

## A cursory view on gender perspective in the National Education Policies with special focus on National Education Policy, 2020

Dr. Vanthangpui Khobung

Asst. Professor

DESS, NIE-NCERT, New Delhi -16

**Abstract:** Gender is a constant theme in the world of academia. As such, many imminent works have been produced and extensive research work has been undertaken on this theme from yore. It also continues to figure prominently in any public policy processes which are geared towards moving society towards equitable development. National Education Policy 2020 is one such document that sought to integrate the perspectives of gender from various angles. It is reflected in themes like Curricular Integration of Essential Subjects, Skills, and Capacities; Service Environment and Culture; Equitable and Inclusive Education for school level. For higher education, under the theme of 'Learning for All', there are various steps to be taken up by Governments for promoting gender equality. These aspects are elaborated in this paper and also a brief on the past national educational policies are highlighted.

Received 11 Mar., 2023; Revised 23 Mar., 2023; Accepted 25 Mar., 2023 © The author(s) 2023.  
Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)

### I. Introduction

The basic aim of education is man making. As expressed by Swami Vivekananda, it is a mean of self-actualization and realization of one's own capacities. The prior aim of education is to bring out the best that dwells in every individual. For defining the path of education, Swamiji stated following aims of education:

- (a) To develop faith in one's own self
- (b) To prepare individual to fulfill primary needs
- (c) To promote self-reliance and universal brotherhood
- (d) To develop the will and enable one to realize the divinity latent in him
- (e) To make pupil conscious of perfection

Digambarrao, 2014

Like any other country, India has also initiated and implemented numerous policies on Education. In all of these, gender occupies an important position place. It is found in the various policy documents – explicit or implicit. In some documents, it is quite prominent but in a few, it is embedded and anchored along with other themes which are required or instrumental to foster a just society. The current NEP also has gender and its concerns figuring in many themes such as Curricular Integration of Essential Subjects, Skills, and Capacities; Service Environment and Culture; Equitable and Inclusive Education and so on.

This paper tries to delineate the emphasis on gender by different national policies on education. It also highlights the prevailing socio-economic and the political environment that shapes policy frameworks as well as the forces and factors that seem to play a role in the shaping of gender's place and position in educational policy documents. The extent gender perspective finds a place in NEP 2020 is also examined in detail in this paper. It tries to answer various queries related to gender such as: - In which aspect and part of the policy the concern and vision of gender inclusive society found? How is it figuring in the policy? Is it as a passing reference or anchoring in nature? What is its vision relating to students cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral dimension?

The information and data for this study are derived from primary and secondary sources which include National policy documents such as National Educational Policies, Position Papers and research based books and journals. Content analysis is done on policy documents from gender perspectives and relate with each other to find out their differences and similarities. A deep focus is directed towards the NEP 2020 which highlights the perspective for integration of gender in school curriculums and textbooks. To some extent, the current national education policy also serves as a benchmark for understanding the extant gender discourse in the society.

### **Cursory view of gender in education in post-independence India**

India has witnessed considerable change in social relations i.e. gender and caste/tribal. In pre independence era, women education was positioned as a driver for modernization – an education that would not challenge gender social relations was the core objective not the one that would challenge gender social relations. The main concern during that time was the impact it will have on social and familial relations.

Post-independence India initially brought into picture the gradual mainstreaming of the then excluded region, SC/ST and address gender imbalances through the five year plans. It also figures within the ambit of education through its stated policies. This is in line with the constitutional emphasis on equality and equity. The 80s witnessed greater effort towards gender equality globally. There was increasing emphasis on the need of education as a crucial terrain in the struggle for gender equality and gender justice. The response however by various political organizations (community, regional and Women's etc.) was lukewarm. Barring missionaries and some other traditional social reformer, Dalit, Tribal, Agrarian, Social Movement organized around trade unions did not flag universal elementary education. The focus was more on affirmative action and job reservation in public offices. The possible reason may be the inroads made by the champions of education (the likes of Missionaries and traditional social reformers) into the tribal society (Ramachandran, V & Jandhyala, 2019). The generations of many educated individuals may have necessitated this focus. Universal elementary education was never high on the political agenda in the few decades after independence. Further, these situations can be viewed from the general development policy planning that focuses more on higher education and heavy industries. This strategy was broadly followed with the hope of materialization of trickle down policy.

Much has changed since then. Economic factor increasingly play a huge role in streamlining gender in education. Working women came to be seen as an asset in the unpredictable economy environment – domestic and global. With other factors like globalization, socio-economic progression, political intervention and overall change in the political environment more conducive to gender equality in different spheres of life in society, the effort towards gender equality in education and education of gender equality increased.

One of the first comprehensive initiatives of the Government of India towards education was the setting up of Kothari Commission (1964–1966) to formulate a coherent education policy for India. The focus was to increase productivity, develop social and national unity, consolidate democracy, modernize the country and develop social, moral and spiritual values. To achieve this, the main pillar of Indian education policy was free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. The need to address gender imbalances along with the quality of educational opportunities (regional, tribal and gender imbalances to be addressed) and the development and prioritization of scientific education and research was stressed upon. Overall, special emphasis was not given by this policy on education that would particularly gear gender equality though it was one of the focus areas of overall development policy.

The mid-eighties saw a new vigor in global effort to streamline gender in education. In India, the publication of the Challenge to Education by the Government of India culminates into the formation of National Policy of Education in 1986. This policy makes radical statements on the transformative potential of education. It acknowledges the need to address the root of women's marginalization (Ramachandran, V & Jandhyala, 2019). This policy brought forth various programmes and major initiatives geared towards women's equality with a focus on girl child education. Some of them are Mahila Samakhyas, The national Literacy Mission, District Primary Education Programme etc.

The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 was broadly intended to prepare India for the 21st century. It emphasized the need for change: 'Education in India stands at the crossroads today. Neither normal linear expansion

nor the existing pace and nature of improvement can meet the needs of the situation.' The commission also emphasized the need to eradicate illiteracy and provide adult education. The NPE 1986 envisages adult education as a means for reducing economic, social and gender disparities. It stressed the need for reorienting the education system to promote women's equality in education. It advocated the need for institutional mechanism to ensure that gender sensitivity be reflected in the implementation of all national programmes. The policy of non-discrimination will be pursued vigorously to eliminate sex stereo-typing in vocational and professional courses and to promote women's participation in education. The main strategies adopted to promote women education by the NPE and Programme of Action were to gear the entire education system to plan a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women, to promote women's studies as a part of various courses and to encourage the educational institutions to take up active programme to further women's development and to create dynamic managerial structure to cope with the targets envisaged.

The 1992 policy on Education laid stress on the problems of universalization of elementary education. It focuses on the increasing participation of girls at all stages of education, particularly in streams like sciences, vocational, technical and commerce education. The need for reorienting the education system to promote the women's equality in education was also stressed. It advocated the need for institutional mechanism to ensure that gender sensitivity be reflected in the implementation of all national programmes. The national education system should play a positive role in the empowerment of women. It should also contribute towards the development of new values through redesigned curricula, text books, training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers, administrators and the active involvement of educational institutions (GOI, NPE 1986). The National Curriculum Framework 2005 further gave clear direction to gender, equity and equality in Education. Though critique points out that despite the documents' reiteration regarding equality, fundamental rights and quality education for all, a closer reading of it points to a move towards ensuring that women learn to play out their traditional social role as good mothers, wives and daughters within the family and the nation (Bhog, 2020).

The goal of NPE on women education is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. Specifically, its objectives of this Policy include educating women for gender equality in the society, to improve and raise their economic condition and their status in the society. Further, the removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education are also priority, through provision of special support services, setting of time targets, and effective monitoring. Major emphasis will also be laid on women's participation in vocational, technical and professional education at different levels. Education of women would mean narrowing down of social disparities and inequities (Bhattacharyya, 2021). This would automatically lead to sustainable development.

### **Gender in National Education Policy 2020**

The National Education Policy of India 2020 (NEP 2020) as the first policy on education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was launched in July 2020. This comes after a gap of 34 years and replaces the previous National Policy on Education, 1986. This document was prepared after a series of feedbacks, workshops, committees and consultations with different stakeholder at different levels. National Education Policy 2020 is one such document that sought to integrate the perspectives of gender from various angles. This is reflected in various themes like Curricular Integration of Essential Subjects, Skills, and Capacities; Service Environment and Culture; Equitable and Inclusive Education for school level. For higher education, under the theme of 'Learning for All', there are various steps to be taken up by Governments for promoting gender equality. One landmark in the contour of educational system in India is carved in the policy's proposal to include children from 3-6 years within the ambit of the policy. This can provide opportunities for a better foundation towards gender equality in a society. A strong base of early childhood education envisioned in NEP 2020 is promising from gender perspectives. It can work towards promoting better overall learning, development, and well-being as stated in the documents.

In the theme of **Curricular Integration of Essential Subjects, Skills, and Capacities**, the policy mentioned **gender sensitivity as one skill** to be learned by all students to become good, successful, innovative, adaptable, and productive human beings in today's rapidly changing world along with scientific temper and evidence-based thinking; ..... digital literacy, coding, and computational thinking; ethical and moral reasoning; knowledge and practice (NEP, 2020). This is expected to help students build a strong moral and ethical foundation that will enable them to make a right decision and do things right - embrace moral/ethical values in conducting one's life, formulate a position/argument about an ethical issue from

multiple perspectives, and use ethical practices in all work (NEP,2020). This is sought to be strengthened by expanding along the themes of cheating, violence, plagiarism, littering, tolerance, equality, empathy, etc. The basic ethical reasoning is expected to further develop in students traditional Indian values and all basic human and Constitutional values (such as *seva, ahimsa, swachchhata, satya, nishkamkarma, shanti*, sacrifice, tolerance, diversity, pluralism, righteous conduct, **gender sensitivity**, respect for elders,.....and fraternity) will be developed in all students (NEP,2020).

A pertinent theme dominating policy documents, training programmes for teachers and programmes of the government at different levels is **Equitable and Inclusive Education** for school. Education system and successive government have been emphasizing on this and also made a considerable progress in bridging gender gap in all levels of school education. However, there are still a lot of works and initiative to be taken up especially for the socio-economically disadvantaged groups across the society. Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) based on gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals) and others such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities, geographical identities, students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts, students having learning disabilities, migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor need to be our continued and consistent focus for improvement for the overall development of the country.

NEP 2020 also favors the creation of a **Gender-Inclusion Fund** in order to build the capacity of the nation to provide equitable quality education for all girls as well as transgender students. It mentioned: The fund will be available to States to implement priorities determined by the Central government critical for assisting female and transgender children in gaining access to education (such as the provisions of sanitation and toilets, bicycles, conditional cash transfers, etc.); funds will also enable States to support and scale effective community-based interventions that address local context-specific barriers to female and transgender children's access to and participation in education. Similar 'Inclusion Fund' schemes shall also be developed to address analogous access issues for other SEDGs. In essence, this Policy aims to eliminate any remaining disparity in access to education (including vocational education) for children from many gender or other socio-economically disadvantaged groups (NEP, 2020.p.26)

It further stresses on the need of teaching children the awareness and knowledge relating to gender sensitization and sensitization towards all underrepresented groups in order to reverse the same. This is envisioned to be an integral part of all teacher education programmes.

In the section of **Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education** in NEP 2020, there are various initiatives required to be taken up by the government to ensure a better equality in the society. Gender issues are embedded in all these policies. Some of those are:

- (a) Earmark suitable Government funds for the education of SEDGs
  - (b) Set clear targets for higher GER for SEDGs
  - (c) Enhance gender balance in admission to HEIs
  - (d) Enhance access by establishing more high-quality HEIs in aspirational districts and Special Education Zones containing large numbers of SEDGs
  - (e) Provide more financial assistance and scholarships to SEDGs in both public and private HEIs
  - (f) Conduct outreach programmes on higher education opportunities and scholarships among SEDGs
- NEP, 2020.p.41

There are also various proposed steps that the higher education institutions need to take up. These are:

- (a) Mitigate opportunity costs and fees for pursuing higher education
- (b) Provide more financial assistance and scholarships to socio-economically disadvantaged students
- (c) Conduct outreach on higher education opportunities and scholarships
- (d) Make admissions processes more inclusive
- (e) Make curriculum more inclusive
- (f) Develop bridge courses for students that come from disadvantaged educational backgrounds
- (g) Provide socio-emotional and academic support and mentoring for all such students through suitable counseling and mentoring programmes
- (h) Ensure sensitization of faculty, counselor, and students on gender-identity issue

and its inclusion in all aspects of the HEI, including curricula

- (i) Strictly enforce all no-discrimination and anti-harassment rules
  - (j) Develop Institutional Development Plans that contain specific plans for action on increasing participation from SEDGs, including but not limited to the above items.
- NEP, 2020. P.42
- 

Also, the policy further stresses on the necessity of ensuring sensitization of faculty, counselor, and students on gender-identity issue and its inclusion in all aspects of the higher education institutions, including curricula.

## II. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion shows that women education has been the central theme in the various policies on education. Though the extent of focus and stress on it may differ in a varying degree, it remains a pertinent theme in the history of Indian education policies. It brought immense changes into the society and acts as an agent for promoting equality in the society. However, there is a huge scope for improvement and drawbacks that needs to be a focus from every angle. The inter-linkage between culture, society, economy and gender needs to be treaded in such a way that the efforts fructified for the overall development of the society.

## References

- [1]. Agarwal, S.P. (2001). Women's Education in India (1995-98): Present Status, Perspective, Plan, Statistical Indicators with Global View, Vol. III New Delhi: Concept Publications Co
- [2]. Ahmed, N., Siddiqui, A. (2006). Empowerment of Women through Education-Commitments and Challenges, University News Journal, 44 (37), 16-20
- [3]. Arya, A. (2000). Indian Women—Education and Empowerment. Delhi: Gunjan Publishing House.
- [4]. Banuri, madhukar & Sarma, Siddesh. (7 Aug 2020). NEP 2020: Hits and misses, India Development Review <https://idronline.org/nep-2020>
- [5]. Bhat, R.A. (2015), Role of Education in the Empowerment of Women in India, Journal of Education and Practice, 6(10), 188-192.
- [6]. Bhog, Dipti. (2020). Gender and Curriculum. In N. Manjrekar (Ed.), Gender and Education in India: A reader (pp.266-274). Aakar Books
- [7]. Digambarrao, Asore Manisha. (2014). Swami Vivekananda's concept of man-making education Conflux Journal of Education pISSN 2320-9305 eISSN 2347-5706 Volume 2, Issue 1, June 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.cjoe.naspublishers.com>. 25/10/2022.
- [8]. Government of India. (1998). National Policy on Education 1986, New Delhi. MHRD, Government of India
- [9]. Government of India. National Education Policy 2020. New Delhi: MHRD, Govt. of India.
- [10]. Guha, D. & Ghosal, D. (2017), Education, Employment and Empowerment of Women in India .published in "Different Truths—A Global Participatory Social Journalism Platform".
- [11]. Manjrekar, Nandini. (Ed.). (2020). Gender and Education in India: A reader. New Delhi: Aakar Books
- [12]. Mondal, Puja. The History of Women's Education in India. <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/education/the-history-of-womens-education-in-india/9982>
- [13]. Nandal, V., & Rajnish, M. (2014), Status of Women through Ages in India, International Research Journal of Social Sciences, 3(1), 21-26.
- [14]. Ramachandra, Vimala & Jandhyala, Kameshwari. (2019). Gender and Education. Orient Blackswan