

Policies and programmes on gender equality through education in India" : A critical perspective

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Abstract: Indian philosophy holds that the word "PRAKRITI," which means "the Nature" or "The Creator," is a feminine one. Women enjoyed a greater standing from the Vedic era onward, as evidenced by our texts. However, women's status was actually unsatisfactory from medieval to modern India, especially during the British era. The themes of equality and accessibility have dominated schooling across time. Both males and females who have an education see gains in their incomes later on, and it also creates chances and choices for both boys and girls. Encouraging gender parity in educational establishments guarantees that people of all ages may reap the rewards of knowledge acquisition. The gender gap persists in India despite rapid economic growth and a plethora of government initiatives to promote gender equality. In addition to providing a critical analysis of Indian laws and programs pertaining to gender equality via education, this assignment aims to propose some significant steps that might further advance gender equality in the country.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Policies, Programmes, Education, India

INTRODUCTION:

Gender equality in India is the most desired state of form, which our Nation is craving to have for since long. Gender equality is no more a moral pressure or social issue but also a social, economic challenge. Gender Equality leads to human development and the overall development of the Nation. India being a Nation full of achievements, still lacks few appreciations in the case of Gender Equality in India.

In India, discriminatory attitudes towards both the genders have existed for generations and exert influence on both lives. Although the Indian constitution has granted both men and women equal rights, gender disparities continue to live and rule as of date.

Research elsewhere reveals gender discrimination mostly in favour of men in many realms, including the workplace. Discrimination between men and women affects many aspects of women's lives, from career development and progress to mental health disorders. While Indian laws on rape, dowry, and adultery have women's safety at heart, many highly discriminatory practices are still occurring at an alarming rate.

Gender equality and women empowerment are two sides of the same coin. Both have multiple dimensions that together yield a wide variety of indicators. It means replacing patriarchy with parity. From the socio-economic

points of view in 21st century, the term gender equality gets a new shape as National Population Policy, 2000 has empowered women in health and nutrition.

OBJECTIVES:

- a) To study the concept of gender, gender equality and its relevance in India.
- b) To give a critical review of policies and programmes on gender equality through education in India.
- c) To suggest some measures to promote gender equality in India.

DISCUSSION:

About Gender Equality -

To better understand the term Gender Equality in India, we shall first emphasize various terms associated with it:

Gender -

Gender is the term that mainly refers to the economic, social, and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. In most communities, being a male or a female is not merely a matter of different biological or physical characteristics-males and females face different expectations about how they should dress up, behave, or work.

Gender Equality -

Gender equality is an often-used term but it is occasionally defined. Translating the concept of gender equality in education into a concrete background will assist the education programmers to perform the functions of planning, managing, and evaluating the education projects.

Gender Equality in India -

"Gender equality" in India is the desired state of equal ease of access to ample resources & opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making, and valuing different behaviours, aspirations, and needs equally, regardless of gender. Gender equality in India is a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous & sustainable world.

CRITICAL REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES ON GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH EDUCATION IN INDIA:

1. National Policy on Education, 1968 -

The policy was first implemented in 1968 and has been updated several times since then. It emphasizes the importance of equal opportunities for all students, regardless of gender, caste, religion, or other factors. It also emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive curriculum and teacher training.

Critical Review:**a)Limited Focus on Gender Equality -**

The policy recognized the importance of providing education to girls, but it did not have a specific focus on promoting gender equality in education.

b)Inadequate Implementation -

Even though the policy recognized the need for providing equal educational opportunities to girls, it did not provide any specific measures for ensuring the implementation of this goal.

c)Gender Bias in Curriculum and Textbooks -

The policy did not provide any specific measures to ensure that the curriculum and textbooks were free from gender bias.

In conclusion, the policy did not adequately address social and cultural barriers, lacked resources, and did not establish a monitoring and evaluation system to measure progress.

Additionally, it did not address gender bias in the curriculum and textbooks.

2.The National Policy on Education 1986 -

It emphasizes on the need to equalize educational opportunities by removing disparities that exist in society. Under the section 'Education for Women's Equality' the policy observes that "education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of woman. The National

Education system will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women". This will be done through curricula, teacher training and active participation of the educational institutions. It also promotes women's studies and also encourages educational institutions to initiate programmes for women's development.

Critical Review:**a)Limited Focus on Gender Equality -**

It did not explicitly address the issue of gender equality in education. While the policy recognized the importance of providing education to girls, it did not have a specific focus on promoting gender equality in education.

b)Inadequate Implementation -

It did not provide any specific measures for ensuring the implementation of this goal. As a result, the policy failed to achieve its objective of promoting gender equality in education.

c)Absence of Monitoring and Evaluation -

It did not establish a robust monitoring and evaluation system for measuring the progress of gender equality in education.

3. The National Education Policy, 2019 -

The National Education Policy of India released in 2019 rightly addresses some foundational issues in Indian education system regarding gender. The lessons from Indian experience can shed light in the challenges and required solutions for educational attainment under 4th Sustainable development goal. The most important of them is Access. The report proposes various steps to increase access of women into schools. The report also suggests meals scheme in schools which will incentivize women of poor households to access schools.

Critical Review:

Trying to increase access without addressing mobility is like dancing without the help of limbs. The report makes a passing mention of the cycle distribution scheme of Bihar which increased the school attendance rates among girl children. Mobility of women free from harassment and safe from other disturbances is a key in attaining the access rates of women.

4. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 -

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was adopted in the year 2001 for the advancement, development, and empowerment of women. Major objectives of this policy are:

- Creation of an environment that fosters the overall development of women and enables them to achieve their full potential.
- De-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women on an equal basis with men in all spheres.
- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.

Critical Review:

a)Limited Focus on Grassroots Empowerment -

It did not address the challenges faced by marginalized women, such as Dalit women, tribal women, and women from economically weaker sections.

b)Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation -

It did not establish a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism to measure the progress of gender equality. As a result, it was difficult to assess the effectiveness of the policy in achieving its objectives.

c)Limited Attention to Intersectionality -

It did not adequately address the intersectionality of gender with other social identities, such as caste, religion, and sexuality. It did not propose measures to address the unique challenges faced by women belonging to marginalized communities.

5. Women Vocational Training Programme -

The Women Vocational Training Programme under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship was launched in 1997 to mainstream women into economic activities by giving vocational training. This programme was formulated with the assistance of the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The Programme offers:

- Industrial skill training under the Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS)
- Instructor skill training under Craft Instructors Training Scheme (CITS)
- Demand-driven short-term courses
- Special programs for training the instructors of ITIs
- Tailor-made courses as per industry's demand

Critical Review:

a)Lack of Diversity -

The program does not adequately cater to the diverse needs and aspirations of women from different backgrounds, including those from marginalized communities.

b)Limited Access -

The program's reach is limited to certain geographic areas, and women from rural and remote areas may not have access to the training facilities.

c)Low Wages -

Even after completing the vocational training program, women often face discrimination in the workplace and are paid lower wages than men for the same work.

6. GATI (Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions) -

GATI is an initiative of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) that aims to promote gender equality in science and technology. It is an innovative project launched by the DST and is one of the three initiatives that was announced by the Hon'ble President of India on 28th of February, 2020, National Science Day. GATI aims to nudge higher educational institutions towards supporting diversity, inclusion, and the full spectrum of their success and advancement.

Critical Review:

a)Limited Focus on Grassroots Empowerment -

This programme under discussion does not address the challenges faced by marginalized women, such as Dalit women, tribal women, and women from economically weaker sections.

b)Insufficient Resource Allocation -

The program does not allocate sufficient resources for the implementation of its objectives.

c)Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation -

The program does not establish a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism to measure the progress of gender equality.

From undergoing discussions, it may be conclusion it has limited focus on grassroots empowerment, insufficient resource allocation, lack of monitoring and evaluation, limited focus on changing attitudes and behaviours, and limited focus on intersectionality.

7. Mudaliar Commission (1952) -

Mudaliar commission was framed under chairmanship of Dr. A. LakshmanswamyMudaliar and it is the first commission to review the secondary education. Recommendations of this commission on women education are:

- Girls and boys should get same education.
- Home science should be introduced where girls' study.
- State Govt. should set up girls' school according to necessity.
- Art and music should be introduced in the curriculum of girls.
- To achieve new aims of education, changes in the methods of teaching were suggested.

Critical Review:**a)Limited Representation -**

It mainly comprised men and did not include sufficient representation from women from marginalized communities, such as Dalit women, Adivasi women, and women from economically weaker sections.

b)Lack of Implementation -

Many of these recommendations were not effectively implemented. As a result, the impact of the Commission's recommendations on gender equality was limited.

c)Limited Role of Women's Movements -

The Commission did not give enough recognition to the role of women's movements and organizations in promoting gender equality.

So, the Commission had limited representation, scope, lack of implementation, and limited recognition of the role of women's movements in promoting gender equality.

8. National Committee for Women Education (1958) -

This committee was setup by Govt. of India under the leadership of SrimantiDurgabaiDesmukh for suggestion regarding the progress of women education. Recommendations of this committee are:+

- Women education should be considered as the special issue for a long time.
- In central administration and in each state there should be a joint Director specially for women education.
- Teachers in the girls' school should be lady teachers only.
- Curriculum for boys and girls should be same at primary level but that should be different in secondary stage.
- Separate arrangement of technical and adult education for women should be made.

Critical Review:**a)Lack of Attention to Marginalized Women -**

The Committee did not adequately address the challenges faced by women from marginalized communities, such as Dalit women, Adivasi women, and women from economically weaker sections.

b)Lack of Implementation -

While the Committee made several recommendations to improve women's education, many of these recommendations were not effectively implemented.

Limited Role of Women's Organizations -

It did not adequately consult with women's organizations and did not incorporate their inputs and recommendations.

9. Kothari Commission (1964-66) -

On the basis of recommendations of above committees Govt. took several steps through which women education had moved forward a lot. But still it was not up to the mark. In this situation Kothari commission was formed under the chairmanship of Dr. Daulat Singh Kothari. **Recommendations of this commission were:**

- There should not be any difference in curriculum between boys and girls. Home science will be an additional subject for girls and it should not be mandatory for them.
- Provision for music and art education should be increased for them. Women should be encouraged to learn science and mathematics.

Critical Review:

a) Inadequate attention to gender -

The report does not explicitly mention gender as a factor in educational access, quality, or outcomes.

b) Limited analysis of gender issues -

The report does not consider the specific challenges faced by girls and women in accessing and completing education.

c) Stereotyping of gender roles -

The report reinforces stereotypical gender roles and expectations, for example, by suggesting that women should focus on home-making and child-rearing, while men should pursue careers outside the home.

10. The National Knowledge Commission (2007) -

This commission focussed on access to knowledge, knowledge concepts and creation of new knowledge. Under this, Universities are making sincere efforts in the direction of providing facilities and necessary provisions to the women students.

Critical Review:

a) Lack of attention to gender issues -

The NKC report does not explicitly recognize the gender gap in education and the need for gender-sensitive policies and programs.

b) Inadequate gender analysis -

The report does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the gender-based challenges faced by women in accessing and participating in knowledge-related activities.

c) Reinforcement of gender stereotypes -

The report reinforces gender stereotypes and biases by portraying women as less capable and less interested in pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

11. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) -

The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) launched in 2003 is implemented in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBB) and addresses the needs of girls who are 'in' and 'out' of school. The NPEGEL emphasizes the responsibility of teachers to recognize such girls and pay special attention to bring them out of their state of vulnerability and prevent them from dropping out.

Critical Review:**a) Inadequate focus on marginalized women -**

The policy focuses primarily on mainstream women and does not adequately address the specific challenges faced by marginalized groups, such as women from lower castes, indigenous women, and women with disabilities.

b) Lack of effective implementation mechanisms -

There is no system of monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the policy is being implemented effectively.

Lack of emphasis on legal reforms -

It does not address the need for legal reforms to address issues such as gender-based violence, discriminatory laws, and unequal access to property and inheritance rights.

12. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme -

The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVS) are residential upper primary schools for girls from Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Muslim communities. KGBVs are set up in educationally backward blocks where schools are at great distances and are a challenge to the security of girls and often compel them to discontinue their education.

Critical Review:**a) Insufficient focus on gender-sensitive curriculum -**

The KGBV schools often do not have a gender-sensitive curriculum, which perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces gender-based discrimination.

b) Lack of attention to gender-based violence -

It does not adequately address issues of gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination, which can affect girls' ability to learn and participate in education.

c) Inadequate training for teachers -

Teachers in KGBV schools are often not adequately trained in gender-sensitive teaching practices. This leads to a lack of awareness about the specific needs of girls and perpetuates gender-based stereotypes and biases.

13. MahilaSamakhya Programme -

The MahilaSamakhya (MS) programme was started in 1989 for the education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly those from the socially and economically marginalized groups. The main focus of the programmatic interventions under the MS programme has been on developing capacities of poor women to address gender and social barriers to education.

Critical Review:**a) Inadequate funding -**

The MahilaSamakhya Programme has been hampered by inadequate funding, which has limited its ability to reach more women and have a greater impact.

b) Limited focus on marginalized women -

The program has a limited focus on marginalized women, such as those from lower castes, indigenous communities, and women with disabilities

c) Insufficient attention to gender-based violence -

The program does not adequately address issues of gender-based violence, which can be a significant barrier to women's empowerment.

14. BetiBachaoBetiPadhao (BBBP) -

The BetiBachaoBetiPadhao Scheme focuses on ensuring the protection, survival, and education of the girl child. This Scheme was introduced by the government for addressing the issue of declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR). The overall goal of the scheme is to Celebrate the 'Girl Child & Enable her Education'. The objectives of the Scheme are as follows:

- Preventing gender-biased sex selective elimination
- To ensure survival & protection of the girl child
- To ensure education of the girl child

Critical Review:

a)Lack of effective implementation -

The scheme suffers from a lack of effective implementation. There have been issues with the disbursement of funds, as well as inadequate monitoring and evaluation of the program.

b)Limited focus on gender equality -

There is no emphasis on promoting gender-sensitive education, addressing gender-based violence, or increasing women's participation in decision-making.

Insensitivity to social inequalities -

The scheme does not adequately address social inequalities, such as caste and class, which can impact girls' access to education and their overall empowerment.

It has been criticized for its lack of effective implementation, limited focus on gender equality, insufficient allocation of funds, and lack of attention to women's health.

15. SukanyaSamriddhi Account -

It meant to help families save money for their daughters. It was launched in Jan 2015. This scheme concentrates on helping families financially for their daughters' education and wedding expenses. In accordance with this saving scheme, parents or guardians can open an exclusive account in the name of their daughter with any bank or post office with a minimum amount. Multiple deposits of any value can then be made every year up to 14 years from date of opening a/c. The deposit shall mature after 21 years.

Critical Review:**a) Exclusion of families with only male children -**

The scheme is only available to families with daughters, which can reinforce gender discrimination against male children and perpetuate traditional gender roles and biases.

b) Limited focus on education -

It does not address issues related to gender-based discrimination in education, such as the lack of access to quality education, discrimination in the classroom, or social and cultural norms that limit girls' access to education.

c) Lack of flexibility -

The scheme has limited flexibility in terms of withdrawal options and investment choices, which may not suit the needs and preferences of all families.

16. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana -

It was launched in March 2016 this is a step by the Government of India to keep every household fed and aims at providing free LPG connection to women below poverty line. It gained a lot of attention due to the social campaign and an appeal to the affluent class to give up LPG subsidy in favour of weaker classes.

Critical Review:**a) Limited impact on women's empowerment -**

It does not address broader issues related to women's empowerment, such as access to education, employment, and healthcare, or gender-based violence.

b) Limited focus on gender-sensitive implementation -

It does not have a gender-sensitive implementation framework, which can result in the exclusion of women from decision-making processes, as well as the limited participation of women in the scheme's awareness and outreach programs.

c) Insufficient attention to intersectional issues -

It does not address the unique challenges faced by women from marginalized communities, such as those from lower castes, indigenous communities, or those with disabilities, who may face multiple forms of discrimination based on their gender, caste, ethnicity, or disability status.

It has some limitations like limited impact on women's empowerment, limited access to fuel refills, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation.

17. Mahila E-Haat -

This plan emphasizes on empowering women entrepreneurs, NGOs, self-help groups and small producers. It was introduced in March 2016, this bilingual portal presents an online marketing platform for women all over our country to showcase products manufactured, and the services offered by them to attract customers. A huge leap, it is in line with the 'Digital India' and 'Stand up India' social campaigns to boost the Indian economy.

Critical Review:

a)Limited access to technology and internet -

The platform requires access to technology and the internet, which can limit its reach to women entrepreneurs who do not have access to these resources, particularly those from marginalized communities.

b)Limited focus on intersectional issues -

It does not address the unique challenges faced by women from marginalized communities, such as those from lower castes, indigenous communities, or those with disabilities, who may face multiple forms of discrimination based on their gender, caste, ethnicity, or disability status.

c)Limited government support -

While the platform is a government initiative, it suffers from limited government support, including limited funding and inadequate marketing and outreach efforts.

18. Maternity Benefit Scheme -

This scheme is for the benefit of pregnant and lactating women in India. Previously known as Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana, it was renamed as Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana in 2017 to combat the increasing maternal mortality rate. It presents conditional cash transfer for women of 19 years or above who are expecting or lactating for her first two live children.

Critical Review:

a)Insufficient benefits -

The financial assistance provided under the scheme is limited to a maximum of Rs. 6,000, which may not be sufficient to cover the full cost of medical expenses and nutritional requirements during pregnancy and childbirth.

b)Limited focus on maternal health -

It does not address broader issues related to maternal health, such as access to healthcare, nutrition, and family planning services, which can have long-term impacts on women's health and wellbeing.

c)Limited impact on women's employment -

The scheme does not address the broader issue of maternity benefits and leave for women employees, which can have an impact on their employment status and opportunities.

It has some limitations like limited coverage, insufficient benefits, limited focus on maternal health and on women's employment, limited awareness and outreach efforts.

19. One Stop Centre Scheme -

It meant to offer easy access for women suffering from domestic abuse or violence, and needing support. All around us we witness women struggling from exploitation, torture and violence which needs to be checked. These One Stop Centres (OSC) shall step up for offering immediate response, emergency help, medical support and legal and psychological assistance to affected women and girls even below 18 years of age.

Critical Review:**a)Limited coverage -**

The scheme is limited to providing support and assistance to women who are survivors of violence, which may not address the broader issues related to gender-based violence and discrimination against women.

b)Limited scope of services -

The services provided by the OSCs are limited to medical, legal, and counseling support. While these services are important, they may not address the broader issues related to gender-based violence, such as prevention, community outreach, and awareness-raising efforts.

c)Limited outreach and awareness -

The OSCs suffer from limited outreach and awareness efforts, which can limit their reach to eligible beneficiaries, particularly those in rural areas or those who are illiterate.

It has some limitations like limited coverage, limited scope of services, insufficient resources, limited outreach and awareness efforts, and limited focus on intersectional issues.

20. RashtriyaMahilaKosh (RMK) -

Established in March 1993, RashtriyaMahilaKosh(RMK) is an autonomous body, a national level organization under the aegis of the Ministry of Women and Child Development with the objective of socio-economic empowerment of women. Currently, RMK acts as a facilitating agency wherein it provides loans to NGOs, Intermediary Micro-Financing Organization (IMO), and voluntary organizations which on-lend to Self-Help Groups (SHGS) of women.

Critical Review:

a)Limited outreach -

The RMK suffers from limited outreach and awareness efforts, which can limit its reach to eligible beneficiaries, particularly those in rural areas or those who are illiterate.

b)Insufficient resources -

The RMK may not have sufficient resources, including funding and trained staff, to effectively provide credit and financial assistance to women from marginalized and lowincome groups.

c)Limited focus on intersectional issues -

The RMK may not address the unique challenges faced by women from marginalized communities, such as those from lower castes, indigenous communities, or those with disabilities, who may face multiple forms of discrimination based on their gender, caste, ethnicity, or disability status.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. Women literacy gap must be reduced by ensuring the safety of the women in the schools and through better infrastructure.
2. Increasing women's economic independence through improving financial literacy, access to financial services and assisting women to develop their employment prospects is important.
3. It is important to work on vulnerable populations to enable the realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights.
4. Skill development through life skills education for low-income women equipping them with knowledge, skills and an understanding of their rights and entitlements enabling them to manage their lives better.

5. Efforts should be taken for the prevention of violence and violence response systems through community-based mechanisms and concerted sensitisation mechanisms.
6. The meaningful involvement of women and men affected by gender-based violence in the design and delivery of services and advocacy and policy response through the provision of technical assistance should be encouraged.
7. For reducing gender inequality in India, we should offer high level of education to girls and increase women empowerment.
8. We should also give them opportunity in active politics & social activities so that social integration in Indian society can be made.
9. Government should make policies & strategies regarding stopping the sex identification & abortions.
10. Politicians should frame out policies for increasing social welfare development regarding this issue.

CONCLUSION:

Every child deserves to reach her or his full potential, but gender inequalities in their lives and in the lives of those who care for them hinder this reality. Wherever they live in India girls and boys see gender inequality in their homes and communities every day – in textbooks, in movies, in the media and among the men and women who provide their care and support. Across India gender inequality results in unequal opportunities, and while it impacts on the lives of both genders, statistically it is girls that are the most disadvantaged. With the prevalence of gender discrimination, and social norms and practices, girls become exposed to the possibility of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, child domestic work, poor education and health, sexual abuse, exploitation and violence.

Swami Vivekananda had said, “As a bird cannot fly on one wing, no society can make progress unless it’s women to join men in all activities.” This statement has highly made clear the importance of women in our society.

After adopting many policies and programmes, only girl enrolment rate in India started increasing but Gender equality was never a concern of educational policies still very recent new education policy 2020. It does not have any chapter on gender equality. Government adopted many policies and programs but gender inclusion is one thing and equality is a value. people's mindset must be changed and orthodox activities must be removed from our society. From this forgoing account we come to the conclusion that women are undoubtedly the foundation of the basic unit of society- the family. To inculcate those values of gender equality, it will take many years to start from the very family then society, nation, and the whole world.

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