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SENDING girls to school has not yet found much favour with many old fashioned Nepalese, especially those living in remote villages or in backward communities.

This is the reason why special emphasis has been laid on promoting girls' education and appointment of women teachers. A women's education unit has been set up at the Ministry of Education and Culture to promote education among girls.

New measures to promote literacy and primary education among women are being introduced this year to attain universal literacy. These include scholarships for 5 percent of girl enrollees who are intelligent but poor, school dresses to deserving primary school girls, promotion of women's teacher training programmes and a non-formal education for adult women.

Officials at the Ministry of Education and Culture say some 140,000 girls will benefit from these programmes. Promotional campaigns are to be launched in cooperation with non-governmental organisations to encourage parents to send their daughters to school.

"The low enrollment of girls compared to boys is a big hindrance to achieve the target of universal literacy," says Madhav P. Mainali, executive director of the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID).

Girls compose only 29 percent of total school enrollees in 1987. Girls' enrollment is highest at Grade I (32 percent of the total enrollment) but this starts dipping in higher grades to about 22 percent of Grades 9 and 10.

Literacy among women in 1986 was only 18 percent in contrast to 51.5 percent among men.

Education Takes the Long Road in Nepal

Dr. Mainali says a CERID study showed that in many districts, the percentage of girl enrollees was less than 10 per cent on average. In the Mugu, Dandeldhura and Baitadi districts, it was less than 3 per cent.

The same study describes secondary education (Grades 6-10) as "a neglected area" compared with primary and higher education, in a way reflecting a contradiction in the government education policy.

Nepal's literacy rate jumped from 0.7 percent in 1947 to 35 percent now. The Government hopes to increase it to 40 per cent by 1990 when the enrollment in primary education is expected to rise to 87 percent.

Officials say 1.8 million children of primary school age (83 percent) were enrolled during 1984-85. About 2.2 million children (87 percent) will have been admitted to primary schools by 1990.

The number of primary school enrollment is expected to increase to 2.7 million or 95 per cent during 1990-95 and 2.9 million or 100 percent by the year 2000. The number of primary school teachers also need to be increased from 51,166 to present to 69,505 to 1990 and 88,565 by the year 2000.

Nepal's Harvard-educated King Birendra has identified the promotion of primary education and functional literacy as the basic requirement in reaching universal literacy by the year 2000. He has often described education as "the mainspring of development" for the Himalayan kingdom.

Three years after his accession to the throne, he declared free primary education and instructed the Government to provide free primary textbooks to girls.

Illiterate and poor villagers who never had the opportunity to go to schools are now being told to have their children educated. The slogan for this year is, "Promote education from the base; send your girls to school as well."

The Government plans to invest US\$ 515 million to attain the goal of universal primary education.

A massive literacy programme will be implemented to cover as many as five million adults by the year 2000. The ministry's Adult Education Section is involving non-governmental organisations to expand literacy programmes, specially among women.

The United Nations Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)'s Asia Pacific Program of Education for All (APPEAL) is helping Nepal with the promotion of girls' education by providing experts to formulate strategies for training teachers in educational programmes for girls and other disadvantaged groups.

To raise the achievement level in primary education, APPEAL is also assisting Nepal in the training of teachers and school managers and the development of teaching materials in initially 20 schools.

The UNDP, UNESCO and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) have also helped launch in 1971 the Equal Access of Girls and Women to Education, a project aimed at increasing girls' enrollment in primary schools.

Under the project, now renamed as Girls' Access to Education, girls from remote and hill districts are recruited for primary teacher training and are posted in community schools after completing training programmes.

The Seti project—another major effort supported by UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF—is training a new type of teacher who is not only skilled in routine teaching but has also knowledge in basic health care or agriculture.

A major effort under the project—covering Doti, Bajhang and Bajura districts in the remote Seti zone—is skills training for out-of-school girls.

The World Bank is also providing a US\$ 12.78 million credit to help implement a primary education project that aims at developing a low cost system of improving basic education.

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