

NEP - 2020 and Women Education in Odisha: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract: *The Goal 4 of the 2030 global Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG4), adopted by India in 2015 targets to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. On the other hand, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) envisages an inclusive and structural change in the educational system. It focuses on 'Equitable and Inclusive Education' which reverberates the idea that no child should be left behind. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisages equitable and inclusive education for all, with special focus on children and youth, especially girls, from socially and economically disadvantaged groups. The policy's focus is important because despite effort to educate women, the dropout rate for girls is still high after secondary education. The enrolment ratio too dips at the secondary and higher secondary levels. Among many reasons, the onset of menstruation and the lack of availability of hygienic toilets are responsible for girls leaving school without completing education. The NEP 2020 intends to meet this challenge through its Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF). The NEP states that the "Gender Inclusion 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.). The fund will be used to provide quality education to all students. Hopefully, it will also be used to ensure facilities secured and hygienic toilets would definitely be a part of GIF's infrastructural checklist. Besides toilets, hostel facilities for girl students have been recommended by NEP. This would be welcome in those areas where students have to travel long distances to reach school. After 34 years, there is a change in the education policy in India with the introduction of the New Education Policy 2020 (NEP). This new policy aims at universalization of education in India with 100% gross enrolment ratio by 2030 for school education and 50% by 2035 for higher education. The first such move as the formation of a Gender Inclusion Fund toward equitable education for girls who are underprivileged and creating Special Education Zones is included in the provision. Within the goal, it also intends to improve women leadership capacity through positive civil dialogues with women leaders involved in the education system. If implemented, this will bring a record participation rate in higher education, decrease gender gaps at all levels and ensure the practice of gender equity and inclusion in society. In this study, an attempt has been made to study the New Education Policy 2020 on women education, its provisions, implications and challenges with special reference to Odisha.*

Keywords: NEP - 2020, Women Education

1. Introduction

The National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 recognizes 'Education' as the major tools that can help liberate the country from backwardness and lead it onwards to progressive developed nation. Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. Also, National Education System will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It called for special emphasis on the removal of disparities and to equalize educational opportunities for women. "Free and Compulsory Education for All" was initiated. The Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh Five Year Plans (1997 - 2002) focused on free education for girls in elementary to the higher level and to provide free vocational and professional training for girls, free school dress, books, scholarships to reinforce girl's education, but the implementation aspect is yet to be realized in Practice. After 34 years, there is a change in the education policy in India with the introduction of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 designed by a committee chaired by Scientist K. Kasturirangan or better known as Kasturirangan Committee. The new policy stresses on holistic, flexible and multidisciplinary development of learners focused on acquiring key 21st century skill and reduction in curricula content built on the foundational pillars of access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability which indeed is a

long awaited requirement. This new policy aims at universalization of education in India with 100% gross enrolment ratio of girls by 2030 for school education and 50% by 2035 for higher education. The NEP 2020 aims at making 'India a global knowledge superpower'. The policy prescribed to approach gender as a cross-cutting priority to achieve gender equality in education with the partnership of states and local community organizations. It also proposes various steps to increase access of women into schools, which includes creating special education zones, gender inclusion fund toward equitable education for girls who are underprivileged, the targeted scholarships, and formula based and discretion funding of gender inclusionary projects in school levels. Within the goal, it also intends to improve women leadership capacity through positive civil dialogues with women leading institutions, including principals, teachers, wardens, physical instructors and other staffs.

The policy hopes to locate specific social causes such as gender stereotyping and customs and beliefs that have perpetuated the unequal treatment meted out to girls, including their education. It is hoped that issues specific to girl students and the other marginalised genders do not get diluted after having been co-opted within SEDGs. The policy has underlined the necessity for teachers and facilitators like anganwadi workers to undergo proper

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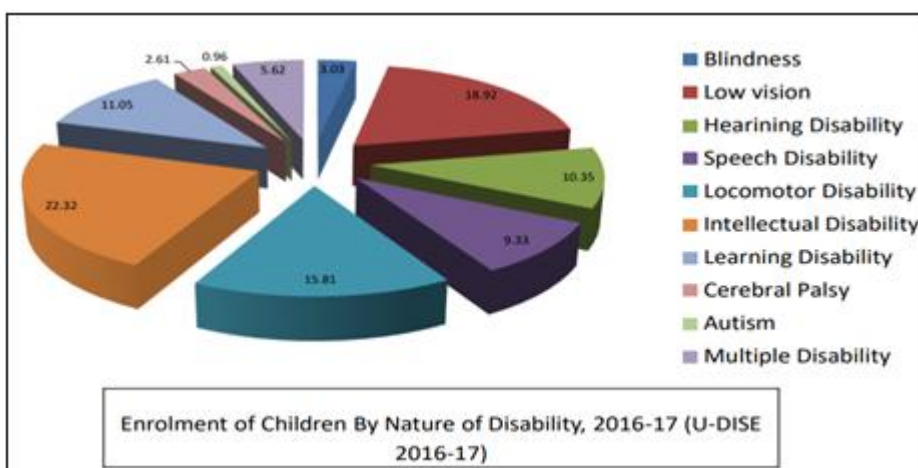
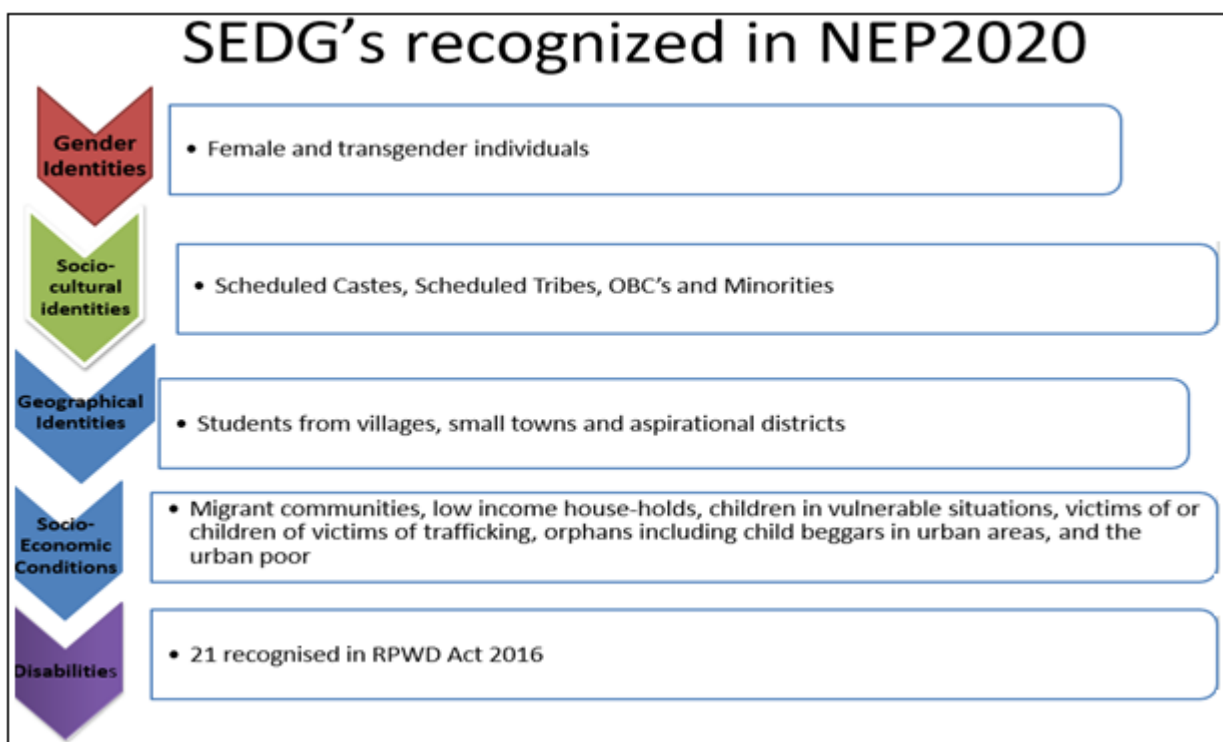
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training to counsel the families of girl students. This inclusion of the family for counseling is significant as the gap between an educated girl child and her uneducated family leads to a different set of problems. NEP 2020 aims to address the issue of gender inequity in recruitment of teachers in rural areas. The policy hopes to adopt new methods that will ensure that merit and qualifications are taken into consideration and that women teachers are provided appropriate forums for recruitment. It is a fact that sound teacher training is imperative for quality education. A definite way forward for girl students would be the skill enhancement courses that NEP foregrounds.

Economic empowerment of women through skilling in educational institutions will surely be progressive and attract

girl students to educational institutions as well as, hopefully, change the way that traditionally families distinguish between male/female education, seeing the former as a more rewarding proposition. The NEP 2020 will focus on the safety and security of school - going girls both inside and outside the campus. The schools have to ensure an environment without harassment, discrimination, and domination against women to go for regular accreditation by the statutory bodies. According to the survey, the countrywide female literacy rate in India is 70.3 percent, while the male literacy rate is predicted to be 84.7 percent. According to the NSO, India's average literacy rate is 77.7 percent. women's education is vital to the overall growth of the country.



NEP 2020 provides for setting up a Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF) to build the nation's capacity to provide equitable quality education for all girls as well as transgender students. While the policy does lay emphasis on gender sensitisation, what needs more attention is the curriculum. The component of sex education needs to be carefully added and be made a

mandatory part of the teaching - learning process. This should include instruction on menstrual health and hygiene.

Another important aspect that should be included as compulsory education is legal literacy. The girl student must be aware of her legal rights. Framers of curriculum under

NEP 2020 must ensure that these two essential domains are properly factored into the curriculum and not done as tokenism with mere cosmetic value. Furthermore, female health should be of prime importance and care should be taken that the right kind of nutrition is provided to female students; the mid day meal, or even the breakfast as mentioned in NEP, in themselves good initiatives of the government, are not enough to battle malnourishment faced by female students.

Status of Women Education in Odisha:

Data from the fourth round of the National Family Health Survey 2015 - 16 (NFHS - 4) show that education of girls and women continues to be neglected in rural areas of Odisha. District Fact Sheets from NFHS - 4 show that every second female aged 6 and above in rural areas of six districts of south Odisha had not attended school. Further, less than one fifth of women in the 15 - 49 age groups in rural areas of 13 districts of Odisha had completed 10 years of schooling. These badly - performing districts are geographically concentrated in the south and have a sizable proportion of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the population.

National Family Health Survey (NFHS) is a household based large scale sample survey which collects data related to health and family welfare. NFHS also collects information on educational attainment of members of sample households. For the first time NFHS - 4, which was conducted in 2015 - 16, has published district - level data.

In rural Odisha, the percentage of females aged 6 and above who ever attended school was 65 per cent. There was wide variation across districts: the proportion of females who ever attended school ranged from 39 per cent in Rayagada district to 79 per cent in Jagatsingpur district. There are 13 districts, out of 30, with performance below the State average. In six districts, namely, Rayagada, Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangapur, Kalahandi and Gajapati, less than 50 per cent of females in rural areas had attended school. Except for Gajapati all five districts are part of the KBK region (the undivided districts of Koraput, Balangir, and Kalahandi) which is one of the most backward regions of India. The combined Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population of Gajapati district constituted two thirds of the district's rural population. The combined Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population in the rural area of these six districts constituted 67 per cent of the total rural population of these districts. In other words, all the six districts are Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe majority districts.

Table 1: Districts with fifty or less percentage of females aged 6 and above who ever attended school, Odisha, rural areas, 2015 - 16 in per cent

District	Percentage of female aged 6 and above who ever attended school
Gajapati	50
Kalahandi	49
Nabarangapur	46
Malkangiri	42
Koraput	42
Rayagada	39

(Source: District Fact Sheets, NFHS - 4, available at <http://rchiips.org/NFHS/OR.shtml>)

Another indicator of educational attainment is years of schooling completed. In rural Odisha only 23 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 had completed 10 years of schooling. The proportion ranged from 8 per cent in Nabarangapur to 47 per cent in Jharsuguda. There were 13 districts in which the percentage of women in rural areas with at least 10 years of schooling was 20 or less (Table 2). All six districts mentioned earlier also feature here. Seven districts namely, Nabarangapur, Rayagada, Koraput, Kalahandi, Nuapada, and Balangir are part of the KBK region. The combined Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population constituted 51 per cent of the rural population of the 13 districts. In Malkangiri, Rayagada, Nabarangapur, and Koraput more than 70 per cent of the rural population belonged to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities.

Table 2: Districts with 20 or less percentage of women with 10 or more years of schooling in 15 to 49 age group in rural areas, Odisha, 2015 - 16 in per cent

District	Percentage of women in 15 to 19 age group with 10 or more years of schooling
Nayagarh	20
Sambalpur	20
Balangir	19
Nuapada	19
Boudh	18
Kandhamal	17
Kalahandi	16
Gajapati	15
Ganjam	15
Koraput	10
Malkangiri	10
Rayagada	9
Nabarangapur	8

(Source: District Fact Sheets, NFHS - 4, available at <http://rchiips.org/NFHS/OR.shtml>)

It is shocking that after seven decades of planning over half of females in rural areas aged 6 and above had never attended school in six districts of Odisha. Fewer than 20 per cent of women, in rural areas had completed 10 years of schooling in 13 districts.

Committees and Commissions on Women Education:

Following Committees and Commissions have discussed the various issues relating to women's education.

1. University Education Commission - (1948 - 49)
2. Secondary Education Commission (1952 - 53)
3. Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh Committee (1959)
4. Smt Hansa Mehta Committee (1962)
5. M. Bhaktavatsalam Committee (1963) to look into the causes of public support particularly in Rural Areas for girls Education and to enlist public cooperation.
6. Indian Education Commission (1964 - 66)
7. National Policy on Education (1968)
8. Committee on the status of women in India (1974)
9. Challenges of Education (1985)
10. National policy on Education (1986)
11. Programme of Action 1986 and 1992
12. National policy on Education (NEP - 2020)

NEP 2020 on Women Education:

The NEP states that the "Gender Inclusion 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.). The policy further says, "This fund 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". The fund will be used to provide quality education to all students and to ensure facilities, secured and hygienic toilets. Besides toilets, hostel facilities for girl students have been recommended by NEP. 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. The policy also envisages

- Providing bicycles and organizing cycling and walking groups to provide access to school for female students.
- Appointing counsellors and social workers to connect with students and parents to improve attendance and prevent dropout rates among female students to uplift the SEDGs
- Providing quality education to girls
- The Government of India will constitute a "Gender Inclusion Fund" to provide equitable quality education for all girls. The fund will be available to States to implement priorities determined by the Central government critical for assisting female children getting access to education.
- Free boarding facilities will be built for students coming from far flung areas especially for female students for their safety. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas will be strengthened and expanded to increase the participation of quality schools for girls.
- To focus on the safety and security of school going girls both inside and outside campus.
- Enhance gender balance in admissions to HEIs.

Challenges on the recommendations made by NEP 2020:

The National Education Policy 2020 in light with equitable and quality education is the first education policy of the 21st century and aims to address the problems and prospects of our country. However there are many issues and challenges with reference to women education.

- No particular mention of girl child education but it has been brushed under the category of SEDGs (SocioEconomically Disadvantaged Groups) also the policy do not address the issue of gender
- Providing bicycles to every girl child is a farfetched recommendation because of various obvious reasons like geographical barriers and safety reasons
- No mention of awareness of menstrual hygiene for girl child in the school
- Sexual harassment to girl child is one of the most common issue that is happening everyday in schools but there is no mention of measures or steps to be taken to address the issue
- Due to public private privatization there will be a rise in dropout rates among female learners.

Educational challenges faced by women in our society:

Women in our society are still not given equal opportunity as our male counterparts. In most parts of the country,

education of the girl child is limited only till class 10 or 12 because they are considered to work or help out in domestic chores. Education of the girl child is not considered important. The many educational problems faced by women are:

- Women are given multiple roles and so education takes a back seat
- RTE - free and compulsory education - is not followed
- The girl child is denied education because of uneducated parents/family
- Providing bicycle to girl child is not applicable in hilly areas and some schools in rural area are not accessible by transportation
- Dropout rates are higher among female learners because after a certain age they are not allowed to go to school

Suggestive measures for implementation of NEP 2020 with regard to Women Education:

- A gender responsive educational curriculum will reverse gender bias and discrimination.
- Gender disparity in School Curriculum
- Sex education is also missing out in the curriculum which is imperative that every child should be educated about the importance of sex education in schools
- Awareness on the importance of education should be given to parents so that they treat the girl child equally important as the male child
- Providing safety for the girl child should be the top priority in every school so that girls are encouraged to attain school

2. Conclusion

Education brings about knowledge and a reduction in gender bias which functions as a means of improving the status of women within the family and the community. Education is thus the foundation of women empowerment. After 34 years, there is a change in the education policy in India with the introduction of the New Education Policy 2020 (NEP). This new policy aims at universalization of education in India with 100% gross enrolment ratio by 2030 for school education and 50% by 2035 for higher education. The first such move as the formation of a Gender Inclusion Fund toward equitable education for girls who are underprivileged and creating Special Education Zones is included in the provision. NEP 2020 emphasizes upon inculcating Inclusive educational structure and inclusive educational culture in our school education system through infrastructural support and by making corresponding changes in curriculum incorporating materials on human values such as respect for all persons, empathy, tolerance, human rights, gender equality, non - violence, global citizenship, inclusion, and equity. It calls upon the stakeholders to overcome the barriers and remove biases and stereotypes through sensitization programme. The policy aims to promote inclusion, bringing out equity and developing respect for diversity through developing understanding about various cultures, religions, languages, gender identities, etc. among children, teachers and other school functionaries. Implementing of policy will result in empowerment of stakeholders through efficient manner of resourcing and more robust and improved governance and monitoring mechanism

with cooperation and support across schools for the education of children with disabilities and SEDGs.

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