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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE GENDER-BASED INEQUALITIES IN INDIAN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In India the previous educational policies along with NEP-2020 advocates the universalisation of education and equal opportunities of education in every sphere. But the present-day scenario for women is quite different, especially in the rural parts of the State. Girls face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in society which denies their Right to Education 21(A). At every transitional phase of education, the girls are segregated and face significant challenges in accessing equal and inclusive educational opportunities. Increase of numerical data in favour of girl child inclusion in educational sectors does not uphold equalization of education in its true sense. Those who are vulnerable and marginalised are more prone to be denied of their rights, in spite of having a good number of inclusiveness in the education sector in the last few years. The present article seeks to find out the answer of few pertinent questions regarding equal opportunity of girl education in India. Policies ensuring enrolment only and not preparing a balanced society may spoil the true spirit of equal opportunity concept. This cannot define equality as a whole, until it satisfies the parameters of quality education and empowerment, which uphold women in the same strata with that of male counterparts. This article envisages the problems and challenges faced by women in gaining equal opportunity of education.

KEYWORDS: *Empowerment, Equal opportunity, Gender, Psycho-physical, NEP-2020, Inclusive*

1. INTRODUCTION

The answer to a very popular question - What does equal opportunity in education mean? -is beyond any simple explanation as it follows multiple layers of interpretation in terms of gender, ethnicity, belief, economic status, psycho-physical barriers etc. The girl children are denied of their fundamental rights in many ways in spite of several programmes, projects and initiatives undertaken by both the central and state governments, along with constitutional provisions. Gender inequality in Indian education is a serious issue. Inequalities are important in various dimensions- Education, health, employment etc. During the last few decades, we have seen a rapid change in the enrolment ratio in schools and colleges in favour of women. This has reduced the gap quantitatively. But in real situation, the women are still deprived of their societal, economic, domestic accessibility. In present times, there have been several opportunities and rights which are available for girls to increase their rapid representation in Indian education. Universalization and concepts like equalization of education has promoted their situation. Although the fact in reality is quite different, as the picture shown by our societal viewpoint does not approve girls to be the decision makers. Rather, we have seen them as subjugated towards the patriarchal constructs. Until or unless you provide the power of decision making to the girls, the real measure of their participation with their male counterparts is invalid. This Paper seeks to find out the causes behind these poor conditions of women even in 21st century, in spite of several provisions of the Constitution and government policies running. Therefore, mere increase in the number of girl students does not satisfy the argument that women are being empowered. Their qualitative upliftment is the utmost important thing in establishing the concept of equalization of education because giving scope only and not availing societal benefits does not make any sense.

2. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY OF EDUCATION

According to Kothari Commission, "On grounds of social justice as well as for furtherance of democracy, it is essential to make special efforts to equalize educational opportunities."

Equal opportunities for each individual follow the elimination of all factors that cause exploitation and inequality. Sex, caste, religion, language, race, colour, political opinion, national or social origin, economic considerations, place of birth, etc. are a few examples of these factors. Equality does not presuppose that every person possesses the same abilities. When someone is competent, they should have equal access to educational opportunities regardless of their gender, caste, religion, language, race, colour, political viewpoint, country of origin, economic status, or place of birth. This is known as equality in education. The concept of equality does not entail that every person has the same potential. Every person should be afforded opportunities commensurate with their inherent abilities.

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The following perspectives on the idea of equal educational opportunity are presented by B. R. Goyal (1983), with particular relevance to India:
(i) All Indians should receive a minimal degree of education. (ii) The primary criterion for allocating educational opportunities should be the students' intrinsic potential and ability.
(ii) In India, neighbourhood school systems are preferable to common school systems, and need-based curricula are preferable to common curricula since they help students build competencies.
(iii) If a student is unable to support himself, he should be prepared to take advantage of educational opportunities through loans or scholarships.
(iv) Taking advantage of educational possibilities and recognising the value of education in gaining employment or a place in life should go hand in hand.

The prevailing perspective of the notion of equal educational opportunity holds that it encompasses the subsequent three dimensions: (i) Equality in educational opportunities; (ii) Equality in the benefits of education (Common School System); (iii) Equality in the social standing attained through educational achievements.

In addition to this, following concerns must be considered in defining equal opportunity: Various scholarships, stipends, exemptions (e.g., from examination costs and tuition fees), educational loans, and other subsidies. Free education up to the primary level. 3. No cost midday meals, clothes, and literature 4. Opportunity for personalised instruction; 5. Removing the financial crisis for opportunity disparities.

The Directive Principle states in Article 85 that "the State shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen." This implies universal retention, universal physical facilities, and universal enrolment. Universalization of primary education refers to the broad enrolment, infrastructure provision, and retention policies. Equal educational opportunities are important because:
Equal educational opportunities are essential for a country's rapid development; they will expand the search for talent among all citizens; they will help to establish a close relationship between the need for skilled labour and a society's workforce needs; they are required for the establishment of an equitable society; and they are important because they guarantee that all citizens in a democracy receive an education. A gap in societal achievement without it will exist, and the economy will suffer as a result. All students can acquire the information and abilities necessary to engage with society and contribute positively when there is equity in the educational system. Furthermore, granting every child an equal start will benefit people on a personal, regional, and national level in terms of the economy and society.

3. CONSTITUTION AND EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY

i. Equality Before the Law: In accordance with Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, the state shall enact and implement laws that are equal for all. No person on Indian territory would be denied the protection of equality or equal law by the state. Each person shall have the right to petition the court to have his rights upheld.

ii. Elimination of Discrimination on the Basis of Religion, Race, Caste, Sex, or Place of Birth: The Indian Constitution's Article 15 declares that no one shall be subjected to discrimination by the state on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, among other things. This includes the elimination of discrimination based on these factors. No citizen will be prohibited from using public restrooms, hotels, movie theatres, tanks, wells, or baths.

iii. Equal Opportunities for State Services: Article 16 of the Constitution states that no citizen shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, religion, caste, or class in order to be appointed to a government job or office. That means that any position in India, no matter how high, is open to all Indian citizens. Men and women will not be treated differently.

iv. Eradication of Untouchability: Untouchability has been permanently abolished by Article 17. Any restriction resulting from untouchability has been deemed illegal.

v. Prohibition of Titles: During British control, individuals were prohibited from receiving decorations based on their possessions, among other factors, which led to social discrimination. According to Article 18 of the Constitution, a citizen cannot accept an award from a foreign state without the President's approval, with the exception of military and educational honours.

vi. RTE, 2009: All children aged 6 to 14 are entitled to free and compulsory education.

The aforementioned constitutional articles, which uphold the principles of equality and freedom, also outline the equality of men and women in all sectors of life. As such, they are necessary to establish equal opportunity in education.

4. PRESENT SCENARIO IN EDUCATION

Following India's independence, the government increased the standard of education for women there by implementing a number of policies. Because of this, the rate of female literacy has increased over the past three decades, growing at a faster rate than the rate of male literacy. By the end of 2001, 54.16% of Indian women had obtained a formal education, compared to just 22% in 1971. The rate of increase in female literacy is 14.87%, whereas the rate of increase in male literacy is 11.72%. Again, in 2011, we observe the rate increasing and reaching the 65.46% milestone. This definitely poises a great positive picture of women being uplifted at least in the field of education. Even our daily experiences in schools, colleges, universities depict the same picture, the number of female-participation in education is increasing. But this massive increased scenario dims when we reach the higher classes. NEP-2020

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envisages the GER for higher education at 50% by 2035. Therefore, the decreased enrolment in higher studies is visible and so is the situation.

Table 1:

Years	Persons	Growth	Males	Growth	Females	Growth
1951	19.33	-	27.16	-	8.86	-
1961	28.30	8.97	40.40	13.24	15.35	6.49
1971	34.45	6.15	45.96	5.56	21.97	6.62
1981	43.57	9.12	56.38	10.42	29.76	7.79
1991	52.21	8.64	64.13	7.75	39.29	9.53
2001	65.38	13.17	75.13	11	54.16	14.87
2011	74.04	8.66	82.14	7.01	65.46	11.3

Source: Census of India Reports

Literacy Rate and Decadal Growth Rate: 1951-2011

4.1 The term 'Enrolment' and its complexities

Enrolment of students does not satisfy the criteria for equal opportunity in education. There lie several other factors like retention, provide quality education, societal upliftment etc. Increase in quantitative data may not be the true reflection of equal opportunity in education. If you push the idea of Enrolment maintaining the previous patriarchal mind-set then it is not possible to fume up the girls in our society. We may feel that the numbers are increasing, hence this is a good sign; No! That's not true. Numbers do not qualify the quality of the concept because to fulfil the objectives can only define the term in its true sense. So, my view is to define and explain the term from Multiple facets, otherwise it may not be understood or misunderstood. Despite effort to educate women, the dropout rate for girls is still high after secondary education. So, a thought must be paid to it. We must understand- Why quantitative gender inclusive data may curtail the very spirit of equal opportunity of education? The quantitative gender inclusive data may work as a pseudo picture for equal opportunity of education. This very concept is like a skeleton with out its spirit. The spirit lies in its objectives: i. To empower the women in larger context, ii) to make them decision makers, ii) to take part in social activities just like their male counterparts, iv) to utilize resources equally, V) to make society where no patriarchal constructs exist. If we are failing to gain these objectives, which evidently structures the female position in society, shows the inevitability of curtailing the true definition of equal opportunity of education. An example of the previous phenomena can be seen here:

Table 2:

Share of participation at work across India from 2014 to 2022, by gender

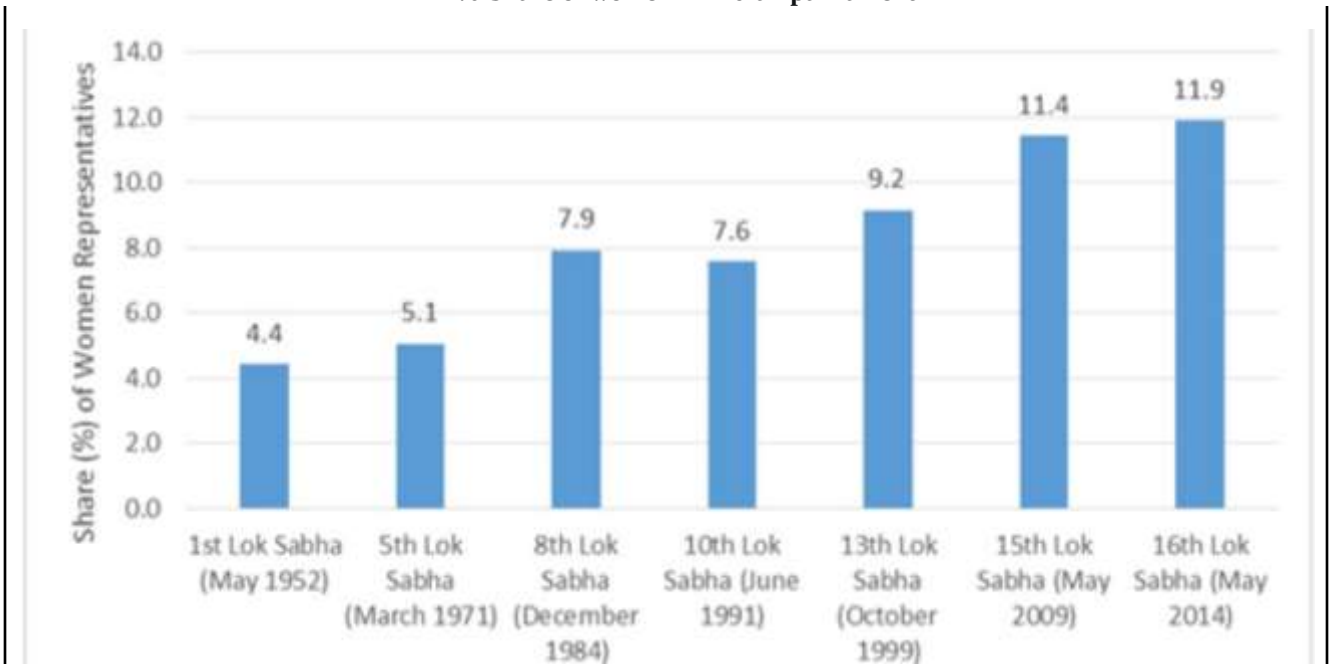
Years	Male (%)	Female (%)
2022	67%	33%
2021	64%	36%
2020	77%	23%
2019	75%	25%
2018	77%	23%
2017	71%	29%
2016	68%	32%
2015	70%	30%
2014	71%	29%

Retrieved from: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1043300/india-work-participation-by-gender/

The above chart shows a glimpse of what number of women ar participating at work place which shows a poor correlation and uphold social backwardness for women. The male participation rate in work place is double the female participation.

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Table 3:
% Share of women in Indian parliament



Retrieved from: http://164.47.194/Lokshabha/Members/lokprev.aspx

This data shows the poor female participation in decision making especially in political decision making. Only about 12% of women in 2014 (by latest) participates in democratic decision making. This scenario is even poorer when looked at into domestic field. Therefore, my argument lies in the fact that if this is reflection of equal opportunity of education and huge number of enrolments in primary, secondary and higher studies, then there is few obvious constraints. Either we are failing to gain the objectives or there is problem in understanding the spirit of equality of opportunities in education. Policies, provisions are there for the betterment of women life in every sphere, if we can't provide that then it would be an entire failure.

5. FACTORS FOR INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION

- **Lack of Decision Making:** One of the major constraints of inequality lies with the lack of decision-making power in favour of women. Domestically, Socially, Politically they lack this and the Patriarchy remains strong.
- **Family:** Lack of awareness and familial pressure is a hurdle for Inequality. Gender biased decisions in family against girl child cause problems in participating in education. Besides that economic condition of the family is another serious concern.
- **Society:** Patriarchal society doesn't allow women to take any upper hand. Even though they are given any opportunity that is bound to another direction. Thus the politics of Patriarchy and society restraints women from several opportunities even education.
- **Personal issues:** Women having personal psychological, societal issues may themselves come in between education and equality. Their personal choice sometimes brings Inequality.
- **Population, Child marriage:** Taboos may be cause behind sudden closure in education. Early marriages, pressure of population curtail the opportunity of equality in education.
- **Scholarship only means of earning:** Scholarships now-a-days become a mode of income for students. They enrol their names only to gain the monetary benefit. They have no interest in education. Wasting of these leads to inequal access to education as this leads to educational failure.
- **Lack of infrastructure:** Infrastructural deficiencies in schools, colleges lead to inequality. If girls are not provided with basic amenities in the institutions then that would be a major constraint.
- **Security:** Another issue is security. If girls don't feel secured and there have been security issues then that may cause inequal access of education too. In Indian society unwanted situations are very common especially for women. Hence, Security must be ensured for equal opportunity of education.

6. NEP-2020 & GENDER INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The NEP 2020 seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. The NEP 2020 intends to meet this challenge through its Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF). The fund will be used to provide

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quality education to all students. 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". Building of toilets, girls' hostels are recommended. Another remarkable proposal made in the policy is to enhance the number of women in several institute heads. Recruitment of female teachers and reduce gender gaps are major concern of this policy. The NEP 2020 will also focus on the safety and security of school-going girls both inside and outside the campus. This policy focuses more on quality so as to achieve the true spirit of 100% enrolment in primary education.

7. CONCLUSION

Policies ensuring enrolment only and not preparing a balanced society may spoil the true spirit of equal opportunity concept. This cannot define equality as a whole, until it satisfies the parameters of quality education and empowerment, which uphold women in the same strata with that of male counterparts. This article tried to highlight the problems and challenges faced by women. Increase of numerical data in favour of girl child inclusion in educational sectors do not uphold equalization of education as it fails to fulfil the objectives and parameters associated with this concept. Therefore, if we can address this fundamental area of explanation then at least we might face equality of opportunities in education by keeping the spirit

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