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**DEBUNKING THE MYTH OF GENDER CONCERNS IN EDUCATION
POLICIES: SOME REFLECTIONS**

Introduction

Gender inequality in India persists despite its induction (with GDP, 7.62%, 2015-16). into the world's elite developing nations, i.e. the BRICS. Persistent inequality is reflected in the low human development attainments of the country's most marginalized groups including scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, rural populations and women. India has performed poorly in removing gender-based disparities, ranking 114 out of 142 countries in World Economic Forum's 2014 gender gap index, scoring below average on parameters like economic participation, educational attainment and health and survival. Besides low women participation in employment and decision making. This disparity is not likely to be eliminated soon due to existing traditional patriarchal norms. Though government has launched several commendable schemes to save and educate the girl child and the national average has also risen from 943 females per 1000 males, but in many parts of India

it still continues to remain low. Women literacy in India as per 2011 census was 65.46% (overall 74.04 %, men 82.14 %,). It is alarming for India to improve women literacy rates as India has 30% of the world's total illiterate population and around 70% of them are women. Among these illiterate women forty percent are rural belonging to socially backward communities who have never been to school or are dropouts. The hurdles prohibiting these marginalised sections from attending schools are; prejudices that families have about girls, domestic work, mobilisation of community for enrolment of girls, working children, less number of female teachers, long distance to school non-availability of schools etc.

Education has the inbuilt potential of initiating social change in the context of gender relations. Therefore, conscious and pluralistic interventions have been put forward by the Government of India to address gender equality in education at the centre and state level. Government made commitment to create an integrated school system free from the issues of equity, equality and social justice in education. Steps were taken to make education a fundamental right (for children aged 6-14), along with initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (to universalise primary education) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (to universalise secondary education).

In India gender related policies have always been victim of political discourses and the policies made by government have faced multiple accidents in their implementation. Sometimes due to lack of political will, human resources, human expertise, funding or spending. Therefore to reduce gender inequality in education the immediate need is to reflect and focus in a proactive manner on transforming

attitudes, beliefs and behavioural patterns that impact gender relation in family, community and schools. It is thus, essential for both the government and the civil society to discuss female education as a social aspect at micro-levels.

Issues and Concerns

India lacks a larger perspective with respect to education of girls. The government schools of India has large presence of girls from disadvantaged groups and communities. These schools are dysfunctional with unstable management conditions, inappropriate or lack of leadership, lack of vision, unhealthy school climate and culture, and low staff and learner morale. In the Indian context textbooks are a part of social milieu and an important source of knowledge that teachers and students rely upon across the country. In the construction of knowledge in different subjects' domains, it is important to analyse the content, visuals and exercises of the textbooks from a gender perspective. But textual materials do not include sufficient issues of equity and equality in India.

In fact, a gender friendly environment can easily be created by a teacher in any context to build harmonious relations between boys and girls at different stages of education. It just requires sensitivity and positive intent of teachers, but unfortunately teachers do not define their roles as mentors and facilitators but they work as instructors and knowledge experts aiming to disseminate information. The efforts to address biases in curriculum transaction have been entirely missing.

While educational planning in India is centralised, and does not allow comparing diverse perspectives, women's confidence in state led reforms has diminished. The

reach out programs towards girls is not autonomous and governmental also miss reaching out to the masses. India also happen be missing gender mainstreaming, there is more politicization in the mainstream of women education. It is a fact that even after 67 years of independence, there is very little representation of women on the ground and they are still not emancipated. This emancipation needs a change in perspective which is missing at the moment.

Women Participation continuous to be low in India, let's take an example of the state of Meghalaya in the North East of India. Meghalaya, separated from Assam on the grounds of being a Matriarchal society but if we see the women participation and representation in the state, it is a sad fact that we have only one female Member of Parliament out of the 128 MPs in the state Assembly. When this is the situation of a Matriarchal society then forget about the ground realities of a Patriarchal society that exists in the major states of India. Another issue is with evaluation and reporting of policies and programs, the government reports come out with data on quantitative improvements, they fail to show qualitative change taking place.

Education Policies and Plans

Five Year Plans

The all-round development of women has been one of the focal point of planning process in India. The importance of the role of women in development had been recognized by the government of India right from the very first plan.

The First Five-Year Plan (1951-56) envisaged a number of welfare measures for women. Establishment of the Central Social Welfare Board, organization of

Mahila Mandals and the Community Development Programmes were a few steps in this direction the empowerment of women was closely linked with the overall approach of intensive agricultural development programmes.

The second five year plan (1956-1961) continued to reflect the very same welfare approach, providing priority to women's education, their rights and status of women in the fast changing socio-economic condition of our Indian society.

The Third and Fourth Five-Year Plans (1961-66 and 1969-74) supported female education as a major welfare measure.

The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79) emphasized training of women, who were in need of income and protection. This plan coincided with International Women's Decade and the submission of Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India. In 1976, Women's welfare and Development Bureau was set up under the Ministry of Social Welfare.

The Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85) saw a definite shift from welfare to development. It recognized women's lack of access to resources as a critical factor impeding their growth.

The Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985-90) emphasized the need for gender equality and empowerment. For the first time, emphasis was placed upon qualitative aspects such as inculcation of confidence, generation of awareness with regards, to rights and training in skills for better employment.

The Eight Five-Year Plan (1992-97) focused on empowering women, especially at the grass roots level, through Panchayat Raj Institutions.

The Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) adopted a strategy of women's component plan, under which not less than 30 percent of funds/benefits were earmarked for women-specific programmes.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-07) aims at empowering women through translating the recently adopted National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) into action and ensuring Survival, Protection and Development of women and children through rights based approach.

The Eleventh Five Plan (2007-2012) says it is about to change all that. The document reads; “An important divide which compels gender special focused efforts will be made to purgesociety of this malaise by creating an enabling environment for women to become economically, politically and socially empowered.

The Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017) has identified inclusiveness issues an integral part to achieving faster but sustainable growth as well as has given recommendations, suggestions and strategies for quality improvement in higher education.

Educational Policies

Gender concerns in education have been reflected in its policies. A landmark initiative was undertaken with the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and its revised POA 1992 as well as the National Policy on Empowerment of Women 2001, all these focuses on promoting gender sensitive curriculum for addressing gender discrimination at all levels of education. The new draft of National Policy on Education 2015, lays emphasizes on “Encourage, Educate and Employ”, all irrespective of their socio-economic background. The National curriculum frameworks of 1975, 1988, 2000 and 2005 also have made specific efforts to focus attention on gender disparities in education. The other national initiative to promote basic education, with a focus on greater participation of girls and women is

Operation Blackboard (1987) that focused on construction of school buildings and appointment of a second teacher in single teacher schools.

All the above stated five year plans and educational policies of education have made interventions for improving gender inequalities in education. There are combination of approaches, such as; constructing more schools, improving school management and administration, increasing accountability and bringing curriculum reform. Reforms in access is far less successful and there is hardly any attempt made to reduce gender inequality. It is imperative to formulate an integrated policy and strategy to address economic, social, and political empowerment of women, especially from the disadvantaged groups and communities that can enable them to break out of existing stereotypes.

Last Word

Since independence, the Indian Government has been trying to improve the situation of girls. But government fails to realize that the policies with respect to the education of girls cannot be seen in isolation, instead, policies must be seen in a larger perspective with larger inclusivity and in totality. In India the problem of generality is proving to be the biggest curse, which follows a single model of education, whereas the country has diverse socio-economic issues. The 29 states in India have 29 cultures, with every state being a distinct world in itself. What India need is multiple policies with multiple implementations, especially with respect to policies for the education of girls. Unfortunately there are few signals of a serious effort to implement this vision or to have a holistic planning process. The Indian

government has to rethink the overall gender justice perspectives and policies that are currently in place.

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