



NEP 2020: A Catalyst for Women's Empowerment in India

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Abstract: *The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 directly links women's empowerment with inclusive, equitable, and accessible education. NEP 2020 views education as a primary driver for eliminating historical gender disparities and ensuring social equality. Measures such as the Gender Inclusion Fund, safe school infrastructure, and flexible learning methods actively encourage and secure the enrolment of female students. By integrating digital literacy, vocational training, and mainstream formal education, the policy transforms women from passive learners into active leaders in national development. The policy concludes that establishing an egalitarian society is impossible without empowering women through self-reliance, economic participation, and equal rights.*

Keywords: *NEP 2020, women empowerment, Education, Gender Inclusion.*

Introduction: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 plays an important role in women's empowerment, viewing equitable education as a primary tool to eliminate gender disparity and establishes social and economic justice. India's NEP 2020 and women's empowerment are deeply interconnected. A key objective of this policy is to create an egalitarian and inclusive environment for girls by eliminating gender disparities in education, thereby indirectly accelerating women's empowerment in society. One of the boldest initiatives of NEP 2020 is the creation of the 'Gender Inclusion Fund.' The primary aim of this fund is to provide quality education to girls and transgender individuals across the country; it helps reduce school dropout rates among girls and ensures the educational access for women in remote areas, fostering their economic and social self-reliance. The policy incorporates provisions for vocational education and internships starting from Class 6. By acquiring technical and digital skills alongside traditional education, women can access business or employment opportunities locally or from the comfort of their homes. Economic independence is a crucial instrument for women's empowerment. Another goal of NEP 2020 is to design a curriculum that eradicates gender discrimination and social prejudices. It advocates for removing gender-biased notions from textbooks and highlighting the contributions of both men and women equally, which will positively shape the mindset of future generations. Many girls are forced to discontinue their education due to factors such as family responsibilities, marriage, or childbirth. The 'multiple entry and exit' system introduced by NEP 2020 ensures that a woman's previously earned academic credits are not lost if she leaves her studies temporarily or in middle session. She can resume her education at a convenient time, significantly facilitating the completion of higher education. Many families feel unsafe sending girls to distant schools or colleges. Consequently, this policy has emphasize safe transportation, separate sanitation facilities, childcare amenities, and the establishment of hostels for girls. Enhanced safety for women in educational institutions naturally leads to increased participation in higher education and research. This

policy plays a significant role in boosting women's involvement in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). It includes provisions for special fellowships and innovation grants for female researchers, which substantially strengthen their leadership positions.

Role of NEP 2020 in Women's Empowerment:

Completion of Education: The multiple entry and exit options within the new undergraduate framework under NEP 2020 will benefit female students, as statistics show that a significant number of them have historically been unable to complete their education due to various reasons.

Employment: With the implementation of NEP 2020, female students will possess a recognized degree or qualification even if they do not complete the full course of study, thereby enhancing their employment opportunities.

Financial Independence: The academic credits and skill development programs incorporated into NEP 2020 will assist every woman in becoming financially self-reliant.

Gender Equality: It will prioritize gender equality and aims to ensure equitable access to quality education for all students.

Gender Inclusion Fund: It proposes the expansion of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, which provide boarding and lodging facilities for female students throughout their educational journey.

Recognition of Barriers to Women's Education: It acknowledges the specific barriers hindering women's education, particularly at the primary level.

Relevance of this study: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 acts as a significant catalyst for women's empowerment in India by addressing long-standing educational barriers and advocating for gender equality. It facilitates an assessment of how specific provisions—such as the Gender Inclusion Fund—translate from policy into practical action to drive women's empowerment. Provisions for multiple entry points in higher education help prevent students from dropping out due to familial or social pressures. Exposure to technical skills prepares female students for diverse, non-traditional professions. The policy emphasizes safe school environments, secure transportation systems, and gender-sensitive teaching staff. It integrates foundational literacy, vocational training, and digital skills to foster greater female participation in the workforce. Furthermore, it provides a roadmap for policymakers to monitor the progress of socio-economically disadvantaged groups, particularly young women from rural areas.

Objectives of the study: The major objectives of the study are-

- a) To study the educational fields of the NEP 2020 which are related to women and their educational development.
- b) To find out the implemented process of women empowerment in the classroom through NEP 2020.
- c) To find out the socio- economic and other issues confronted by women in India.

Methodology: This study is basically theoretical in nature therefore qualitative research study method is used which includes describing and analysing of the collected materials. The main objective of this research paper is to highlight the women empowerment in India through NEP 2020. The study is based on secondary data collected from available sources such as books, journals article magazines.

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The process of Implementation in the classroom under NEP 2020:

Implementing women's empowerment in the classroom under NEP 2020 means ensuring equal participation for girls through inclusive teaching, eliminating gender bias, and fostering leadership skills.

Teachers can implement women's empowerment in the classroom through the following teaching practices:

- 1) Training to eliminate gender bias: Students should be trained to treat all peers equally and avoid showing bias toward any specific gender.
- 2) Equal opportunities: Both boys and girls must be given equal opportunities to answer questions, lead groups, and use classroom equipment.
- 3) Fair task allocation: Classroom tasks should not be assigned based on traditional gender stereotypes (such as asking only girls to clean up or only boys to move heavy objects).
- 4) Highlighting role models: Stories of famous women—leaders, scientists, artists, and innovators—should be shared during daily lessons.
- 5) Reviewing materials: Textbooks should be examined to ensure they depict men and women sharing domestic and professional responsibilities equally.
- 6) Encouraging expression of views: In subjects like Civics or Language, students should be encouraged to discuss and question unfair social norms to develop a clear understanding of these issues.
- 7) Group work: Students should be assigned group tasks that foster mutual respect for each other's ideas.
- 8) Welcoming open feedback: Teachers should listen attentively to students' concerns and enforce a zero-tolerance policy regarding teasing or harassment.

Issues overlooked by NEP 2020:

- 1) Sex education: Many girls fall victim to child marriage, abuse, and unwanted pregnancies at an early age, leading to school dropouts.
- 2) Women's nutrition and health: The UN's "State of the World's Children" 2019 report states that approximately 47 percent of adolescents in India suffer from malnutrition, with 56 percent affected by anemia.
- 3) Insufficient emphasis on gender sensitivity: The policy highlights the importance of gender sensitivity in teacher training and classroom culture.
- 4) Accessibility: Girls often face mobility issues and harassment while commuting to school.

Taking significant measures regarding these issues could greatly alleviate the problems:

- 1) Girls should be provided with guidance and awareness regarding menstrual health to help them effectively manage an integral yet challenging aspect of womanhood.
- 2) Women's nutrition and health must be acknowledged, and appropriate measures should be taken to address widespread gender-based malnutrition.
- 3) Government schools should provide bus services that facilitate last-mile connectivity for girl students, thereby expanding opportunities on a large scale.
- 4) The practice of curating digital content targeted at women—via apps, websites, software, etc.—could be further adopted to deliver women-centric services to girl children.
- 5) The policy should incorporate sex education, as it has the potential to revolutionize the overall socio-economic status of young women.
- 6) A toll-free number should be available for children to immediately report grievances regarding gender discrimination, other forms of inequality, or unfair treatment and abuse by parents or even teachers.
- 7) Gender-inclusive reforms should be introduced in school textbooks, curricula, teaching methodologies, and other related areas.
- 8) Opportunities for student participation—particularly for girls—should be expanded to include involvement in policy research and public administration.

Characteristics of Women's Empowerment:

Women's empowerment is a process that enhances women's ability to make life-defining decisions and translate those decisions into desired actions and outcomes.

Its key characteristics are as follows:

- 1) Decision-making power: The capacity to make independent decisions regarding one's personal life, family, career, and significant financial or household purchases.
- 2) Economic independence: Ownership and control over productive assets, access to fair employment, equal pay, and financial services, without relying on others for survival.
- 3) Self-confidence and self-esteem: A sense of self-worth, acknowledgment of one's achievements, and confidence in one's own thoughts, feelings, and capabilities.

- 4) Resilience and adaptability: The ability to adapt to changing circumstances, remain steadfast in the face of adversity, and take constructive risks without the fear of failure.
- 5) Educational and legal awareness: Access to quality education and skill development, along with a clear understanding of legal rights and political processes.
- 6) Individuality and leadership: Leading through personal strength, expressing one's truth, and challenging restrictive traditional gender roles while embracing individual identity.

Socio-economic and other challenges faced by Indian women:

The social, economic, health, and structural challenges faced by women in India are as follows:

- 1) Low workforce participation: Compared to men, women face unequal economic opportunities and lower participation rates in the workforce.
- 2) Unpaid labor: The heavy burden of unpaid domestic work and caregiving limits women's ability to pursue formal careers.
- 3) Wage disparity: Women often earn less than men and are disproportionately concentrated in the informal sector, which is characterized by high risk and low wages.
- 4) Workplace discrimination: Professional advancement is hindered by discrimination related to maternity, a lack of safe working environments, and limited opportunities for leadership roles.
- 5) Educational gap: Due to social norms, girls from marginalized and rural backgrounds face high dropout rates and limited access to quality education.
- 6) Child marriage and dowry: Illegal practices such as child marriage and the dowry system continue to jeopardize the future and safety of young women.
- 7) Lack of political representation: Women remain marginalized in active governance and political decision-making roles.
- 8) Gender-based violence: Domestic abuse, sexual assault, harassment, and human trafficking are prevalent across all levels of society.
- 9) Neglect in healthcare: Within patriarchal family structures, women's health and reproductive rights are often accorded secondary priority.

Findings of the study: NEP 2020 acts as a significant catalyst for women's empowerment in India by prioritizing gender inclusion, equitable access to education, and professional development across all educational levels.

- 1) Gender Inclusion Fund: The policy establishes a special fund to support the education of girls and transgender children in backward or disadvantaged areas.
- 2) Increased Enrollment and Retention Rates: Enrollment statistics indicate that a greater number of women are entering higher education and professional degree programs, thereby narrowing the historical gender gap.
- 3) Role Models in Rural Areas: The policy encourages the recruitment of more female teachers in remote villages, ensuring that young women have strong local role models.

- 4) Vocational and Skill Training: The integration of skill-based education and flexible entry-exit options in higher education helps women balance their academic pursuits with career goals.
- 5) Early Childhood Care: Strengthening the pre-school framework alleviates the burden of domestic caregiving and supports mothers returning to the workforce.

Conclusion: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 directly links women's empowerment with inclusive, equitable, and accessible education. NEP 2020 views education as a primary driver for eliminating historical gender disparities and ensuring social equality. Measures such as the Gender Inclusion Fund, safe school infrastructure, and flexible learning methods actively encourage and secure the enrolment of female students. By integrating digital literacy, vocational training, and mainstream formal education, the policy transforms women from passive learners into active leaders in national development. The policy concludes that establishing an egalitarian society is impossible without empowering women through self-reliance, economic participation, and equal rights.

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