to be cursory about what I say.

When we talk about the subject, there is a pattern to the Indian woman, because in spite of all the varieties, there are certain points where the parameters of their lives are fairly similar. Just one very common idea is that every woman has to get married. She is expected to get married by age twenty or twenty five or so. And not getting married is really making a point or failure. All this is tied to the fact of whether you are married or unmarried. So that is such an imperative that the custom of dowry and home practice about the role of brides comes from that. That means you have to get married, so you have to pay a price for her. In that sense whether you are Hindu or Muslim or whether you're a Sikh, does not really make a difference. You have to get married. And young people talk about young women distinguishing different communities, castes, or class; and what you have is in religion, family structure. The most important thing you have here is what you might call family structure.

Family, patriarchy has control over women. These are fairly similar in most groups in the sense that they are set. First thing is that you have to get married. Secondly, inwardly you have to accept the fact that there is a divide between the women's world and the men's world. This divide is not of her choice. It's somebody else's choice. This is really the unfree part of the marriage or family contract of which we are talking. Thirdly, there are a lot of images created of women in Indian society. In that sense patriarchy is forced through patriarchies, through religion, through

beliefs, not so much through physical force, not through physical control, but making you believe in it. The belief is that you are the focus of the family and you are in charge of keeping, not only the daily functions of child rearing, cleaning, and cooking, but in charge of keeping the daily traditions in every sense of the word. And she is in charge of maintaining the family appearance which consists of not just custom and rituals, but also in the standard of living that you maintain. In that sense you belong to a certain social group. You are expected to do certain social things. Now if the family income does not reach that level, you are also supposed to do something to bring the level there, but you are not really considered as a worker. But you are there to maintain whatever the family is supposed to maintain. So in that sense her role really is that of adjustment. Suppose there are old people. She is to nurse them. Suppose there are children, she has to look after them. Suppose there are disabled people, she has to look after them. Suppose the family income fails, she has to supplement it, too. In all senses she is the adjustment of the family. In this she is brought up for that matter, to play that role of the adjustor, so she's not taught any particular skill. She might be taught cooking, cleaning, or sewing, but much more important she's taught an attitude, so that when she goes to the other family as a wife, she becomes and takes up the role of maintaining the balance of the family. This belief is a much more important part of her education. It's not only that the woman is a sex object, she's a reproductive machine and she's the adjustor of the family. That is the tradition in the Indian family. You have this kind of tradition that rich people will have a wife to look after all of this. The husband might have a mistress outside for a physical relationship, a dalliance. That was accepted as part of the social norm. A man was allowed to do that, provided he gave his wife the spirit of house control in which he didn't interfere. In that way she was a poor woman who has the appearance of being a pure woman. In that case she has a spirit of control which she could maintain her life. Despite the fact that now you have judges and prime ministers in India, who are women, you still have this basic idea that she is this control mechanism of the family. To a certain extent this is enforced through a guilt phenomenon built into her psyche, which is she is supposed to feel guilty if she doesn't do this (being the control mechanism), so that any working woman feels guilty about the fact that she goes out and isn't there at home when her husband comes back or her children come back. I'm sure other countries also put this kind of guilt mechanism on women, but it is done very effectively here.

I would say my generation of people have suffered a great deal. We have tried to build up our lives, but we always have this background behind it. It has also given in traditional society protection for the women. The woman, when she came into the family as a wife, even if her husband

forms an alliance outside the house or didn't like her, was guaranteed a living in that family. It wasn't a living with dignity. It might be a precarious living, but she had that guarantee. Apart from whatever other phenomena have been, this guarantee is being removed from her, so that she has all the traditional handicaps and other imperatives. But the changes in the family structure may mean that the parents in law don't really have that kind of control over their son to enforce that; if you don't like the wife, it doesn't matter, she is still going to be there as your wife. Whatever he does outside the home, that kind of control, they do not have. So that is the kind of taking away the security for the wife. This is a problem in all castes, across all classes.

In each class there are these ideologies that start at the top and filter down. But really it is one of the peculiarities of Indian working society that you don't have the terrible working class which is free from the middle class norms. There is really no such class. When you go down into the lower class peoples, they will accept most of these norms as the norm. Now they might not so much insist on the purity part, because in every one of the parts of the economic exploitations here is the landlord. The landlord would rape the lower class man's wife. That is one way of enforcing his superiority over the man, that he would use his wife as well. To that extent the husband might put up with it, but on the whole, he would not like her to have an affair of her own choice. It's one thing that the landlord insists on sex. It's another thing that she has the choice. It is a kind of delicate balance. This idea of purity, of family goes down the caste into even the lowest castes. The higher caste women have a whole lot more freedom about divorce. To a certain extent remarriage is within our choice. Women must accept even then certain ideas about choices and decision making powers.

Problems that women face in India stem from their caste and community and from the region they live in. Some regions have a tradition of much more conservative ideas. Other regions have much less conservative ideas. In our treatment of women jobs are treated most conservatively. The Punjab region which extends into Pakistan shares a lot of the same ideas about the position of women. It doesn't matter that these women are Sikhs or Muslims. They have similar ideas with the Hindus about women. The religion tries to impose its own norms, so that they come back through family laws or marriage systems, but again laws and practices keep on differing. The practices would be similar by region, rather than by religions.

You would find, say in an area of northern India that has very conservative Hindu norms, that these Hindus have much more in common with Muslims in the same region than with Hindus of south India. So region is a very important consideration in India. This is usually not mentioned when talking about women's positions. And this is reflected in one of the major indicators of Indian women's position, in



sex distribution ratios of the region. India, China, Pakistan, and to a certain extent some of the Middle East, there are fewer women in the population than men. All the first world countries have more women and also Sub Saharan Africa and Southeast Asian countries. There is a shortage of women in India. This sex deficiency in the ratio of women to men varies sharply from region to region. It is very high in the Punjab where there are only 300 women to every 1000 men. As you go south to Kerala there are more than 1000 women to every 1000 men. Punjab has the worst ratio, as you go south the ratio improves. If you take the ratio by age group, there is a deficit in the child age population. It is greater in North India than in South India or East India. This kind of regional pattern is very clear in India and has been very steady over the twentieth century. Over these years you find the same pattern which extends into neighboring countries. The pattern of Punjab flows into Pakistan. That of Bihar flows into Bangladesh. One of the things we've been trying to do in recent years is trying to understand why these patterns exist.

Part of the reason is ecological. A specific region is a plateau. It is basically dry or has low rainfall. It has a low population density so that women's labor is required in the economy. Women have to go out and work. They can't be kept inside the house. They are required in field labor as well. Now since they have the opportunity to come out, to get out of the house, there is a better sex ratio. It's really a better ratio, because women's labor is required in the economy. If you go to the Punjab, women's labor is used, but not as field labor, so that the dominant class' workforce, or occupations like the military, does not use women. Women were used in the household economy, with the dairy, poultry, stitching, processing, or that kind of occupation, which really look as if they working. This phenomenon keeps on repeating in the daily work force participation rates. This is an Indian peculiarity. Going from region to region you get wide variations in the rate of work force participation by women. So if you look at the percentage of the women in the work force, it varies. In Andara, which is in the middle area of India, it is about as high as 40%, whereas if you go to Punjab it will be as low as 5%. This variation is also very sharp between regions. There are a lot of people including an American anthropologist who has been talking about work giving women work, so that in regions where women work, they get better work. I have some disputes with this, but I won't go into that now. This regional pattern comes out in work, in sex ration, child survival rates, and orphans.

Now I will talk about the women's movement. In India the women's movement has a very long history. We have had since about 1912-13 an all India Women's Conference. Before that in the nineteenth century, there was some social reform movements which were really about women. The first reformer, Raman Rao, promoted the abolishment of suttee, that is the

custom of burning the widow with their husbands on the funeral pyre. He did the first bid for abolishing this practice, so he is taken as the first social reformer in India. The whole nineteenth century reform movement was really for the benefit of women, that is for education, for women to remarry, for age of consented marriage- against child marriage. All the major nineteenth century social reform movement had a very major women's component in it. But this was not really a women's movement because most everyone promoting these women were men. There were a few wives of the social reformers who worked with their husbands. By the beginning of the twentieth century you did have a real women's movement here. First of all the women's suffrage movement had its counterpart here. It was a very small one, but it started here as a movement. And then with Gandhi's movement coming up, the nationalist movement coming up women made gains. A major argument in Gandhi's movement was that women are also a part of the citizenry and therefore women are a rich resource which was being wasted. The Nationalist movement could not afford this waste. Gandhi was one of the major social thinkers here who argued that housework is very important work and that degrading women by saying it is nothing should be protested. He took a very strong line which partly reflects that he was thought of as the founder of a movement that shows housework and the women who do it are important. In fact women are a part of the workforce. All these ideas, Gandhi had argued. In the 1920's and 1930's when the nationalist movement was very much on the swing, women took part in large numbers. Not only did you have women leaders who were very dedicated presidents of the Indian Women's National Congress, but there was also a very large number of peasant women, working class women in the nationalist movement. All the protest movements of Mahatma Gandhi included large numbers of local, totally uneducated, totally uninitiated women in the nationalist movement. This gave women a very great position of strength before independence in Indian politics. This kind of movement went on all through the 1930's and 1940's so that even in all the leftist movements you have a strong women's component in it who took up the working class issues for the women. There was a peaceful movement, but we also had a violent movement among the nationalists. Women were in that case, too. Altogether you had women in politics and in political movements throughout the twentieth century before independence. Therefore, at the time of independence there was no doubt that women had to be given full political and social rights. We got our right to vote without any kind of real movement for it. It was given as a birth right. The constitution made almost all provisions for giving women equality, but this achievement was a very peculiar reversal after independence. Now the women's movement went underground. It disappeared. What you have now is a lot of middle class women, like I was, just part of the post independence generation. We were given rights for education,

higher education, and jobs. So we felt we had everything. We didn't have to fight for a women's movement. In fact the women's movement became a dirty word for social workers who did charity at that time. There have always been charity movements in India. These women were doing little things for little persons. We were free and independent. We were part of new India, so we didn't really have women's issues in India. This was the sort of belief for the first twentyfive years of independence. We all believed in it and acted in it. Now by 1970 this veneer was becoming musty because what was noticed in the working class area, where women had been working in the textile industry, in the mines, and in a lot of the modern industries, was that they were losing their jobs very rapidly.

In the 1960's and 1970's there was a protest movement coming out. Also medical reports in 1970 showed that India's sex ratio in the population, which had been falling from 1922-1961, fell more sharply from 1961-70. This sharp decline became very noticeable. Well, where were all the women going? In the 1970's Mrs. Gandhi was prime minister. She set up a commission on the status of women in India. She given the report in 1974. This really concerned her with the Women's Decade coming up in 1975. Some of our women went over to the Mexico conference and suddenly it came out in this report how women really were in India.

First, the sex ratio was going down and the child age sex ratio was decreasing. Secondly, dowry deaths were increasing very much. Thirdly, women had lost totally on the economic front, so that they were being pushed out of the modern sectors and into traditional occupations or into unorganized occupations. All this data was presented in the Status Of Women Report. This data had been there; it was from official sources. We just hadn't noticed it. When it was put together, it became a very horrifying picture. That really sparked up a lot of consciousness among women. Along with that came several court cases which really shook the country.

One case occurred in 1974. This case was of a girl raped in police custody. Then the judges said, well, she was a prostitute, so it can't be a rape case. Therefore, the police aren't guilty. This verdict really made women angry all over the country. It became a symbol that women were being used. So, lawyers could just say, well, she's a prostitute and couldn't have been raped and so she couldn't have been murdered, even if a murder has been reported. So from 1975 onward, partly from this case, partly from the Status of Women Report and Commission, and partly from the way the international women's movement has gone, India got into the women's movement. What we have now are two kinds of movements. We have a fairly strong academic movement of women, which has done a lot of work on the women's issues. So, I think data wise, if you talk about most third world countries, India has probably the best data sources and analysis of data, debates about definitions, analysis of the



legal position of women, watch on treatment of women in the courts, and ideological arguments. The academic part is fairly well done in India.

We have also got some kind of working class group, but it is very much localized. For example, in Aurangabad, the membership in women's groups is 20,000. All the members are vegetable sellers, hand cart pushers, or block printers. There are all kinds of laborers. This organization has started its own bank for these women, so they can give them loans for opening their own businesses. These also have a health movement, maternity benefits movement, and electricity movement associated with it. This is a very strong organization in that region. Similarly there is another organization of a similar kind in Madras in the south. There are some organizations coming up in Delhi, in Lucknow, and other areas, but all over India there is very little working class movement as such in the women's movement. This is because most of the women work in the unorganized sector where they are underclass, where no trade union will touch them. If they work at home in their own field, it is very difficult to bring them under any particular banner.

In that sense we recently had a commission called the Self-employed Women's Commission on Studying the Working Conditions. They brought out a very negative report, but they also brought out the difficulties in organizing these women, because they are so spread out. Also they are so busy, they are so vulnerable, and they are so bound by their religion that it is difficult to organize them. In that sense working class movements which are here for women are few and far between. What we're trying to do now is try to take up the ideological issues which we feel are much more important because even when you know a lot about the situation, you are trapped yourself. In your own movement most of the pressure comes from within the family, and you have to fight your own battles there. No outside help is available in fighting your battles there. So it is a matter of consciousness, raising your positions in that. For that you need a lot more will, more confidence in yourself. So in that sense that is what the women's movement would like to do, take up the ideological issues.

The movement would also like to take up the legal position, because the courts are continually giving judgements against women. Even recently another similar case of a woman raped in custody was in the supreme court. The court said the women who brought charges of rape were loose women. Also since the men who were supposed to have raped them were men of position, they couldn't have done it. So we had to have a legal movement. In India we have some of the most modern laws in the world, but we have no legal system which will enforce them. Again and again this prejudice in the laws comes up. The lawyers won't take up the case. The police wouldn't pursue the case. The forensic report wouldn't come out. If you keep on fighting this battle against the system then there is a murder. The forensic

report wouldn't be there. The police wouldn't accept the case. Then if they accepted the case, they would treat the husband or marriage better. The courts will not accept it. If one court does, then the senior court dismisses the case. This goes on and on. You also have another problem that anything we try to do, we get corrupted very easily. Whatever we might want to say about women, they too are corrupt. Last year I did my research with a four women commission. They said everything we wanted to say in the official report. They said they're going to do it all. But you know they're not going to do it, but since they said it, it really carries. They said, you know we're going to do it. It's there in the document. Every plan has a woman's chapter in it. It says about women they're going to do this and that. Anybody who really protests a lot gets a double job. So the corruption process is very prevalent. It goes on all the time. Since the problem is very big and the women who are conscious are not that many, it is very difficult to stop.

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THE ASIA SOCIETY

Education and Communication Department  
725 Park Ave.  
New York, New York 10021

India-A Teacher's Guide  
Focus on Asian Studies

Excellent book with many good lesson plans on locating India, describing India, national symbols, varna/jati-identity with a group, mythology-the one and the many,

articulating values, and marriage.

Donald and Jean Johnson. India Through Literature, 1973.

India's Working Women.

A sound filmstrip by Geraldine Forbes.

THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION

777 U.N. Plaza

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Through Indian Eyes Vol. 1: The Wheel of Life, 1981.

THE CENTER FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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India

This is an academic organization which is dedicated to help in the promotion, development, and dissemination of knowledge regarding the evolution of women's roles in Indian Society with a view to a) enhance women's effective participation in the development process, b) assist measures for realizing women's equality, c) change social attitudes regarding women.

They have a wonderful library and have published a bibliography on women in development.

WOMEN IN WORLD ARE STUDIES

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Improvement (OERI)

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Date Filmed

March 29, 1991

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 434

SO 030 378

TITLE Universal Primary Education for Girls: China.  
 INSTITUTION United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Bangkok (Thailand). Regional Office for Education in Asia and the Pacific.  
 PUB DATE 87  
 NOTE 33p.; For related documents, see SO 030 379-383.  
 AVAILABLE FROM United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, P.O. Box 1425, General Post Office, Bangkok 10500, Thailand.  
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.  
 DESCRIPTORS \*Area Studies; Developing Nations; Educational Development; Educational Policy; Educational Research; Elementary Education; \*Equal Education; \*Females; Foreign Countries; Primary Education; Public Education; Tables (Data); \*Womens Education; Womens Studies  
 IDENTIFIERS \*Asia Pacific Region; \*China

ABSTRACT

Universalization of primary education (UPE) is one of the major goals of all countries in Asia and the Pacific region. The developing countries, in particular, are engaged extensively in the formulation and implementation of policies, plans, and programs aimed at making adequate and suitable opportunities for primary education available to all children as soon as possible. Lower participation rates of girls in primary education is seen as one of the main obstacles to achieving full universalization of primary education in some of the countries of the region. This volume, one of a series that provides a comparative view of the position of and progress made in UPE in six countries, focuses on China with particular reference to girls' enrollment and participation in primary education. Chapter 1 provides a background history of education in China. Chapter 2 presents proposals for strengthening public education. Chapter 3 describes several case studies of education in various locations throughout China. A summary in chapter 4 concludes the document. Four tables of significant data are provided. (DB)

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UNESCO. Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.  
*Universal primary education for girls - China* Bangkok,  
1987.

24 p. (Asia and the Pacific Programme of Educational  
Innovation for Development)

1. UNIVERSAL EDUCATION - CHINA. 2. PRIMARY  
EDUCATION - CHINA. 3. WOMEN'S EDUCATION - CHINA.  
I. UNESCO. Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.  
II. Title. III. Series.

372.95

376.95





*Universal  
Primary Education  
for Girls  
  
China*

UNESCO  
PRINCIPAL REGIONAL OFFICE  
FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC  
BANGKOK, 1987



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AND THE PACIFIC PROGRAMME OF EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

© Unesco 1987

Published by the  
UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific  
P.O. Box 1425, General Post Office  
Bangkok 10500, Thailand

Printed in Thailand

*The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of Unesco concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.*

## PREFACE

Universalization of primary education (UPE) is one of the major priority goals of all countries in the region of Asia and the Pacific. The developing countries in particular, are now engaged extensively in the formulation and implementation of policies, plans and programmes aimed at making adequate and suitable opportunities for primary education available to all children as soon as possible.

Lower participation rates of girls in primary education is seen to be one of the main obstacles in achieving full universalization of primary education in some of the countries in the region.

In 1985, six member countries of the region were supported within the framework of the Asia and Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development (APEID), to prepare national studies focusing on problems and issues related to education of girls, programmes and plans for the promotion of girls education and the innovative measures and actions taken to improve their participation in education. The studies were carried out by national institutes and professional groups under the guidance of high level national steering committees for promotion of girls' education which were established by the Ministries of Education in the respective countries, at the request of UNESCO, ROEAP. A list of the members of the steering committee is given as an Annex.

The findings of the national studies were later reviewed and examined at a Regional Review Meeting on the Situation of Girls' Education in the Context of Universalization of Primary Education which was held in Bangkok in November 1985. This series of publications is an outcome of the collaborative and co-operative efforts of the member countries in understanding the tasks involved in universalizing the primary education of girls and the nature and extent of problems and issues associated with it.

This series provides a comparative view of the position of and progress made in UPE in six countries, with particular reference to girl's enrolment and participation in primary education. It is published with the view that the countries in the region, which have similar problems on education of girls, will find the information, experiences and conclusions useful in pursuing their tasks vigorously by drawing on the experiences of other countries with the same goals and objectives.

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## Chapter One

### BACKGROUND

As the foundation of the whole education system, primary education plays a fundamental role in raising the scientific and cultural level of the nation. The Chinese government has always paid great attention to the universalization of primary education including education of young girls.

China was for many years a feudal society. From 475 BC to AD 1840. Going through Dynasties of Warring States, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties, Sui, Tang, Five Dynasties, Song, Liao, Jin, Yuan, Ming and Qing, the feudal rule in China lasted more than 2,000 years. In this long, long period, the emperors and their followers adopted a policy of keeping the people in ignorance and forced girls and women to unconditionally obey the feudal ethic code, which imposed on women three obediences and four virtues (obedience to their father before marriage, their husband after marriage, and to their son after the death of their husband; and virtues of morality, proper speech, modest manner and diligent work). The rulers and public opinion would not allow women to have any behaviour contrary to the feudal code; they advocated that women without talents were virtuous women. Under this social condition women could not involve themselves in social activities and had to be confined to household chores and became appendages of their husbands. Women had no right to education at all.

After the Opium War in 1840, China entered into a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society, and women's social status remained the same. A folk song, popular then in China, used these words to describe the women's status: 'The old society is like a 10,000-metres deep well, and at its bottom are the oppressed – we common people; and women are the lowest of the mass'.

## *Universal primary education for girls*

The founding of the People's Republic of China ended thousands of years of dark history and brought new life to women, who began, at last, to enjoy equal rights with men.

The first Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultant Conference (CPPCC) passed the Common Programme of CPPCC, the 6th article of which stipulated that 'the People's Republic abolishes the feudal system imposed on women, and women have equal rights as men politically, economically, educationally, culturally, and in all other aspects of social life'. The first session of the National People's Congress passed the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, the 96th article of which stipulated that: 'Chinese women enjoy the same rights as men politically, economically, culturally, socially and in family life'. It also stipulated that: "marriage, family, mothers and children are protected by the state'.

In his whole career, Chairman Mao Tsetung, one of the founders of the People's Republic, always paid full attention to the issue of women. After the founding of the Republic, he said that, 'we are now in a different era. Men and women are the same. Women can do what men can'. He highly valued the active role of women in both revolution and economic reconstruction, and likened women to 'half the sky'.

These basic policies of the Chinese government and the high respect and attention paid to women by the leaders opened up a new way to the true emancipation, or rebirth, of Chinese women.

Since 1949 Chinese women have played a great role in socialist construction. In the National People's Congress, the highest state authority, the proportion of woman delegates rose from 12 per cent in 1954 to 21.2 per cent in 1983. In the central government there are now ten women ministers and vice ministers. In provincial governments there are now seven women governors and vice governors. According to the second national census in 1982, the percentage of women workers and staff members was 36.3 per cent, an increase of 28.8 per cent over that in 1949. In the total of 5,296,000 scientific and technological personnel, 1,672,000 or 31.6 per cent are women. Whereas these once used to be only one woman member in the Academic Council of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, by 1981, when the fourth session of the Council was held, there were 14 more female members. In 1984, there were

5,360,000 full-time teachers in primary schools, among whom 2,090,000 or 38.9 per cent were female.

While taking practical measures to safeguard women's equal rights with men in political, economic, social and other aspects, the Chinese government has been paying special attention to the education of women, especially girls. Since 1949 when the Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultant Conference was formulated, the Chinese government has always followed a national policy of popularizing primary education among both boys and girls. Since 1976 the universalization of the primary education of boys and girls has been accorded new attention. In December 1980 the Chinese government issued the Decision on Some Issues of the Universalization of Primary Education, in which it was pointed out that:

. . . education plays a vital role in the modernization process. Our socialist modernization requires not only a highly developed material civilization but also a highly developed spiritual civilization. Without the full development of education and culture, there will be no true socialism.

The Decision also stated that: 'Primary education is the foundation of the whole education system. . . and the raising of the national educational level must proceed from primary schools'. It called on the whole nation 'to strive for basic universalization of primary education in the country in the 1980s'.

In 1982, the 19th article of the new Constitution of the People's Republic of China stipulated that 'compulsory primary education should be universalized'. In his speech at the 12th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Yao-bang, Secretary-General of the Party, emphasized that universalization of education is an important prerequisite for building a material and spiritual civilization, and that,

'while primary education should be basically popularized in the whole country by 1990, the economically and educationally developed areas should accomplish the task earlier than that. Though the popularization of primary education is a tremendous task, it must and can be accomplished through persistent efforts'.

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New China has made great achievements in the span of little more than thirty years. According to statistics for 1984, there were 850,000 primary schools, 2.5 times more than the years immediately following liberation. There were 135,570,000 pupils enrolled in primary schools, 5.5 times the number in the early 1950s, and there were over 6 million teachers and staff members in primary schools, seven times more than in the early 1950s. In 1984 there were 106,449,500 school-age children aged 7-11 years, of whom 101,597,100 were enrolled. The overall percentage of school-age children attending schools was 95.4 per cent, and that of girls 93.48 per cent. The annual retention rate was 96 per cent. Now, the network for universalizing primary education extends from the grasslands in northern Inner Mongolia to the tropical forests in Southern Yunnan Province and from the east coast to the Tibetan Highlands in the northwest. A large contingent of primary school teachers has been formed and a solid foundation laid for the universalization of primary education in the whole country.

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the general situation and development of girls' education in the universalization of primary education in China from a historical and geographical viewpoint. A highlight of Table 1 is the performance of the mountainous province of Fujian which recorded an overall attendance rate of 94.21 per cent.



Table 1 Enrolment rates of school-age girls in all provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, 1984

(in ten thousands)

Areas	Number of 7-11-year-old school-age girls	Number of 7-11-year-old girls enrolled	attendance rate %	(for rural areas)		
				Number of 7-11-year-old school-age girls	Number of 7-11-year-old girls enrolled	Attendance rate %
National total	5,042.65	4,713.78	93.48	4,298.80	3,962.27	92.17
Beijing Municipality	25.58	25.62	99.1	14.15	13.94	98.5
Tianjin Municipality	25.78	25.60	99.49	15.73	15.59	99.11
Shanghai Municipality	29.27	29.22	99.83	14.39	14.34	99.65
Hebei Province	219.16	212.92	97.20	190.05	183.79	96.20
Jiangsu Province	238.55	232.34	97.40	205.01	198.75	96.49
Zhejiang Province	171.07	165.75	96.89	152.79	147.63	96.62
Shanxi Province	135.66	133.69	98.75	115.07	123.49	98.63
Liaoning Province	158.20	155.90	98.53	112.30	109.90	97.86
Jilin Province	111.01	108.89	98.02	76.88	74.89	97.41
Hubei Province	236.57	230.54	97.45	186.26	180.33	96.82
Hunan Province	274.47	265.41	96.70	241.95	233.13	96.35
Heilongjiang Province	176.15	170.75	96.90	120.90	116.49	96.40
Guangdong Province	277.26	269.32	97.14	242.46	233.35	96.24
Shandong Province	335.24	332.09	96.08	274.44	262.23	95.55
Shanxi Province	138.99	132.29	95.18	115.39	109.25	94.32
Fujian Province	146.85	138.80	94.52	129.15	121.27	93.90
Henan Province	395.93	373.45	94.30	360.41	336.56	93.40
Jiangxi Province	209.19	196.22	93.80	168.82	174.42	93.36
Sichuan Province	569.44	522.81	91.80	527.51	479.23	90.80
Yunnan Province	197.49	171.76	87.00	178.70	153.08	85.60
Anhui Province	257.21	228.08	88.70	230.93	202.19	87.60
Gansu Province	96.30	74.91	77.79	81.59	62.34	76.41
Qinghai Province	25.37	18.81	74.14	18.03	11.98	66.146
Guizhou Province	182.58	128.23	70.20	136.32	110.15	67.40

*Universal primary education for girls*

Table 1. (continued)

(in ten thousands)

<i>Areas</i>	<i>Number of 7-11-year-old school-age girls</i>	<i>Number of 7-11-year old girls enrolled</i>	<i>attendance rate %</i>	<i>(for rural areas)</i>		
				<i>Number of 7-11-year-old school-age girls</i>	<i>Number of 7-11-year girls enrolled</i>	<i>Attendance rate %</i>
Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region	96.56	90.79	94.00	72.02	66.34	92.10
Guangxi Zhuang Minority Autonomous Regions	198.11	181.30	91.50	179.26	161.92	92.30
Xinjiang Weiwuer Autonomous Regions	78.28	73.13	93.42	61.30	56.10	92.01
Ningxia Hui Minority Autonomous Regions	24.04	20.03	83.30	20.29	16.27	80.20
Xizang*	12.04	4.86	40.40	10.36	3.62	29.20

\* Note: Figures for Tibet stood for 1983.

Table 2. Percentages of girls in total enrolments in primary schools 1951-1984

(in ten thousands)

Year	Total enrolment in primary schools	Among the totals	
		Number of girls	Percentages of the total
1951	4,315.4	1,206.3	28.0
1952	5,110.0	1,679.6	32.9
1953	5,116.4	1,782.2	34.5
1954	5,121.8	1,707.1	33.3
1955	5,312.6	1,775.8	33.4
1956	6,346.4	2,231.2	35.2
1957	6,427.9	2,215.9	34.5
1958	8,640.0	3,325.7	38.5
1959	9,116.3	3,566.9	39.1
1960	9,379.1	3,665.6	39.1
1961	7,578.6	2,082.5	27.5
1962	6,923.9	2,406.7	34.8
1963	7,152.2	...	...
1964	9,294.5	3,250.5	35.0
1973	13,570.4	5,527.2	40.7
1974	14,481.4	6,330.8	43.7
1975	15,094.1	6,824.3	45.2
1976	15,005.5	6,823.3	45.5
1977	14,617.6	6,632.1	45.4
1978	14,624.0	6,570.4	44.9
1979	14,662.9	6,577.4	44.9
1980	14,627.0	6,517.4	44.6
1981	14,332.8	6,301.2	44.0
1982	13,972.0	6,099.9	43.7
1983	13,578.0	5,937.2	43.7
1984	13,557.12	5,937.72	43.7

## Chapter Two

### STRENGTHENING PUBLIC EDUCATION

Table 2. shows that by 1984, 43.7 per cent of primary school students were girls. This compares very favourably with statistics that show women comprise 48 per cent of the total population.

#### Strengthening public education

The founding of People's Republic of China in 1949 established the social system of the nation, made democratic reforms and realized the principle that men and women are equal. Taking into consideration the large population, vast areas and its unbalanced economic and cultural development, the Chinese government adopted a series measures that were beneficial to the education of girls in the course of popularizing elementary education to raise standards for entry into the work force.

Much attention was paid to the mobilization of ideas and raising people's consciousness for the purpose of attracting the attention of leading members at different ranks to the importance of girls' education; preparing their parents and society to care about girls' education; and arousing girls' interest in being educated.

At the beginning of liberation, public education work was carried out mainly; (a) to disseminate the concept that men and women are equal, and that it is important for women to be liberated in politics, culture and education; (b) to convince women that lack of knowledge would cause them unnecessary suffering; and (c) to call on girls to study at school in order to have the ability to build socialism and be workers with socialist consciousness and culture. At that time a group of young people returned to the countryside to build their home villages after graduation from primary school. Their deeds were prominently disseminated among the masses.

The ten years of upheaval, during the 1960s and 1970s were the years when China felt the effect of a negative influence on girls' education.

Then, until the beginning of the 1980s emphasis was placed on the intimate relationships between education and the four modernizations, emphasizing the role of intelligence investment in developing production, in a diversified economy and in getting rich through labour. The public education of the 1980s has characteristics of our age. Wuqi County, a revolutionary base area in Yenan region, was the first memorial place where the Red Army arrived after the Long March in 1935. However its economic basis was weak and the development of education was slow. In recent years the local government has realized that it should grasp education well and grasp it from primary school so that the educational face of Wuqi County can be changed.

In 1983, the government of the Wuqi County made a decision on 'strengthening education work', energetically disseminating strategic roles of education in the drive for modernization. Many pamphlets on education were printed and handed out to the cadres during one week in March and another in October every year. These cadres took the lead in making the contents known to every household.

They also organized all the efforts to mobilize the school-age children, particularly girls, to attend primary school. Thus the attendance rate in the whole country has risen to 95.4 per cent. Several anecdotes relating to the success of this programme were widely disseminated, including the one about a man beyond 60 who managed to send his granddaughter to primary school to study every day after learning of the importance of education. Another peasant helped his village to build a school with the money he had kept to buy donkeys. Many similar examples could be seen in the vast countryside of China.

Issuing rules for compulsory education. In 1984, the second meeting of the sixth National People's conference of Jiangsu Province discussed and adopted 'Contemporary Rules of Popularization of Elementary Compulsory Education'. It stipulated that children of age 6 or 7, regardless of sex and nationality must attend school on

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time. In 1984, many other provinces such as Fujian, Anhui, and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region published rules similar to this.

In order to assure that the girls could attend school on time, they wrote into the rules that: 'Those parents who prevent the girls of school age from going to school are guilty of tyrannizing women and children'. These rules were based on the fact that part of the districts in the province were under the influence of 'the feudal idea of regarding men as superior to women'. Some parents had been preventing the young girls from going to school, so the rate of girls' attendance was so low that it became an obstacle to popularization of elementary school.

In order to carry out the rules, the Educational Department and the Women's Federation of Fujian Province sent out a notice which stated:

1. The administrative Department of Education at different levels and the Women's Federation must co-operate very well in deepening the propaganda and popularization of elementary education's great significance in order to enable the cadres and masses to know that it is their responsibility to send their sons and daughters to schools. It also stresses the need to get rid of the feudal idea of regarding men as superior to women and defend the rights of girls to receive education
2. The Department of Education at different levels and the Women's Federation must regard the assurance of girls' education as an important matter of defending their rights and educate those who prevent girls of school age from attending local government schools.
3. The department of education at different levels must exercise the running of schools in all ways. In those places in which the economic condition is good the girls can receive elementary education free of charge.
4. The Department of Education at different levels must sum up the experience of mobilizing the girls attending schools conscientiously and organize a comparative evaluation.

In 1984 the local government of Zuoyun County, Shanxi Province, published 'The decision on implementing free elementary volunteer education', thus setting a good example for the whole country. Investigations showed that the production in industry and in agriculture has developed rapidly in this country in recent years. Between 1980 and 1984 the total output value more than doubled. The province has also encouraged entry and retention through the provision of free textbooks.

Cadres and masses in other rural areas in Southern and Northern China have realized the urgency and necessity to send their children to school. They have also made some decisions, praising those who are active in sending their children to schools, criticizing those who are not. Such roles and decisions play an important role in popularizing elementary education and prompting the children of school age to go to school, so that girls' education could be assured.

Popularizing education and promoting the enrolment of girls. The former Ministry of Education published 'Preliminary rules on the basic demands of populizing elementary education'. It indicates: 'The popularization of elementary education demands that all the children of school age could enter schools and keep on learning till they finished their periods of schooling and graduate. At that time, considering the difference of the development of economy and culture and natural condition in different parts, the rules demanded that:

- a) the rate of enrolment into schools should reach more than 95 per cent.
- b) the retention of students in school should be more than 97 per cent.
- c) the rate of graduation should be more than 95 per cent urban students, 90 per cent for the rural areas which have good conditions, and 80 per cent for the other areas.
- d) among the young children aged between 12-15, the rate of popularization of elementary education should be more than 95 per cent.



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Provincial autonomous regions and municipalities directed by the Central Government adopt the following measures to assure that both the boys and girls of school age enter school:

Each primary school must file documents related to the popularization of education, including the 'Records of education of every household' and the 'List of names of 0-6-year pre-school-age children'. They must also establish a system of responsibility for the popularization of education in towns and village. The responsibility of towns is to:

- a) strengthen leadership for the popularization programme including carrying out regular checks and giving support to schools;
- b) disseminate information about the significance of popularizing primary schools and educate the broad masses and cadres to fulfil their obligations including assuring the safety of school property;
- c) carry out the policies consciously, care about the teachers' lives, support them in their work and promote their respect in society;
- d) refuse employment to children who have received no elementary education; and
- e) provide funds for elementary schools to appraise and buy instruments and facilities for teaching.

The responsibility of villages is to:

- a) run their schools through committees comprising village cadres, youth, women, activists and school leaders;
- b) incorporate the popularization of elementary schools in the regulations and rules of the village and educate the masses to respect the teachers, love their schools and support the work of schools in all ways;
- c) educate and support parents to send their children to school and fulfil their obligations by applying economical sanctions against those who prevent their children from going to school and giving financial help to those children who need it; and

- d) provide funds for building schools and improving their condition.

The responsibility of parents is to ensure that:

- a) children who are at the age of seven and have no physical defect are sent to school;
- b) their children complete their primary school courses; and
- c) they co-operate with the school in doing educational work for the students by helping them fulfil their study.

Before the entrance of students every year, principals and teachers are responsible for making investigations into the children of school age and should organize their entry into schools.

Principals and teachers should do their work well to keep the students at school. Teachers should show fondness for their students and manage to teach well by arousing the students' interests in learning. They should provide economic assistance to those who lack money and organize those who have some difficulties in attending schools to learn in other ways. Teachers should also serve all the students and adopt measures to help those who have lagged behind.

Three types of primary school provide for the needs of girls from cities, rural areas, mountain regions, pastoral areas and regional networks of waterways, of different nationalities and economic backgrounds. The central primary schools in the cities and rural areas (town and county, village), carry out teaching plans made by the Ministry of Education as full-time schools and offer complete courses. Village schools offer Chinese, mathematics, general knowledge and ideology and behaviour subjects. The teaching plan is made by the administration department of education in the province. There are also part-time and other forms of primary schools, making up the third alternative offered. Such schools offer only two subjects: Chinese and mathematics and there are only one or two teachers. The teaching plan and this teaching materials are prepared by the province. These various types of schools satisfy most needs.

## Chapter Three

### CASE STUDIES

Mingli town of Yuan Jiang County, Yunan Province, is located in the mountain areas of Ailao. More than 20 per cent of the population of 12,590 belong to a minority race, the Miao. Being restricted by the natural conditions and the scattered distribution of the villagers, the irrational location of schools, and the number of single teachers, the rate attendance was very low. Only half of the girls went to school. They would be kept at home to look after the cattle and do domestic work. Now they run schools in various forms. There are 24 night schools and 29 morning and evening classes with 1,010 pupils of whom 70 per cent are female. In some village night schools, more than 90 per cent are girls. The new entrant rate rose to 84.13 per cent. Students at night schools have two periods of classes every evening. They spend five nights in studying Chinese and mathematics and one night in singing and playing. They do domestic work and homework by day. At night they go to school. Those who ask to transfer to full-time schools are given help.

Liufu County of Jianhe County, Kuizhou Province is a region of Miao nationalities. Both the economy and culture there were backward. Only a few girls attended schools. In 1982, they ran their first part-time primary schools for girls. Under the influence of this town, the whole county has established more than 70 primary schools similar to this school.

Lechang County of Kwangtung Province is located among the mountains of Nanling in north Guangdong. There are more than 160,000 people living in the region of calcareous sandstone. Because of the bad natural conditions, economic and cultural development was very slow. In 1981, the new school entrant rate was only 72.5 per cent. Among the 2,400 new entrants there were only 185 girls or 8 per cent of the total. Among the 45 first-year classes, 16 were without young girls. In 1982, the Department of Education of Lechang County investigated the elementary education of this

region. They found it necessary to run schools in various forms in order to suit the needs of the local masses for production and life. They established full-time schools at the central village; setting the place of teaching at those villages with more than 15 children of school age and making a circuit to give lessons to those who had some difficulty in going to the full-time schools. Thus there were 23 teaching places, 178 part-time classes and 28 circuit classes. The number of girls increased to 8,587, more than three times as many as in 1981.

The Congwu township in Huian County of Fujian Province is a fishing area, where there is high mobility among the fishermen and relatively few girls were enrolled in school. In 1982 the township set up 43 girls' classes, which enrolled 1,400 girls, increasing the enrolment rate for school-age children from 75 per cent to 95.1 per cent and setting the retention rate at 99 per cent.

In recent years there have been more and more children of workers and farmers getting school fee waivers, and in Inner Mongolia, Tibet, Qinghai, and Xingjiang, where there are many minorities, the state has been providing tuition and textbook fees for most pupils, and providing stipends for pupils who have financial difficulty. In areas populated by the Han nationality, those primary schools which are located in economically developed areas or which have good returns from work-study programmes have waived tuition and other fees for all pupils. The tuition and pupil fees charged by Chinese primary schools are quite small, which, in common folk's words are 'less than the the money spent for buying a hen'. Despite this small amount of expenditure, the tuition and pupil fees are still a barrier to some families in financial difficulties or multichildren families. In view of this, the waiving of tuition and pupil fees to all will be a positive encouragement to girls as well as boys in attending schools.

Madu County in Guoro Tibetan Autonomous Area in Qinghai Province is a sparsely populated pastoral area at the upper end of the Yellow River, 4,500 metres above sea level. The average annual temperature is  $-5^{\circ}$  C, with a low of below  $-53^{\circ}$  C. The atmosphere is rarefied with only 50 per cent of the oxygen found at sealevel. In 1983 only 60 per cent of shepherds' children were enrolled in schools. Despite the great difficulties in running education in such a

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low-temperature area, the local government is fully aware that without education there can be no change in its backwardness. In recent years the county government has set up seven boarding primary schools. It has not only waived tuition and school fees for every pupil but also provided each pupil with a 16 yuan monthly stipend and given each pupil clothing, a quilt, and a blanket. The authority also granted grasslands to the schools and 420 oxen and 3,364 sheep for pupils' food. These seven schools now have an enrolment of 500, half of whom are girls.

Zhiho County in Guizhou Province is a remote area which is populated by the Han Miao, and Tujia. Transportation in the County is very difficult and the economy and education very backward. Eight townships of the county are mountainous. In 1983 these eight townships had 1,780 school-age girls, of whom only 341, or 19 per cent, were enrolled in schools. In 1984 the County Party Committee held an educational meeting for promoting primary education and decided to waive tuition and school fees for all girls in grades I to III and to improve the working conditions of the teachers. Thereby the enrolment rate of girls has been greatly increased.

In the Tongxing County in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region the Hui population has a long tradition of betrothing girls at the age of 7-8 years. Consequently their school attendance rate was quite low. In 1980, 15 primary schools were set up for Hui children. The Hui pupils had their tuition and school fees waived and were given a monthly stipend of 7 yuan. Since 1981 all pupils in the County have had their tuition and school fees waived. In 1984, all girl pupils in grades IV-V were given a 5 yuan monthly stipend as an encouragement to complete primary education. Moreover rural families which had more than three children enrolled in school were given 15 yuan every month to help them buy learning materials.

In order to prevent girls from remaining illiterate, some rural areas, such as Huashan Village in Guangyintang Township, Qiyang County, Hunan Province, have sponsored 'Girls' School-attending Award' since 1979, with funds collected from the income of rural industry and side-line production. Largely owing to this Award, 100 per cent of the girls and boys in the village have been enrolled in schools.

The foregoing examples show that though there are various factors influencing girls' enrolment rate, the problem in girls' enrolment may be gradually improved and greater progress made so long as people's governments and education authorities at all levels make rational policies and take various active measures which suit the specific conditions in the region or area.

**Growth and development.** At present a course in moral education is offered in all Chinese primary schools, and social moral education is carried out through instruction in Chinese language and literature, history, arts and extracurricular activities. Children are taught in a lively, practical way to be polite and civilized and to pay attention to hygiene, social order and discipline and public environment. They are encouraged to love their motherland, the people, labour, science, and socialism; they are trained in fine manners, speech, and behaviour. Much care is taken to see that children develop good moral qualities and habits from their early years, qualities such as hard work, thrift, efficiency, attention to the saving of energy, keeping time, a good sense of equality for all in seeking truth, and capability of self management and helping the family and others. A collaboration is encouraged between education by the family and by society and school education.

The Chinese Government and its leaders pay full attention to the healthy growth of children. Praise for their heroic deeds, encourages children and motivates them to develop noble qualities of serving the interests of the people of China and the whole world.

**Improving the quality of education.** The 'Teaching programme for Chinese full-time primary schools', stipulates that primary schools offer courses in ideological and moral education, the Chinese language, math, a foreign language, fundamentals of nature, fundamentals of history, fundamentals of geography, physical education, music, singing and play, fine arts, and physical labour. The Programme stresses the need to improve methods of teaching and testing, to reduce the pupils' homework load, and to improve the quality of teaching. At the same time the Programme requires that schools strengthen the teaching of fundamentals, pay more attention to the development of pupils' abilities, and enable the pupils to learn advanced scientific knowledge at an earlier age.

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Surveys have found that Chinese girls, whether in urban or rural areas, study hard and observe discipline, and that their achievements are not lower than boys'. The results of one of these studies are outlined in Table 3.

It can be seen that Chinese girl pupils receive the same teaching as boys and their school performance shown through test scores are as good, or even better in some areas, than boys'.

**Physical growth.** The Chinese government and educational authorities pay special attention to the physiological characteristics of girls, especially girls in upper grades in primary schools. In the Preliminary Regulations for Primary Schools, formulated by the former Ministry of Education in the early 1960s and revised in 1978, it was stipulated that female teachers be appointed as counselors for girls in matters of girls' health in their puberty years. In 1979 the former Education Ministry and the State Commission for Physical Education issued 'Preliminary regulations of physical education in secondary and primary schools', which stated that courses in physical education of girls should be offered by female teachers and the classes should correspond to girls' physiological characteristics and should not treat young girls as adults. Also in 1979 the Education Ministry and the Health Ministry jointly issued the Preliminary regulations of health work in secondary and primary schools (draft)', which pointed out that girls should not participate in violent physical activities and unsuitable physical labour during menstruation. Owing to the attention and efforts by the Chinese government and relevant authorities in strengthening girls' health, the conditions for Chinese girls' healthy growth have been gradually improved.

As regards social education, the Chinese government, the National Women's Union, and the Communist Youth League, in order to specify the good qualities they are advocating and stressing and to set good examples for girls to follow, often publicize the deeds of heroines model woman workers, woman teachers, and especially the well-known disabled girl, Zhang Hai-dai, and members of the Chinese Woman's Volleyball Team, who successfully won the World champion three times in succession.



Table 3. Pupil scores in County-wide Standard Test Zhouyang Central Primary School,  
Gaomi County, Shandong Province, Feb. 5, 1985\*

	Number of Students			Test Scores						
	Total	among whom		Average of all student scores in Chinese & Math	among which					
		Girls	Boys		Average Scores for Girls			Average Scores for Boys		
					Math and Chinese	Chinese	Math	Math and Chinese	Chinese	Math
I	64	33	31	97.94	98.15	98.8	97.5	97.72	97.19	98.25
II	69	27	42	93.99	94	92.7	95.3	93.99	95	92.88
III	86	35	51	87.46	87.55	77.3	97.8	87.4	76.6	98.2
IV	90	46	44	76.4	78.5	72.88	84.12	74.24	66.3	82.18
V	98	38	60	85.3	87.98	80.4	95.55	83.63	76	91.25
Total	1,407	179	228	88.2	89.24	84.42	94.05	87.39	82.21	92.55

- \* 1. This school is in a rural area and its quality of teaching is ranked in the county, as upper middle-level.
2. The tests are county-wide standardized, with the item set by the County Teaching Research Group.
3. Scores are on a 100-mark system.

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Table 4. Status of physical growth of girls in urban and rural areas<sup>1</sup>

<i>Item</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>7-yr old</i>	<i>8-yr old</i>	<i>9-yr old</i>	<i>10-yr old</i>	<i>11-yr old</i>
height (in mm)	1979	120.4	125.0	130.1	135.6	141.2
	1975	119.3	124.6	129.5	134.8	140.6
	change	+ 1.1	+ 0.4	+ 0.6	+ 0.8	+ 0.6
weight (in kg)	1979	20.6	22.5	24.9	27.8	31.0
	1975	20.4	22.4	24.6	27.1	30.5
	change	+ 0.2	+ 0.1	+ 0.3	+ 0.7	+ 0.5
	1979	66.3	68.2	70.4	72.9	75.5
	1975	65.8	68.0	70.2	72.5	75.3
	change	+ 0.5	+ 0.2	+ 0.2	+ 0.4	+ 0.2
chest measurement (in mm)	1979	55.8	57.4	59.3	61.6	64.1
	1975	55.3	57.1	58.6	60.7	63.5
	change	+ 0.3	+ 0.3	+ 0.7	+ 0.9	+ 0.6

<sup>1</sup> Above results obtained through a survey of 200,000 girls in 16 provinces and cities.

## Chapter Four

### SUMMARY

Despite the great efforts made by the Chinese government in developing girls' education, there are still problems and difficulties in this respect because of the vast territory, the many nationalities, and the relative underdevelopment of the country as a whole.

First of all there is the influence of the economic development level on girls' education. It can be seen from Table 1 that in economically developed municipalities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin, the attendance rates of girls in 1984 were all over 99 per cent and the rates for economically relatively developed provinces on the southeastern coastline, like Jiangsu and Guangdong, were mostly over 95 per cent. The rates for economically underdeveloped provinces in the Southwest and Northwest regions like Tibet, Qinhai in 1984 were all below 90 per cent. Problems are even greater for areas where minorities are situated. For example, the average attendance rate for girls in Ning-xia Hui Minority Autonomous Region in 1984 was 83.3 per cent while the rate for those in mountainous and pastoral areas in the same Region was only 63.9 per cent. In the Bama Yao-Minority Autonomous County in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region there are 843 primary schools/centers, 38 of which have no girls, and the percentage of girls in the total primary school enrolment is only 30.5 per cent. In addition to economic and cultural conditions, national customs and religious influences also count for the relatively low enrolment rate in these areas.

Secondly, there is the influence of feudal ideology of regarding men as superior to women. In 1984 the national enrolment rate for boys was 97 per cent while that for girls was only 93.48 per cent. One major cause for this difference is the lingering influence of that feudal idea on the part of some parents, especially in rural areas. This kind of attitude influences not only some minority nationalities but also some remote Han-nationality-populated areas. Though

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efforts have been made for many years to solve this problem, it has not been solved nationally.

Taking into consideration the foregoing problem, the Chinese government has shifted its priority in the universalization of primary education to rural areas – especially areas liberated early in the revolutionary years, mountainous areas, economically poor areas, and minority-populated areas. Since 1983 the State Council has granted a total of 150,000,000 yuan to these areas to assist in development of school buildings and instructional instruments. In December 1984 the Chinese government sponsored a national meeting in Yantai City of Shandong Province to exchange experiences in universalizing primary education. The Final Report of the meeting stressed that

. . . special attention be paid to the issue of girls enrolment. As regards the lower enrolment rate of girls than that of boys, educational authorities should collaborate with other social institutions and organizations like the Women's Union in analyzing the various causes of the problem and taking relevant measures for strengthening ideological education and increasing financial support.

In March 1985, a Report by the National Women's Union to the State Council stressed again the issue of girls' school enrolment. The Report pointed out:

The relatively low enrolment rate of girls in rural areas might result in many female illiterates in a few years. To solve this problem, in addition to ideological work to girls' parents, governments should formulate relevant legislation and regulations to protect the legal rights of girls in receiving education.

The Report has been approved and disseminated to all provinces and regions for implementation.

In May 1985 the Central Committee of the CCP issued the 'Resolution concerning educational system reforms', which stated that the power to develop basic (primary and secondary) education should be delegated to local authorities and 9-year compulsory education implemented in steps. Because of the vast territory and uneven economic and cultural development, primary education

would be universalized in stages and in accordance with different conditions of different areas.

Firstly, for cities, economically developed areas in coast-line provinces and some developed inland areas, which account for one quarter of the total population, junior high school education has been popularized in some and the rest should popularize junior high school education in both quality and quantity by the year 1990.

Secondly, in average-level townships and rural areas which account for half the total national population, primary education should be first popularized, and preparations made for universalizing general junior high school education or vocation/technical education at the same level by the year 1995.

Thirdly, in economically backward areas, which account for one quarter of the total population, efforts should be made to develop different forms and levels of basic education, and the state should provide as much financial support as possible to educational development in these areas.

At present the State Commission is drafting the 'Compulsory education act of the People's Republic of China', which will be revised on the basis of suggestions from various circles and then submitted to the National People's Congress for Approval and effecting. In this way the girls' rights to education will be further protected by law on a nation-wide basis.

## Annex

### LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Li Zhonghan  
Deputy Director  
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Department of Primary Education  
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SELECTED APEID PUBLICATIONS  
RELATING TO UNIVERSALIZATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

- \* *Education of disadvantaged groups and multiple class teaching, studies and innovative approaches; report. 1981*
- Multiple class teaching and education of disadvantaged groups, national studies: India, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Republic of Korea. 1982*
- Learning needs and problems in primary education, report. 1983. (2 vols.)*
- Training of educational personnel for integrated curriculum, report. 1984*
- Towards universalization of primary education in Asia and the Pacific, country studies (of 12 countries) and a regional overview. 1984*
- Mutual co-operation for schools development, some experiences from Asia and the Pacific; report. 1985*
- Grass roots networking for primary education, case studies. Thailand, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Japan. 1985*
- Towards equality of educational opportunity, inter-country exchange of experiences, report of the visits of the Panel on the Education of Girls. 1985*
- Formal and non-formal education. co-ordination and complementarity, report. 1986*
- Education of girls in Asia and the Pacific; report. 1986*
- Raising the achievement level of children in primary education, report. 1986*
- In-service training and tomorrow's primary education, report. 1987*
- Coping with drop-out; a handbook. 1987*
- Education in difficult contexts; report. 1987*

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\* Out of stock



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All projects and activities within the framework of APFED are developed and implemented co-operatively by the Member States through one or more national centres and in co-operation with APFED.

The 15 Member States participating in APFED are: Bangladesh, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, Turkey and Viet Nam.

The main aim is to set up a National Institute of Educational Innovation and Development in each Member State to act as a link between the Member States and APFED.

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The programme is based on the following principles:

1. To ensure equal access to education for all, through the use of modern means;
  2. To promote the development of scientific and technological education;
  3. To improve the quality of education;
  4. To promote educational development;
  5. To promote co-operation with stress on mutual benefit;
  6. To provide support services and training for the Member States.
- Co-operative studies and innovative projects are encouraged in all areas related to education.

END

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Date Filmed

March 29, 1991