

“EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH: EDUCATION AND NATIONAL POLICY”**SHRADDHA TIWARI**

Abstract: "Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process." Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the education a achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investments in secondary school education for girls yields especially high dividends. Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Educated women can recognize the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the status of women empowerment in India using various indicators like women's household decision making power, financial autonomy, freedom of movement, political participation, acceptance of unequal gender role, exposure to media, access to education, experience of domestic violence etc based on data from different sources.. Gender gap exists regarding access to education and employment. Household decision making power and freedom of movement of women vary considerably with their age, education and employment status. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. More than half of the women believe wife beating to be justified for one reason or the other. Fewer women have final say on how to spend their earnings. Control over cash earnings increases with age, education and with place of residence. Women's exposure to media is also less relative to men. Rural women are more prone to domestic violence than that of urban women. A large gender gap exists in political participation too. The study concludes by an observation that access to education and employment are only the enabling factors to empowerment, achievement towards the goal, however, depends largely on the attitude of the people towards gender equality.

Keywords: Empowering Women, especially significant, dividends. Girls, disempowered.

Introduction: Education is a key intervention in initiating and sustaining processes of empowerment. Good quality education can help women and marginalized communities improve their status, enable them to have greater access to information and resources and to challenge various forms of discrimination. Education helps strengthen democratic processes as it allows for greater and more equitable participation. Being educated or literate leads to greater self-confidence and self-esteem. It enables engagement with development processes and institutions of governance from a position of strength. Poor women from socially disadvantaged communities are invariably not literate and therefore find themselves at a disadvantage when participating in development processes. They are unable to take full advantage of progressive measures like reservations in PRIs. Many of the negative fall-outs of being outside the education net for women are quite recognized, however, the articulation of the problem tends to remain at the level of rhetoric.

Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious bring the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the last few decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country. The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms,

and practices.

The access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes/ Other backward Classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and in the informal unorganised sector - to education, health and productive resources, among others, is inadequate.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The National Commission for Women as set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitutions of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

Critical areas of concern:

1. Women and Poverty
2. Education and training of women
3. Women and health
4. Violence against women
5. Women in armed conflict
6. Women and economy
7. Women in power and decision-making
8. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
9. Human rights and women
10. Women and media

11. Women and environment

12. Girl child

About Social Empowerment And Education:

Education is the single most important instrument for social and economic transformation. A well educated population, adequately equipped with knowledge and skill is not only essential to support economic growth, but is also a precondition for growth to be inclusive, since it is only the educated and skilled person who can stand to benefit most from the employment opportunities which growth will provide. Improvements in education are not only expected to enhance the efficiency but also augment the overall quality of life. Education is an instrument of social change and eliminates gender disparities and ensures equal opportunities.

In this context, National Mission for the Empowerment of Women (NMEW) through its Social Empowerment and Education domain ensures gender mainstreaming in the education sector in-order to empower women holistically and through her the nation building. Social Empowerment and Education domain aims at converging and linking various schemes of Government of India focusing on women with special reference to the flagship programs of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD). The domain will review existing studies, policies, programmes, schemes and also commission research studies of various programmes/schemes on education for better implementation.

National Policies:

The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 emphasises the need to use education as an agent of basic change in the status of women. The NPE proposes national education system to play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women, fostering of development of new values through redesigning of curriculum, text book, training and orientation of teachers, decision making and administrators and active involvement of educational institutions. These will be an act of faith and social engineering. Women studies will be promoted as the part of various courses and education institutions encouraged taking up active programs to further women's development. Removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in elementary education will receive overriding priority, through provision of special support services, setting up of time targets and effective monitoring. Major emphasis will be laid on women's participation vocational, technical and professional education at different levels. The policy of non-discrimination will be perused vigorously to eliminate sex, stereotyping in vocational and professional courses and promote women's participation in non-traditional occupations as well and existing and emergent technologies.

The National Policy of Empowerment of Women of 2001 has endorsed the provisions of NPE 1986. **The policy prescribes:**

Scheme:

Elementary Education: Elementary Education has been accorded priority and Sarve Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) was launched during 11th Plan as a part of Universalization of the elementary education. The goals of SSA were:

- All children to be in a regular school, Education Guarantee Scheme, Alternative Innovative Education, or "Back to School" camp by 2005
- Bridging all gender and social category gaps at primary level by 2010
- Universal retention by 2010;
- Free textbooks to all girls up to class VIII (Rs. 150/- per girl at primary level and Rs. 250/- per girl at upper level).
- Recruitment of 50% women teachers.
- Gender –sensitive teaching-learning materials, including textbooks. Districts with Gender Gaps in enrolment receive attention under SSA. 20 districts with gender gap of over 10 percentage points at the primary level, and 20 percentage points at upper primary level were identified for priority allocation in 2010-11.
- Focus on elementary education of satisfaction quality with emphasis on education for life.
- Separate toilets for girls: Bridge courses for older girls.
- Early Childhood Care and Education Centers in/near schools/convergence with ICDS programme etc.
- Teachers' sanitation programmes to promote equitable learning opportunities.
- Intensive community mobilization efforts.
- 'Innovation fund' per district for need based interventions for ensuring girls' attendance and retention.

SSA has brought primary education to the door steps of millions of children and enrolled them including first generation learners. During these period major schemes like district primary education program and the national program of nutrition support to primary education (Mid-day meal scheme) was also launched. Schemes related to exclusively for girls under Elementary education are as follows:

1. Mahila Samakhya Scheme
2. National program for education of Girls at Elementary level (NPEGEL)
3. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)

The schemes for girls like Mahila Samakhya Scheme, National Program for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) Scheme have been launched by MoHRD. Mahila Samakhya Scheme established Mahila Sangas or "Women Collective" to empower women in rural areas especially from socially and economically marginalized groups. The program focussed on creation of awareness which has resulted in increasing the enrolment and retention rates of girls in school. NPEGEL focuses on "Hardest to Reach" girls, especially those not in school. The scheme is being implemented in educationally backward rural blocks (EBBs). For the promotion of the

girl education KGBV scheme provides support for establishment of residential school in each district. Both the schemes are operationalized where the female literacy rate is less than the national average and gender gap is higher than the national average. The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) needs to be focused on blocks with Rural Female Literacy Rate (RFLR) below 30% as per 2001 Census as well as the existing criteria of the scheme (i.e. educationally backward blocks (EBBs) where the level of rural female literacy is less than the national average and the gender gap is above the national average; in blocks of districts which are not covered under EBBs but are having at least 5% SC/ST population and where SC/ST female literacy is below 10%; and also in select urban slums).

The group also emphasized that the NPEGEL programme instead of fragmented components, should address special projects for girls at risk/girls in difficult circumstances in 6 to 14 years age group.

The design of the programme for girls in these blocks could include any of the elements already stipulated in SSA Remedial Teaching, Bridge Courses, Alternative Schools; Child Care Centres; and also initiate several other measures specific to the NPEGEL component to suit context specificities and local requirements.

Secondary Education: Considering the demand generated out of universalization of primary education, the need to set up a mission for universalization of secondary education was envisaged and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA) has been launched by the MoHRD to widen access to women, SC/STs, and other deprived categories of children. Schemes like Model schools, ICT@school, Inclusive education for disabled at secondary state, National merit cum means scholarship are also implemented.

For the promotion of the girl education at secondary level, the scheme for incentives to girls for secondary education and scheme for establishment of girls' hostels are implemented. The schemes of incentives promote the enrolment of girl child belonging to SC/ST communities in secondary schools and ensure their retention up to the 18 years of age. Girls' hostel scheme envisages construction and running of hostels in educationally backward areas for the promotion of the access and retention of girls at Secondary and Senior Secondary level.

Incentives to girls for Secondary Education: According to the scheme, a sum of Rs. 3000/- is deposited in the name of the unmarried eligible girls as fixed deposit, who are entitled to withdraw it along with interest thereon on attaining 18 years of age and passing X class examination. During 2010-11, Rs. 72.46 crore has been sanctioned in favour of 241528 eligible girls of 15 States/UTs.

Girls hostel Scheme was launched in 2008-09 and is being implemented from 2009-10.

The scheme envisages construction of a hostel with the capacity of 100 girls in each of about 3,500 Educationally

Backward Blocks (EBBs) in the country. Students passing out of KGBVs will be given preference in admission in hostels. At least 50% of girls' students should be from SC, ST, OBC and Minority Communities.

Vocationalization of Secondary Education: The Centrally sponsored scheme of Vocationalization of Secondary Education is being implemented since 1988 to enhance individual employability and to reduce the mismatch between the demand and supply of skilled manpower and provides alternative for those pursuing higher education. The scheme so far has created a massive infrastructure of 21000 sections in around 9619 schools covering a population of 10.03 lakh students at +2 level.

Adult Education:

1. **Sakhshar Bharat** is continuity of the earlier National Literacy Mission but with revised design and structure with principal focus on women and excluded groups like SCs, STs and Minorities etc. The mission has four broad objectives, namely,

- Impact functional literacy and numeracy to non literate adults.
- Enable the neo literate adults to continue their learning beyond basic literacy and acquire equivalency to formal education system.
- Impart non and neo literates relevant Skill development programmes to improve their earning and living conditions.
- Promote learning society by providing opportunities to neo literate adults for continuing education.

2. **Under Saakshar Bharat**, out of 410 eligible districts, 372 districts were covered, 78445 Adult Education Centers (AEC) were set up. NIOS has conducted three Learners' Assessment Examinations in which 97 lakh learners' appeared for exam out of which 32 lakh cleared and certified. Targeted women population is 60 million. In 2011-12, the programme is under implementation in 25 States and in 1 UT and covering about 1.61 lakh Gram Panchayats in 372 districts.

3. **Jan Shiksha Santhan** have been established to promote vocational training to disadvantaged groups of adults such as neo-literates, less-educated slum dwellers, SC and ST and women etc. to raise their efficiency and increase their productive ability. Majority of the beneficiaries are women.

4. **Shikshaka Haq Abhiyan:** In October 2011, the National Advisory Council (NAC) for RTE took a decision to launch a country wide campaign for RTE. The Prime Minister of India addressed a letter to the children of the country, which was read out on the occasion

5. **National Education Day**, 11th November 2011, at a special function organized at Nuh, Mewat, Haryana.

6. Higher and Technical Education

a. Women's Hostel in higher education institutions:

Under this scheme woman hostels are established in the areas where significant population of weaker section and

minorities present. The grant for this purpose is provided by University Grants Commission(UGC).

Under Hostel Scheme, 150 women's hostels were established in Higher education institutions.

b.Women Studies Centre in Universities and Colleges: The Women's Studies Programme which was initiated in VII Plan Period, was promoted, strengthened and given direction to over various plan periods by establishing Women's Studies Centres in the University System. As on 31.03.2011, as many as 159 Women's Studies Centres (83 in universities and 76 in colleges) including 28 centres set up in 2010-11, have been functioning in the University system.

c.Women Polytechnics: As per AICTE, 168 Polytechnics for women are operational in various stages.

d.Women Hostels in Polytechnics: Under this scheme, 481 polytechnics have been provided partial financial assistance of Rs. 202.00 crore till 31.01.12.

e. Establishment of New Model Degree Colleges in Educationally Backward Districts with Low (GER) (UGC).

f. Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education: The scheme of Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education was initiated by UGC in the X Plan period. The overall goal is to facilitate the constituencies of women faculty, administrators and staff within the higher education system to increase the participation of women in higher education management for better gender balance, to sensitize the higher education system through policies and procedures which recognize women equity and diversity and to involve the women capable of becoming administrators for the qualitative development of higher education.

g.Residential Coaching Academy for Minorities and SC/ST/women: Under this scheme Universities and Colleges establish Residential Coaching Academy for UG/PG level students to prepare for NET, Coaching students for entry into services covered under Central and State Governments.

h.Girls Hostels in Minority Concentration Areas: UGC has sanctioned 284 women's hostels during 11th plan in 90 Minority Concentration Districts/Areas. Out of total allocation Rs. 366.49 crore, Rs. 201.55 crore has been released till 15.7.11.

i.Merit Scholarship Scheme: Under this scheme scholarships are directly credited to the Bank account of the student beneficiary.

The Merit Scholarship Scheme provides scholarship to 41000 girls every year.

j.Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child for pursuing higher & technical knowledge

This scheme supports higher education through scholarships to only single girl child in family and also promoting small family norm.Under this scheme Rs.2000/- per month for 20 months is provided.As many as 1803 students who have taken admission in 2011-12 academic sessions have been selected for providing

scholarship.

Under the scheme of Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child, Rs.4.88 lakhs has been provided to the beneficiaries.

k.Tuition Fee Waiver for Girl Students:

The AICTE has a scheme to encourage tuition fee waiver for girl students by providing incentives to Technical Institutions in the form of sanctioning additional intake capacity upto 10%, if the institutions provide tuition fees waiver to at least 10% students, belonging to economically-weaker sections, physically challenged categories and women. With this, the AICTE has also relaxed its norms for establishment of Technical Institutions exclusively for women.

l.Post-doctoral fellowship for women: The scheme provides for a scholarship of Rs.25,000/-pm for fresh Ph.Ds and Rs.30,000/- to Ph.Ds with 5 years of experience and associateship for 5 years a grant of Rs.50,000/- p.a is given.Rs. 2000/- p.m. (fixed) in cases of physically disabled & blind candidates for Escorts/Reader assistance.

Under the Post-doctoral fellowship for women, 100 slots per year are available. During 2009-10 Rs.9.98 lakhs has been distributed.

Studies and Reports: SSA has conducted National level study to find out the extent to which the objectives of the schemes have been translated to action in the field, as well as to incorporate mid course correction. The Social Empowerment and Education domain of NMEW will take concerted efforts for the promotion of more studies focussing women ultimately resulting in the amendment of the policies by the appropriate authorities.

Total Literacy Rate of the country is 74.4% out of which males- 82.14% and female is 65.46%.Female literacy growth rate is 11.8% and Male literacy growth rate is only 6.9% (source: Census 2011 Provisional data)

Under SSA national level studies have been conducted and the findings reported indicate:

1. The percentage of girls in the total enrolment at primary and upper primary level was 48.0 and 46.5 respectively in the year 2006-07; this increased to 48.41 and 48.38 at primary and upper primary levels respectively in 2010- 11. The annual average growth rate of enrolment for girls is considerably higher as compared to boys.
2. Among girls 4.6% were out of school, whereas among boys 3.9% were out of school.
3. Teacher absenteeism in primary and upper primary schools were 24% in AP, 15.4% in MP and 11.0% in UP. The percentage of absenteeism among male and female teachers as well as in rural and urban area was same.
4. The overall attendance rate of children at primary level was 68.5% and 75.7%at upper primary level. The attendance rate of girls is little higher than that of boys in first hour i.e boys 69% and girls 70.6% at primary level and at upper primary level was boys 75.2% and girls 78.7%)

5. During the first hour attendance rate among the SC and Muslim students was little lower at primary level i.e boys 68.7% and girls 68.4%.
 6. In NPEGEL, infrastructure progress is slow and sanitation facilities are yet to be completed. Existing infrastructure is not effectively utilized.
 7. Academic needs have not been taken care of effectively.
 8. Provisions of incentive like bicycle, sweater, socks and shoes, school uniform has increased the attendance rate.
 9. Planning to mainstream the out of school children (Older girls) needs more attention.
 10. Linkage with open school system has not been explored.
- In Higher Education, enrolment of women has reached 41.40% in 2009-10. Maximum no. of enrolment is 49.08% in Arts faculty and 4.90% in Engineering and technology.

Suggestions:

- Equal access to education for women and girls.
- Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination.
- Universalize education.
- Eradicate illiteracy.
- Create a gender-sensitive educational system.
- Increase enrolment and retention rates of girls.
- Improve the quality of education.
- Development of occupation/vocation/technical skills by women.
- Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education.

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