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Girl's Education: Challenges and Impact on the Society

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ABSTRACT:

Education is essential to realizing human potential, creating a fair and just society, ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality education, and advancing national development. Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 goal for Sustainable Development, which our country accepted in 2015, reflects the global education development goal and aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality of education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. NEP 2020 calls for the creation of a Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF) to strengthen the country's capacity to offer all girls fair, high-quality education. However, India faces significant challenges in educating girls and in helping them grow socially and economically. Despite NEP's egalitarian model for schooling, the majority of girls are compelled to marry young, which leads to a number of concerns, including health problems, personality development, women's empowerment, and more. Boys from low-income and illiterate homes are typically given preference when it comes to making educational investments. In certain areas, schools fail to provide for females' requirements in terms of cleanliness, hygiene, and safety. This paper examines how the New Education Policy 2020 addresses girls' education and how difficult it is to meet SDG4's objectives.

Keywords: Girls Education, National Education Policy, SDG4, Personality

1. Introduction:

Our country's New Education Policy 2020 has made it extremely difficult to provide girls with a just education, which has become a major barrier to value-based education. This essay focuses on the difficulties in giving girls a high-quality education since it helps them grow as individuals and advance both socially and economically. In this case, efforts must be made to give girl children an equal education while ignoring the issue of child marriage. Since the National Education Policy (NEP) is the main topic of this essay, it is crucial to comprehend both the NEP concept and the importance of education in a person's life. The central government launched the National Education Policy on July 29, 2020, with an emphasis on innovation and research. It describes the goals of India's new educational system. A structured framework for basic education in both rural and urban areas is another goal of this approach. By 2030, the initiative seeks to completely change India's educational system. The following are some advantages of NEP:

- Comprehensive Development
- Adaptability and Multidisciplinary
- Technology Integration
- Research and Innovation
- Vocational Education and Skill Development
- Inclusive Education
- Exposure to the world

Given this context, it is critical to comprehend the National Education Policy's vision for the education of girls.

2. The National Education Policy's Vision Regarding Girls' Education

The primary goal of the National Education Policy is to make our nation a powerhouse in the field of education by delivering high-quality education and helping to develop the nation, particularly into a lively, equitable, and knowledge-oriented nation. In order to make students aware of their obligations to the country, the policy also focuses on the pedagogy and curriculum of all educational institutions nationwide in order to instil in them a sense of respect for Fundamental Duties and Constitutional Values. Additionally, this policy aims to implant in the kid's intellect, values, skills, and information. Additionally, it makes an effort to prioritize global well-being, sustainable development, and human rights. The educational levels are explained in Figure

1, which also compares the new pedagogical and curriculum framework with the old academic structure. It seeks to make education entertaining, pleasurable, integrated, and holistic. In order to better meet the requirements and interests of students at various developmental stages—which correspond to the age groups of 3–8, 8–11, 11–14, and 14–18 years, respectively—the curriculum and pedagogical framework of school instruction will be rearranged.



Figure 1. Present Scenario of Female Education

The foundational stage (three years of Anganwadi/pre-school plus two years of primary school in Grades 1-2; both together covering ages 3-8), preparatory stage (Grades 3-5, covering ages 8-11), middle stage (Grades 6-8, covering ages 11-14), and secondary stage (Grades 9-12 in two phases: 9 and 10 in the first, and 11 and 12 in the second, covering ages 14-18)¹.

Five years of adaptable, multilevel, play/activity-based learning and curriculum pedagogy will make up the Foundational Stage. In order to establish a strong foundation in a variety of subjects, including reading, writing, speaking, physical education, art, languages, science, and mathematics, the Preparatory Stage will consist of three years of instruction that builds on the play, discovery, and activity-based pedagogical and curricular style of the Foundational Stage. It will also start incorporating some light textbooks and elements of more formal but interactive classroom learning. Building on the pedagogical and curricular approach of the Preparatory Stage, the Middle Stage will consist of three years of education. Subject teachers will be introduced to help students learn and discuss the more abstract concepts in the sciences, mathematics, arts, social sciences, and humanities². Despite the addition of more specialized subjects and subject teachers, experiential learning within each subject as well as investigations of relationships between various disciplines will be promoted and reinforced². Building on the subject-oriented pedagogical and curricular style of the Middle Stage, the Secondary Stage will consist of four years of multidisciplinary study with increased depth, critical thinking, attention to life goals, flexibility, and subject choice for students. Students would specifically still have the choice to leave after Grade 10 and return in the following phase to study vocational or any other courses offered in Grades 11–12, including at a more specialized school if they so choose³.

The aforementioned phases are solely curricular and pedagogical, intended to maximize student learning based on children's cognitive development. They will guide the creation of national and state curricula and teaching-learning strategies at each stage, but concurrent modifications to physical infrastructure won't be necessary⁴.

3. The Current State of Women's Education

When compared to men, women have a significantly low literacy rate. Because of the patriarchal structure that rules Indian society, women have less rights and a lower position than men. As seen by the 2011 census, which shows that women's literacy rates are 65.46% compared to men's 82.14%, gender inequality in education is reinforced. Indian women's literacy rates are considerably lower than the 74.04% national average, according to census data. Additionally, research indicates that the jobless rate for young women in the 15–24 age range is 11.5%, while it is 9.8% for young men in the same age range. (Source: www.census.gov.in, Census 2021)

The following factors contribute to low literacy among females:

- Approximately 65 out of 100 girls drop out of school.
- Families expect women and girls to take care of the home rather than pursue an education.
- Due to the girls' involvement in home chores, they have less time to concentrate on their education.
- Many schools engage in gender bias by prohibiting girls from pursuing their preferred topics.

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- Parents would rather spend money on their daughters' education than on their marriage.
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4. Why Is Education Important for Girls?

Learning is an eye-opening experience. It is the process of obtaining or providing systematic education, particularly in a university or school. For a human being, education is crucial. Because education is what sets humans apart from animals. The most effective weapon is education. We have the power to transform the world via education. The level of education of a nation's citizens determines that nation's prosperity^{5,6}. Males cannot be the only ones with education. It should also be distributed equally to women. The following are only a few of the numerous arguments supporting the value of education for women:

Lower newborn death: When a girl has an education, the newborn death rate decreases. A female who has an education will be aware of all the precautions that need be taken to ensure the safety and well-being of youngsters.

Decrease Maternal Mortality: If a girl is educated, she will understand that marriage should be delayed and that being married too young might result in several health problems.

Boost Socio-Economic Growth: A girl's employability will be high if she has a good education. This will result in a high per capita income, which boosts the nation's economy. A girl's education will benefit society's social development because it empowers women.

Decrease Child Marriage: Due to her lack of education and understanding of population growth, girls who marry young often have more children. Education will undoubtedly delay the girl's marriageable age, which will lower the number of child marriages.

Reduce Population increase: A girl's education helps to slow down population increase. An educated girl is more likely to have fewer children because education increases a nation's population.

Reduce Malnutrition: If the female has a higher level of education, she will be aware of the nutrient-dense foods that should be fed to kids to prevent malnutrition-related deaths. As a result, there are fewer instances of childhood malnutrition.

Boost Political Process Involvement: A girl who has an education will be more inclined to take part in the nation's political process. She enjoys participating in national politics and will be able to represent the nation through her studies.

Reduce Domestic and Sexual abuse: If the girls have an education, they will be able to fight legally if they are threatened with domestic or sexual abuse and will be aware of the laws that prohibit violence against women.

5. Role of Illiteracy in Girl's Education

One of the main causes of child marriage is illiteracy. Child marriage will result from parents that are illiterate. On the other hand, illiteracy among girls also contributes to child marriage since they are unaware of the detrimental effects of child marriage, the health problems they encounter, and the laws and policies that assist the prevention of child marriages. The key factor in preventing child marriage is education. The following are some effects of illiteracy that result in girl's education:

Deterioration in the Girls' Personality Development: Girls who marry young are unable to acquire the information and skills necessary for their age group, and as a result, their personalities will degrade. When it comes to developing their personalities in all areas, they are unable to keep up with their educated peers.

The parents' superstitious beliefs: Young girls become victims of child marriage because one of the main causes of child marriage is parental illiteracy. Compared to males, parents perceive girls as a burden to the family and find it extremely difficult to care for them.

Health disorders: Girls who marry young are not educated enough to recognize the health dangers of early marriage, which might result in the emergence of certain diseases. Their lack of literacy makes it difficult for them to understand how child marriage affects maternal mortality and the health problems associated with having a child at a young age. Most babies born to young girls are underweight and premature⁷.

School Dropout Rates: As females are compelled to marry at a very young age, school dropout rates will rise. Although the Education Department has also been fighting against underage marriages, a survey by the Human and Natural Resources Development Society (HANDS), a non-profit organization in the Anantapur district, indicates that many teachers have not been investigating the reasons behind their students' dropouts. Approximately ten females from such school are said to have been married off. In another case, when her marriage was resolved, a student in the tenth grade at a different school ceased going to class for several months. This event was discovered after representatives from the Education Department visited the school recently; the school administration did not conduct any investigations.

Impedes the nation's economic growth: Young girls who married at a young age lack education and acquire skills that would help them find employment. The nation's economic growth will be impacted by their unemployment since the country's per capita income will be extremely low and the dependency ratio will rise.

Lack of Knowledge of Legislative Acts: A number of laws, including the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Amendment Bill of 2021, and others, work to prohibit child marriages. The lack of literacy among girls is the cause of this. They will be used as scapegoats for child marriage since they lack education and are unable to question their rights.

The following are some conclusions that demonstrate how girls' lack of literacy contributes to underage marriage:

Many girls in rural cities are being forced to marry before reaching 18 because to poverty, illiteracy, and legal ignorance. A non-profit group in city called the Human and Natural Resources Development Society (HANDS) examined certain child weddings and discovered that parents' lack of literacy was compelling them to marry off their daughters when they reached puberty. According to the report, the majority of parents were ignorant of the legal ramifications of child marriages. 74% of child brides were found to be between the ages of 15 and 17. Unfortunately, despite the Education Department's efforts to prevent underage marriages, many teachers have not been investigating the causes behind their pupils' dropouts⁸.

With the exception of Meghalaya and Sikkim state, Goa and Andaman, and 103 Nicobar Union Territories, female literacy has been substantially lower than male literacy in rural areas of 15 states and 3 Union Territories. This could be due to a number of parents not allowing their female children to attend school, as well as child marriage of girls. Another explanation could be that the majority of people live in poverty and are unaware that children should receive free education as required by law. As a result, there is a significant educational disparity between men and women⁹. India's female literacy rate was 54.16% in the 2001 census and 65.46% in the 2011 census. Despite an 11.3% growth from 2001 to 2011, this was 3.6% less than the 1991–2001 period. Because it impacts women's empowerment, this ten-year dropping trend raises concerns for sustainable development^{9,10}.

6. Obstacles in the Education of Girls

It is common knowledge that education is crucial to building a solid foundation for each and every person in the twenty-first century. Every person's life is transformed, both personally and professionally. However, gender discrimination, early marriage, poverty, and other obstacles make it extremely difficult for girls in India to receive an education. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP), which primarily focuses on girls' education, may offer a solution to this issue. With a focus on children and youth, particularly girls from socially and economically disadvantaged groups, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims for inclusive and equitable education for all. The strategy, which aims to provide free and compulsory education to all children until they reach the age of eighteen, is crucial for educating women. The following are some of the significant provisions that the National Education Policy instilled on the education of girls:

- Introducing gender-sensitive education
- Increasing awareness of the value of education for girls
- Offering scholarships
- Giving girls financial support
- Improving school infrastructure, particularly in remote regions.

According to the Gender Gap Report 2023, India is ranked 127 out of 146 countries in terms of gender parity, an improvement from 135 last year. However, this is not a good rank for a country like India who has invested a huge amount for girl's education and also for their welfare. In 2023, the dropout rate for girls at the secondary level is 12.3%, while the dropout rate for boys is 3%. The dropout rate for girls in India is higher than the dropout rate for boys, considering the fact that the number of girls enrolled in secondary school in India is much lower than the number of boys enrolled¹¹.

The following two reasons early marriage and poverty are the causes of rising dropout rates among girls. Gender discrimination, a lack of access to high-quality education, superstitious family beliefs, transportation issues in remote areas, a lack of safety, and more are all examples¹². The previously listed circumstances discourage the girls from going to school. It's critical to educate females and even their parents about this. Even while gender discrimination is less common in urban areas than in rural ones, girls nonetheless worry about their safety. Ongoing efforts are required in this area to improve India's educational system. SDG 4 in India aims to provide everyone with opportunity for high-quality education and lifelong learning¹³. Additionally, it seeks to educate a sizable populace. In 2015, India ratified the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Additionally, it focuses on development with a primary emphasis on economic growth and the elimination of poverty¹⁴. The number of child marriages will drastically change after poverty is eliminated. Girls will be motivated to pursue education and enhance their standard of living. In all government policies, ending child marriage ought to be the first focus¹⁵.

7. Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 offers optimism for resolving the educational issues facing today's society. Encouraging females to believe in themselves and their potential for education is crucial. They should be given role models so they may become literate, which will help them accomplish their objectives and advance their own abilities. They should be informed that in order for women to live successful lives, they must be financially independent. Along with the successful implementation of NEP, these measures should be rigidly enforced. If not, India will never be able to achieve gender equality. The key to success in life is education, and every girl should receive an education of the highest calibre. Only then can a just and equitable society be established.

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