

IMPACT OF EDUCATION POLICIES ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Education is a panacea of all evils. It improves the self-esteem and self-confidence of human beings. In India, one of the indicators of socio-economic development is expansion of education. Since the time of independence, Government of India has introduced a number of programmes to address and tackle the problem of literacy in rural-urban India irrespective of sex. The Right to Education Act has been considered to be a turning point in the context of elementary education. This act has resulted in remarkable change in the school education, which also generated many positive impacts on girl child. Education is considered to be a landmark of women empowerment because through education the female counterpart can face and confront the challenges and take part in decision making. This actually helps them to improve their status in their families as well as in the society. At the same time through women empowerment the problem of poverty and unemployment can be eradicated.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to study the impact of various education policies and schemes on female education in India since independence. This paper is descriptive in nature. In this connection 'KanyashreePrakalpa' introduced in West Bengal has also been taken into consideration as a part of upliftment of female education in West Bengal. Although 'KanyashreePrakalpa' is not directly associated with education policy, however, it has greatly impacted the quality of female education. With the aim of expansion of female education, this programme has also been successful in reducing early marriage. School dropout cases are minimized by funding studies for the girl child and females aspiring for higher education. In fact, early marriage and school drop outs are the two major hindrances restricting the expansion of female education. 'KanyashreePrakalpa' has played an important role to overcome these two major challenges.

Keywords: female education, women empowerment, school drop-outs, education policy

Introduction

Education is considered to be the basic requirement for achieving entire human potential which in its turn promote socio-economic development in the country. For this reason, education must be rendered to each and everyone in the society by removing the obstacles. Through the expansion of education, the problems of poverty and unemployment can be mitigated. In India, since the inception of first 5 years plan alleviation of poverty and employment generation have achieved the utmost importance. In this aspect, education is one of the creative means. Provision of universal access to quality education will lead to achieve to economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation in India. With this attempt government of India has framed various education policies. In this connection women education has got importance because education can uplift their position in their families as well as in the society. This is important because women constitute almost half of the population. Therefore, to achieve the overall development of the society betterment of the female counterpart is a must. As per Right to Education Act in India children in the age group of 6-14 years have fundamental right to attain education. In this context the school education among the girl children has got some special importance which benefitted them.

In West Bengal KanyashreePrakalpa has become very successful in the context of expansion of education among the female child. Although it is not a part of education policy but it has helped to empower the women by reducing school drop outs, early marriage by providing financial support to the female child to continue their education.

In this paper an attempt has been made to study various education policies and their impact on the female education. Also, another attempt has been made to examine the impact of KanyashreePrakalpa in the context of women empowerment. This is mainly a literature-based study which is descriptive in nature.

Literature Review:

Literature in the context of education policies and its impact on female empowerment is not enough. Various reports on education policies published by Government of India such as, National Policy on Education 1986, National Education Policy 2020 etc. and Margaret (2021) Singh (2016) in their paper have tried to explain the impact of the education and its related policies on women empowerment. On the other hand, Reports generated by West Bengal Government on KanyashreePrakalpa since its inception, Das (2018), Biswas and Deb(2020),

Mandal (2021) etc. have examined the impact of KanyashreePrakalpaon women empowerment especially in the context of girl child education.

I. Education Policies in India and its Relation to Female Education:

After achieving independence with the objective of expansion of education the then government introduced number of education-oriented programmes for addressing the problem of illiteracy in rural-urban India. However, during the third 5-year plan it was realised that proper attention to the education system was not paid so far. This resulted in the adoption of education policy separately. With this idea Kothari Commission was set up. Based on the recommendations of Kothari Commission the first education policy was introduced in 1968. This policy had involved a *National School System*, which necessitated that all students, irrespective of caste, creed and gender would have access to education up to a certain level. Further, it proposed a common educational structure {10+2+3} which was accepted across the country and most of us have studied under this system. It also encouraged use of mother tongue as medium of teaching in early school years. Another major call was strengthening the research work in the universities.

However, the First Education Policy was not successful enough. There are certain reasons behind this. Shortage of funds, proper implementation of such policy related programmed are the main causes.

In the year 1986, the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi introduced the National Education Policy with particular emphasis on the removal of disparities and to ensure equality in educational opportunity especially for female, Scheduled Tribes (ST) and the Scheduled Caste (SC) communities. The first and foremost step under this policy was to ensure everyone under 14 years of age group into school. Keeping this in mind, it aimed at improving the school environment and teaching methodology. This time the intention was to frame a non-failure policy at the elementary level of school education. New Education Policy 1986 also targeted to achieve the attainment of free and compulsory education for all by 1995. This policy also gave special importance to the girl child by providing two sets of free uniforms, free textbooks, attendance initiatives and stationery, etc. free of cost. Along with this, students attending elementary school were also given free transportation facilities in the state roadways buses. Actually, it was expected that education policy would play a positive and interventionist role for achieving women empowerment. In this context, the subject Women Studies was promoted as part of various courses and the institutions were encouraged to take up active participation and programmes to ensure further development of women. Special polytechnics for women had also

been set up in all the constitutional States. Further, increased hostel facilities were expected to provide for women to enable them to avail themselves of facilities for technical education.

National Policy of Education, 1986, has been emphasised for the upliftment of status of women in connection with education and employment for empowering women of India. The Ministry has been administrating 'STEP' (Support to Training and Employment Programme for women) scheme in the year of 1986-87 to provide competencies and skill that enable women to become self-employed or entrepreneurs. Legal Services Authorities Act (1987) provides free legal services to Indian women. The schemes like 'Swa-shakti', 'Sayamsiddha' have been introduced and implemented to remove the gender gap in workplace.

Later a committee was set up under the chairmanship of AcharyyaRammurti in May 1990 to review National Policy of Education (NPE),1986 and to make recommendations for its modifications. This Committee submitted its report in January 1992, known as National Programme of Action of 1992. This policy aimed at promotion of overall progress of the country. It laid stress on the need for a radical reconstruction of the education system, to improve its quality at all stages, and therefore gave much greater attention to science and technology, the cultivation of moral values and a closer relation between education and the life of the people.

The third National Education Policy has been introduced in 2020. This National Education Policy 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century and aims to address the many growing developmental imperatives of our country. This Policy proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 forecasts equitable and inclusive education for all, with special attention to children and youth, especially girls, from socially and economically disadvantaged groups. Under this policy free boarding facilities will be built - matching the standard of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas – near the school locations where students may have to come from far, and particularly for students who from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, with suitable arrangements for the safety of all children, especially girls. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya will be strengthened and expanded to increase the participation in quality schools (up to Grade 12) of girls from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

In addition, the Government of India has decided to constitute a 'Gender-Inclusion Fund' to build the nation's capacity to provide equitable quality education for all female students. 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. This will

include 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 access to and participation in education. In a nut shell, this Policy has targeted to eliminate any remaining disparity in access to education (including vocational education) for children from any gender or other socio-economically disadvantaged group.

II. Education Policies and Women Empowerment

Female Empowerment indicates that female section having power and full control over their own lives. In fact, it represents their ability to determine their own preferences and their right to influence the society for better tomorrow. Education and employment are the major stepping stones to move towards the path of women empowerment. Education, on the one hand, has played an important role in shaping the human development and employment, on the other hand, has made the female section economically independent which, in its turn, has given them decision making power in their families. After the sanction of Right to Education Act (2009) significant progress has been made on enrolment at primary school education level. Especially the National Policy of Education, 1986 and its modified version which came into existence in 1992 the Programme of Action (POA) has worked as the guiding force of influence regarding the need for women empowerment. These two policy and programme have put stress on the problems of universalization of elementary education. This has resulted in the increasing participation of girls at all stages of education, particularly in streams like sciences, vocational, technical and commerce education.

The POA has also stressed the need for reorienting the education system to promote the 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. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curriculum, textbooks, the training and orientation programmes of faculty members, decision makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions.

Through education awareness is generated among the female counterpart which in its turn has empowered them socially as well as economically. In this way, National Education Policy will make the women empowerment more impactful which will help to reduce the gender inequality.

Apart from these education policies in recent years Indian government has introduced various schemes like 'Beti Baachao Beti Padhao' which ensures the protection, survival and education of the girl child. On the other hand, 'Mahila Shakti Kendra' has been introduced which targets at the

empowerment of rural women with opportunities for skill development and employment. 'Working Women Hostel' (WWH) is set up to ensure the safety and security for working women.

III. KanyashreePrakalpa _ A Noble Initiative of Govt. of West Bengal

Gender inequality has contributory impacts through creating constraints in their achievement of a number of development goals. Studies have shown that gender inequality in education and access to resources may hamper the process of reduction of child mortality and lowering of fertility, which in turn impacts the expansion of education for the next generation. The government of West Bengal has decided to sensitise the society specially in backward communities in rural areas and slum areas in urban locality about the importance of providing equal access and opportunities for growth and development, including education to all with particular emphasis on girls and planned accordingly.

KanyashreePrakalpa has been introduced by the government of West Bengal in 2013 with aim of promoting education of the girl child through which they will be empowered. Although this scheme is not associated with the National Education Policy however it has played a vital role in the expansion of female education. It is already observed that the girls of age group 13-18 years are the most vulnerable for child marriage, child trafficking. At the same time because of gender discrimination the school drop-out case is also higher in case of female child. The KanyashreePrakalpa has intervened and provided financial support to continue their studies and enrol them for other recognised skill development programmes.

According to the report related to educational statistics (2010-11) published by Ministry of Human Resource Development it is found that the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has been gradually decreasing for high school(IX-X) and higher secondary(XI-XII) indicating that more children, including girl are leaving school in their adolescent age. The drop-out rate between in case of female students has observed around 63.5% in 2011 which is quite alarming. Under these circumstances, the government of West Bengal has decided to create and enable environment for elevating the education, health and nutrition status of women and children through a scheme namely, 'KanyashreePrakalpa'.

This particular scheme not only provides formal education but also conducts various skill enhancement programmes related to handicraft, bamboo craft, soft toy making, mushroom cultivation training basic nursing etc. which will enable them to be self-employed in near future. Indoor and outdoor sports activities for the girls are also initiated by the government.

Table 1: Enrolment of Female students in Secondary & Higher Secondary Level (Before & After KanyashreePrakalpa)

Year	Secondary	Higher Secondary
2011-12	1223896	681880
2012-13	1270635	698440
2013-14	1346616	736378
2014-15	1412770	785828
2015-16	1491350	820881
2016-17	1420429	829181

Source: various reports of U-DISE Flash Statistics

These estimates indicate that over the period the female enrolment in secondary and higher secondary education has increased in West Bengal which represents the reduction in school drop-out case among them.

Table 2: Percentage of Female Enrolment in School Education

Year	Female Enrolment	Total Enrolment	Percentage
2011-12	9199334	18306180	50.25
2015-16	7737760	15241013	50.77
2016-17	7737760	15241013	50.77
2019-20	9489902	18700000	50.75

Source: Various Reports by Ministry of Education in India

In this table it is observed that after the implementation of KanyashreePrakalpa the female enrolment in school education has increased remarkably. In fact, it is found that female enrolment has increased at a higher extent as compared to male counterpart.

Kanyashreeprakalpa not only minimizes the tendency of girl student to dropout from schools at early age but also it will create a positive impact of the prevention of girl child marriage.

Conclusion

In rural India female children play an important role in their families by shouldering the responsibilities of household work such as looking after the sibling, fetching water, collecting wood, cleaning and cooking etc. and this in its turn discourage them to go school. The lower enrolment of girls in school is one of the foundational factors which stand as hurdle for women education. Government of India has come forward to remove this exploitation and gender discrimination with the help of National Education Policies. It is worth mentioning that education will ensure equality and education equality will improve the job opportunities and promote economic growth as well as development. Expansion of education and employment generation including new employment opportunities among the females will empower them. Various states have also taken the initiative to improve the status of girl children belonging to economically weak background. In this context, government of West Bengal has introduced an innovative scheme which is directly related to education expansion of adolescent girls by providing them financial support for the continuation of their education. This particular scheme is praised by the entire world. Day by day new activities related to these schemes introduced by State government and National Education Policies are also coming into force to encourage the attainment of education and uplift the overall status of female section in the society.

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