

National Education Policy and Gender Inclusion

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On National Girl Child Day, we salute our #DeshKiBeti and the accomplishments in various fields. -PM Shri

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Narendra Modi

India will have the highest population of young people in the world over the next decade. So, our ability to provide high-quality educational opportunities to them will determine the future of our country (National Education Policy, 2020).

ABSTRACT

The education system in India has been the most neglected despite economic reforms in 1994. From millennia, India is the land of iconic women who played a unique role in governance, policymaking, defense, religion, etc. and brought many drastic reforms in society. But 800 years of colonization by foreign invaders has deteriorated the core moral, cultural, and educational values of the country. The Sultanate and Mughal rulers were incredibly against women's education, and Britishers had no interest in it.

According to the India Census, 2011, the overall literacy rate in India is 73%. But, women's literacy rate is only 65%. There is a gender gap of around 16% between male and female literacy rates. This gender split is higher in rural areas. The rural female literacy rate is only 57%, while the rural male literacy rate is higher at 77%. However, according to the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE)[report 2018-19], the gender gap in the country narrowed as compared to the previous years after several new policy interventions by current govt. The female students constituted almost half (approx. 48.6%) of the total enrolment in higher education. Nevertheless, there is a long way to go.

If India aims to grow as a strong developed country with a higher rank. This can only be achieved if consistent efforts are made towards closing the gender gap between boys and girls as well as transgender. The country has made recent strides in education sector as well.

National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 has introduced "**Gender Inclusion Fund** for targeting

the development of girl child. The GOI will constitute a "Gender Inclusion Fund" to provide quality and equitable education for all girls. The fund will focus on ensuring 100% enrollment of girls in schooling and a record participation rate in higher education, decrease gender gaps at all levels, practice gender equity and inclusion in society, and improve the leadership capacity of girls through positive civil dialogues.

Objective- This paper explores the plight of women education and, the impact NEP 2020 will make in initiating the much required action in this arena thereby, promoting greater equity.

INTRODUCTION

The global education development agenda reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015 - seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. Such a lofty goal will require the entire education system to be reconstituted to support and foster learning, so that all of the critical targets and goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved.

It also aims towards promoting awareness about the rights of the girl child and to increase awareness on the importance of girl's education, and their health and nutrition.

The Central Government has undertaken many initiatives that focus on empowering the girl child, including access to education, better healthcare and improving gender sensitivity. National Girl Child Day is celebrated every year on 24th January. The day is an initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The objective behind celebrating the National Girl Child Day is to provide all support and opportunities to the girls of the country.

The progress in school and higher education infrastructure and gross enrolment at all

levels is given in Table 3. As per U-DISE+ 2018-19, the physical infrastructure of more than 9.72 lakh government elementary schools has improved significantly. Out of these, 90.2 per cent have girls' toilet, 93.7 per cent have boys' toilet, 95.9 per cent have provision of drinking water facility, 88.1 per cent have hand wash facility, 82.1 per cent have wash (drinking water, toilet and hand wash) facility, 84.2 per cent have medical check-up facility, 20.7 per cent have computer and 67.4 per cent have electricity connection, 74.2 per cent have ramps, 56.5 per cent have boundary wall, 69.3 per cent have playground, 83.8 per cent have library, 21.5 per cent have kitchen garden and 13.9 per cent have rainwater harvesting structure, 23.6 per cent have facility for testing of water and 14.8 per cent have incinerator. (Economic Survey 2021)

Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani, Union Minister for Women and Child Development said in a tweet, "On National Girl Child Day, we reiterate our commitment towards ensuring equal rights for every girl child and empowering them with opportunities. Let us take pride in our daughters and spread awareness about the importance of girl child using #DeshKiBeti".

To tackle the above subjects and articulate an India-centric educational system, the new National Education Policy, 2020, has been designed by a committee chaired by scientist K Kasturirangan. The policy has attempted to approach gender as a top most priority to achieve gender equality in education with the partnership of states and local community organisations. The GOI will constitute a 'Gender Inclusion Fund' to provide quality and equitable education to all girls. The fund will focus on ensuring 100% enrollment of girls in schools and a record participation rate in higher education, decrease gender gaps at all levels, practice gender equity and inclusion in society, and improve the leadership capacity of girls through positive civil dialogues.

The policy will emphasize the number of women on leading positions of the institution, including principals, teachers, wardens, physical instructors and other staff. To decrease the gender imbalance among teachers (especially in some rural areas), alternate pathways for female teacher recruitment will be introduced without compromising on merit and qualification, both educational and professional. NEP 2020 will focus on the safety and security of school-going girls both inside and outside the campus.

Scenario of Education for Girls in India

Ratio of female net enrolment rate for primary to the male net enrolment rate for primary;

It is calculated by dividing the female value for the indicator by the male value for the indicator. A GPI equal to 1 indicates parity between females and males. In general, a value less than 1 indicates disparity in favor of males and a value greater than 1 indicates disparity in favor of females.

The caste system, dating back to 1200 BCE, is a form of discrimination that had been officially outlawed in 1955; however, its influence thrives in India's modern-day education system. On the top of the system is a group called the Brahmins, and at the very bottom are Dalits ("untouchables"). This method has kept many Dalit girls secluded from promising scholastic endeavors. These children are often from their peers segregated during lunchtime and ridiculed by them in class. This rhetoric causes 51 percent¹ of Dalit children to drop out of elementary school. Another law 1989 was supposed to protect the Dalit caste, but it is not being sufficiently enforced.

Gender inequality has deterred education for girls in India for a long time. In 2017, 32 percent of girls were not enrolled in school in comparison to 28 percent of boys. A male's education in India is more valued, therefore; it is often seen as unnecessary to financially support a girl's education due to these binding gender roles.

In impoverished villages where schools are inaccessible and not encouraged, gender roles lead to a third of girls in India marrying off their educational futures. As high as 47 percent of the girls in India are subject to marriage by 18 years of age. This leads to early pregnancies, which makes it impossible to attend school as they must shoulder the stigma and the additional workload. Some regions also don't allow expectant girls to attend school, which puts education even further from their grasp.

In 2009, the Right to Education Act (RTE), mandated that it is the right of every child to obtain a minimum amount of education. The program was supposed to make it compulsory for children ages 6 to 14 to access educational opportunities as more provisions were enacted. This was a step in the right direction, but more must be done to actively close the gender gap and retrain society to value girls' education.

Gender Disparity In Society

In most Indian families, a son's education is prioritised over a daughter's schooling. Girls are more likely to be engaged in domestic activities such as childcare and household work to provide economic support. This is more pronounced in lower-income households, rural families, and households where both parents work. The presence of younger siblings affects a girl's education

negatively — in terms of gross attendance, time spent on learning activities, learning performance, etc.

Early marriage is one of the chief reasons for adolescent girls dropping out of schools and prevents their access to education and development. Expenditure on girl's education is lower than that of boys within families. More boys are enrolled in private schools and tuition than girls. Also, parents anticipate relying on their sons during their old age. This leads to differential treatment in their school enrollment, educational expenditure, and access to learning resources.

Gender Disparity In Employability

According to the International Labor Organization, the female labour participation rate in 2017 was 27%, which is a 7% decrease from 34% in 2001. There are more than 50 million women in India who are neither going for study nor work. Monster Salary Survey, 2016, shows that women in India earn 25% less than the women from the rest of the world². The manufacturing sector shows the highest gender pay gap, while there is considerable gap even in other fields including banking and IT.

Although more women enter the IT sector, some of them end up leaving soon. Almost 60% of women have a work experience of 1-3 years, while only 2.7% women have an experience of more than 10 years. Gender diversity is needed in workspaces across all sectors of the economy. Though female enrollment in engineering and medicine colleges is high, those getting enrolled for IITs, postgraduate research, and elite institutions are low. This might be a reflection of the parents' bias in higher education expenditure. It results in less number of women in the R&D sector and senior management levels.

Gender Disparity In Workforce Participation

As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2018-19, the Female Labour Force Participation rate (FLFPR) was only 19.7% in rural India and 16.1% in urban India (versus greater than 55% for males). India's FLFPR remains remarkably low despite economic development, decreasing fertility rates and rising education levels of women and girls. This is contrary to the experience in other countries where similar factors have resulted in substantial increase in the FLFPR (Infographic 1). Even though, India became the fifth largest world economy in 2019, World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2020 ranks it as among the five worst performing countries on the 'Economic Participation and Opportunity' metric

Gender Disparity In Society

In most Indian families, a son's education is right of way over a daughter's education. This has been manifested today in online classes as well where girls are often abstaining from class for the sake of brother's classes. Girls are more likely to be engaged in domestic activities such as childcare and household work to provide economic support. The presence of younger siblings affects a girl's education negatively — in terms of gross attendance, time spent on learning activities, learning performance, etc.

Early marriage is one of the chief reasons for juvenile girls dropping out of schools and prevents their access to education and development. Also, parents anticipate relying on their sons during their old age. This leads to differential treatment in their school enrollment, educational expenditure, and access to learning resources.

Gender Disparity In School Curriculum

A gender-responsive educational curriculum will reverse gender bias and discrimination within the educational system as well as society. This requires an alteration of our conventional methods of teaching, learning discussion and resources.

Even today, textbook pictures depict men playing certain games, activities and labour, while girls are shown performing only traditional domestic activities.

In history, students are taught more about male leaders than female leaders, and women's achievements are on the verge of being marginalized. Teachers reinforce gender bias by expecting girls to do better in craft activities, while boys are expected to perform well in science and math.

Dropouts In Girls

In India, girls enroll late and drop out early. The progress of girls from primary to upper primary level is also lower than boys. The dropout rate for girls in upper primary level is very high at 18%, according to the Ministry of Human Resource Development. In many families, girls are not permitted to travel long distances to go to school for fear of safety, and lack of toilets and public facilities in schools.

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Multilayered Discrimination In Case Of Marginalised Communities

By denying access to educational or socio-economic opportunities as well as political power, our society discriminates against women from marginalised communities, including Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, migrant children, Dalits and poor Muslims. Girl children who are not part of the mainstream society face social exclusion in schools, and a weak monitoring system further prevents accountability and grievance redress.

Eradicating Gender Disparity With The NEP 2020-

The curriculum will be gender-neutral, technology-oriented, and more adjunct to sustainable employment. The NEP has also recommended vocational training inside school campus to acquaint students with first-hand experience of a workplace. In the end, the policy has a clear vision of reconstructing the nation's learning methodology and building a vibrant Bharat.

Eradicating Gender Disparity with the NEP 2020

Conclusion and Suggestions

To tackle the above subjects and articulate an India-centric educational system, the new National Education Policy, 2020, has been designed by a committee chaired by scientist K Kasturirangan. The policy has approved to move toward gender as a cross-cutting priority to attain gender equality in education with the affiliation of states and local community association. The GOI will constitute a 'Gender Inclusion Fund' to provide quality and equitable education to all girls. The fund will focus on ensuring 100% conscription of girls in schools and a record participation rate in higher education, diminish gender gaps at all levels, practice gender equity and inclusion in society, and improve the headship capacity of girls through positive civil exchange of ideas.

The policy will call attention to the number of women on leading positions of the institution, including principals, teachers, wardens, physical trainer and other staff. To decrease the gender imbalance among teachers (especially in some rural areas), alternate pathways for female teacher recruitment will be introduced without

compromising on merit and qualification, both educational and professional. NEP 2020 will focus on the safety and security of school-going girls both inside and outside the campus.

Schools have to ensure against pestering, discrimination against women, and domineer free campus before enlisting for yearly official recognition. This will increase the attendance of girl children in the classroom. The policy will identify social mores and gender stereotypes that prevent girls from accessing education and cause dropouts. The teachers, Anganwadi workers, and local social entrepreneurs will be trained to deliver proper counseling to families of girl children.

All educational institutions will be subject to authorization to conduct awareness sessions on gender issues to break typecast gender roles, on the importance of a harassment-free atmosphere and equal treatment of genders, and on legal protection and entitlement for girls and women under Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act (POCSO), the Maternity Benefit Act, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act.

This training will aim to raise awareness of teachers and educational administrators of a gender-sensitive and inclusive classroom management. The policy will specifically concentrate on the educational upliftment of underrepresented socio-economic and socio-cultural groups, and facilitate additional scholarships and fellowships. In order to discuss some provisions of NEP 2020 aimed towards promoting Gender disparity it is important to understand the problems associated with Gender disparity in education in India.

In order to ensure greater participation of girls in education, various involvement under Samagra Shiksha have been targeted. These interventions include:

- Opening of schools in the neighbourhood as defined by the State,
- Provision of free text-books to girls up to Class VIII,
- Uniforms to all girls, SC, ST children and Below Poverty Line (BPL) children up to class VIII,
- Provision of gender segregated toilets in all schools,
- Teachers' sensitization programmes to promote girls' participation,
- Provision for Self-Defence training for the girls from classes VI to XII,
- Stipend to CWSN girls from class I to Class XII,
- Residential Schools/Hostels,

- Construction of residential quarters for teachers in remote/hilly areas/in areas with difficult terrain.

Appendix-1

BOX-1

Challenges	Measures Proposed by NEP 2020
➤ To increase number of girl students in schools	Gender Inclusion Fund toward equitable education for girls as well as transgender students and a substantial increase in public investment to bring education spending to 6% of gross domestic product.
➤ One of the major challenges would be towards transition of girls from primary to secondary.	The policy has prescribed to approach gender as a top most priority to achieve gender equality in education with the partnership of states and local community organizations. The GOI will constitute a 'Gender Inclusion Fund' to provide quality and equitable education to all girls.
➤ Girls' enrollment rate has to be increased, ensuring that drop-out ratio is reduced.	The fund will focus on ensuring 100% enrollment of girls in schools and a record participation rate in higher education, decrease gender gaps at all levels, practice gender equity and inclusion in society, and improve the leadership capacity of girls through positive civil dialogues.
➤ Increasing the female staff in educational institutions so as to promote Gender Sensitivity	The policy will emphasise the number of women on leading positions of the institution, including principals, teachers, wardens, physical instructors and other staff. To decrease the gender imbalance among teachers (especially in some rural areas), alternate pathways for female teacher recruitment will be introduced compromising on merit and qualification, both educational and professional. NEP 2020 will focus on the safety and security of school-going girls both inside and outside the campus.
➤ Preventing harrasment of girls in educational Institutions	All educational institutions will be mandated to conduct awareness sessions on gender issues to break stereotyped gender roles, on the importance of a harassment-free environment and equal treatment of genders, and on legal protection and entitlement for girls and women under Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act (POCSO), the Maternity Benefit Act, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act
➤ Increasing the representation of underrepresented groups and, making the education system more technology and employment oriented.	The policy will specifically concentrate on the educational upliftment of underrepresented socio-economic and socio-cultural groups, and facilitate additional scholarships and fellowships.
➤ Restructuring the education system oriented towards employment and vocational training	The curriculum will be gender-neutral, technology-oriented, and more adjunct to sustainable employment. The NEP has also recommended vocational training inside school campus to acquaint students with first-hand experience of a workplace. In the end, the policy has a clear vision of reconstructing the nation's learning methodology and building a vibrant Bharat.

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