



An Analysis Of National Education Policy Focusing On Girl's Education And Challenges Of Child Marriage

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Abstract

Education is the fundamental concept to attain human potential to develop an equitable and just society, thereby providing universal access to quality education and also in promoting national development. The global education development agenda reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by our nation in 2015 itself, seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality of education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. NEP 2020 provides for setting up a Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF) to build the nation's capability to provide equitable quality education for all girls. But Girl's education is a big challenge to India, and it is also very difficult to develop the girls socially and economically, as child marriage is one of the biggest obstacles. However, NEP offers an equity model in giving education, whereas most of the girls are forced to marry at an early age, which results in a plethora of problems such as health issues, personality development, empowerment of women, and so on. If we look into the dominant factors that lead to child marriage we can list out the issues of poverty, unemployment, economic backwardness, and superstitious beliefs among the lead factors. We can also notice the typical stereotypical issue of gender-based violence in imparting education to young girls. Poor and uneducated families usually favor boys when they deviate their mind in investing for education. In some places, schools do not meet the safety, hygiene or sanitation needs of girls. This paper focuses on analyzing the New Education Policy 2020 in addressing the girls education and the challenges of the child marriage which is one of the barrier to achieve the goal being set up by SDG4.

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Key Words- Child Marriage, Girls Education, National Education Policy, SDG4

Introduction

There is a big challenge amidst us with regard to providing just education to girl children as child marriage has become a very giant obstacle in providing value based education under New Education Policy 2020 of our nation. The present paper focuses on the challenges that are being faced in providing quality education to girls as it contributes to the overall development of girls which will lead them socially and economically

forward. Efforts are required in this scenario to provide equal education to girl children by keeping aside the problem of child marriage.

As the present paper focuses on the National Education Policy (NEP) it is essential to understand the concept of NEP and the role of education plays in the life of an individual. National Education Policy an initiative by central government on 29th July 2020 aims to focus on research and innovation. It outlines the vision of new education system of India. This policy also aims for systematic framework for elementary education both in rural as well as in urban areas (Joseph K Thomas, 2022). The policy aims to transform India's education system by 2030. The benefits of NEP are as follows

1. Holistic Development
2. Flexibility and Interdisciplinary
3. Skill Development and Vocational Education
4. Technology Integration
5. Research and Innovation
6. Global Exposure
7. Inclusive Education

In this background, it is essential to understand the vision of the National Education Policy with respect to Girl's education.

The Vision Of National Education Policy Concerning Girls Education

The main vision of the National Education Policy is to contribute to the transformation of the country, especially an equitable and vibrant, knowledge-oriented country, by providing quality education, thereby making our country super powerful in the field of education. The policy also focuses on the pedagogy and curriculum of all the educational institutions across the country to inculcate a sense of respect towards Fundamental Duties and Constitutional Values among the students so that they are aware of their duties and responsibilities towards the nation. This policy also strives to instill the skills, knowledge, values, and intellect among the students. It also tries to focus on giving prominence to human rights, sustainable development, and global well-being (Khursheed Ahmad Butt 2022)

Priyanka Kumari et.al.,(2023) has focused on the importance of National Education Policy 2020 and she has also highlighted the implementation of National Education Policy and the foundation it gives to strengthen the education system of the society. National Education Policy aims at development of skills, vocational training, personality development, holistic development of an individual and so on.

Ajit Mondal et.al.,(2023) states that The Union Cabinet in July 2020 approved the New Education Policy, which aims at transforming our nation's sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all. The new NEP encompasses a wide range of issues starting from school education to higher education. It also tries to unmask the policy reforms and perspectives. It also deals with the evolution of the National Education Policies in India since independence and a comparative evaluation with special reference to school education between the NPE 1986 and NEP 2020.

Annual Report 2022-23 of Ministry of Education, Government of India explains the levels of school education and also compares the previous academic structure and the new pedagogical and curricular structure. It tries to make learning to be holistic, integrated, enjoyable and engaging. The curricular and pedagogical structure of school education will be reconfigured to make it responsive and relevant to the developmental needs and interests of learners at different stages of their development, corresponding to the age ranges of 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years, respectively. The curricular and pedagogical structure and the curricular framework for school education will therefore be guided by a 5+3+3+4 design, consisting of the Foundational Stage (in two parts, that is, 3 years of Anganwadi/pre-school + 2 years in 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, i.e., 9 and 10 in the first and 11 and 12 in the second, covering ages 14-18). The Foundational Stage will consist of five years of flexible, multilevel, play/activity-based learning and the curriculum and pedagogy of. The Preparatory Stage will comprise three years of education building on the play, discovery, and activity-based pedagogical and curricular style of the Foundational Stage and will also begin to incorporate some light text books as well as aspects of more formal but interactive classroom learning in order to lay a solid ground work across subjects, including reading, writing, speaking, physical education, art, languages, science, and mathematics. The Middle Stage will comprise three years of education, building on the pedagogical and curricular style of the Preparatory Stage, but with the introduction of subject teachers for learning and discussion of the more abstract concepts in each subject that students will be ready for at this stage across the sciences, mathematics, arts, social sciences, and humanities. Experiential learning within each subject, and

explorations of relations among different subjects, will be encouraged and emphasized despite the introduction of more specialized subjects and subject teachers. The Secondary Stage will comprise four years of multidisciplinary study, building on the subject-oriented pedagogical and curricular style of the Middle Stage, but with greater depth, greater critical thinking, greater attention to life aspirations, and greater flexibility, and student choice of subjects. In particular, students would continue to have the option of exiting after Grade 10 and re-entering in the next phase to pursue vocational or any other courses available in Grades 11-12, including at a more specialized school, if so desired.

The above-described stages are purely curricular and pedagogical, designed to optimize learning for students based on the cognitive development of children; they will inform the development of national and State curricula and teaching-learning strategies at each stage, but parallel changes to physical infrastructure will not be required.

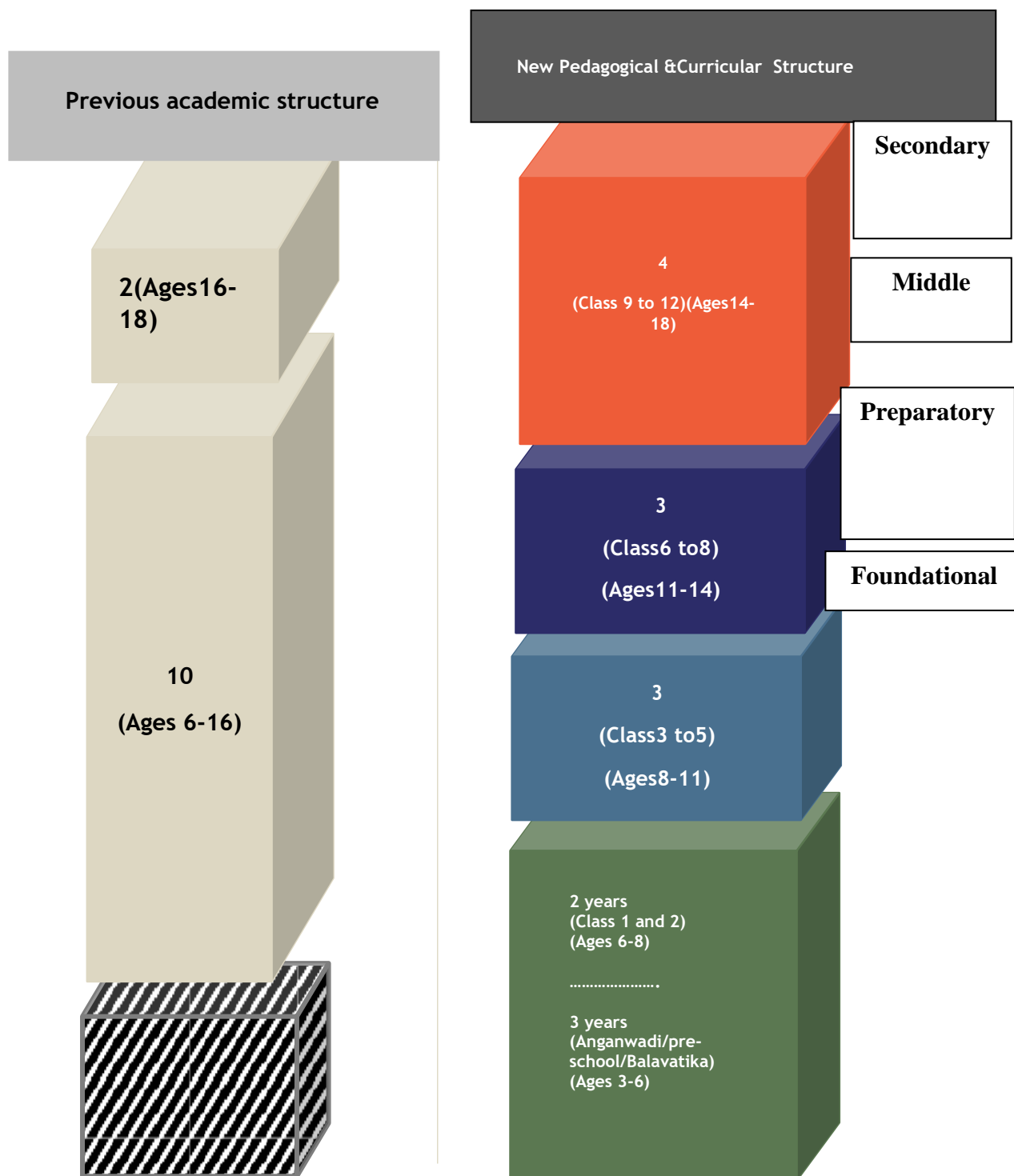


Figure 1: School Education

Source: Annual Report 2022-23, Ministry of Education, Govt. of India

Available online at: <https://jazindia.com>

Present Scenario of Female Education

The literacy rate of women is very low when compared to men. Indian society is dominated by a patriarchal system, which has resulted in fewer privileges and lower status than men. Gender inequality reinforces itself in education as it is factually proved that the rate of literacy for women is 65.46% against 82.14% for men, according to the 2011 census. The Census report also shows that the literacy rate of Indian women is even lower than the national average literacy rate, which is 74.04%. Studies also show that the rate of unemployment in the case of young females belonging to the age group of 15-24 is 11.5% whereas for young males of the same age group, it is 9.8%.

The reasons for low literacy among females are as follows-

- Out of 100, about 65 girls do not continue school and drop out.
- Girls and women are expected to do household work by their families instead of getting educated.
- They have less time to focus on their study as the girls will be engaged in household work.
- Many schools practice gender bias by not letting girls take up the subjects of their choice.
- Parents do not prefer to spend on the education of girls as they should spend on their marriage as well.

Why Girl's Education Is Important?

Education is an enlightening experience. It is the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university. Education is essential for a human being. It is education that differentiates between a human being and an animal. Education is the most potent weapon. It is through education we can change the world. The prosperity of a country depends on the education of the people of that country. Education cannot be the possession of only male folk. It should be given equally to females as well. Ritu Kandpal et.al.,(2023) has focused on the strengths, challenges and implications of National Education Policy and has also highlighted on the gender inequality in providing education to girls when compared to boys. Most of the girls will be dropped out from the schools due to superstitious beliefs, male dominancy, poverty, child marriage and so on.

Jaya Sagade (2012) in her work has given thought provoking analysis on the lacunas of legislative acts in preventing child marriage especially the 1929 Act. It also highlights on the difficulties faced by girls in terms of getting education on par with boys, poverty, and illiteracy of the parents, early marriages, and health issues which affects the overall personality development of the children. She also provides a critique of the laws of States and the country which have aggravated the gender sensitivity issues and also violation of human rights. She also asserts that every child has human rights to health, education, equality, liberty, security of the person and so on.

There are so many reasons to justify the importance of education in women's lives, which are as follows-

1. Reduce Infant Mortality

If a girl is educated, it results in the reduction of infant mortality. If a girl is educated, she will be aware of what steps should be taken to protect the children and also to take care of their health.

2. Reduce Maternal Mortality

If a girl is educated she will be aware of the fact that marriage should be postponed and they should not marry at a very young age it leads to many health issues.

3. Improve Socio-Economic Growth

If a girl is well educated, the rate of employability will be high. As a result of this, per capita income will be high, leading to the country's economic growth. If a girl is educated it will improve the social growth of the society as it leads to women empowerment.

4. Reduce Child Marriage

If a girl is married in an early age, she tends to produce more children as she lacks education and awareness about population growth. If the Girl is educated, she will postpone her marriage age, and as a result of this, child marriage will be reduced.

5. Reduce Population Growth

Education of a girl contributes for lower population growth. If the Girl is educated she will be tending to have less number of children as it leads to higher population growth of a country.

6. Decrease Malnutrition

If the Girl is more educated, she will have knowledge about the nutritious food that should be given to children so that infants and children do not die due to malnutrition. This, in turn, leads to a decrease in the cases of malnutrition among children.

7. Increase Involvement in Political Process

If a girl is educated, she will be interested in participating in the political process of the country. She likes to be involved in the political activities of the country, and she will be able to represent the country through education.

8. Reduce Domestic and Sexual Violence

If the girls are educated, they will be aware of the laws against violence against women, and they will be able to fight legally if they are under the threat of domestic or sexual violence.

Efforts should be made in providing proper elementary education to girls on the basis of gender equality which is very essential in the overall development of the country. Jandhyala(2023) and L S Vasavi(2021) have highlighted the loopholes in the educational policies of the country that have led to gender inequality in attaining education. These works also highlight the quality, equity and diversity in education, education poverty in India, equitable access to education without any gender discrimination. They also criticize the inadequate funding in elementary education that has led to bias in imparting education to girls on par with the boys. These works also assert on the rights to education which is the most important fundamental right to attain education since young age.

Role of Illiteracy in Child Marriage

Illiteracy is one of the major factors that lead to child marriage. Illiteracy among parents will lead to child marriage. On the other side, illiteracy among girls also leads to child marriage as girls are not aware of the negative consequences of the child marriage, health issues they face and also the legislative laws and acts that are in support of preventing child marriages. Education is an important driving force in order to prevent child marriage. Some of the consequences of illiteracy that lead to child marriage as follows-

1. Deterioration in Personality Development of the girls

As girls marry at a very young age, they are not able to attain the knowledge and skills that are essential for their age group, and their personalities will deteriorate. They are not able to cope with their peer group who get educated in terms of improving their personality in all the fields.

2. Superstitious beliefs of the parents

As the illiteracy of the parents is one of the significant causes of child marriage, it makes young girls to be the victims of it. Parents feel that girls are a burden to the family and it is very hard to look after them when compared to boys. For this reason, girls are forced to marry at a very young age due to the superstitious beliefs of their parents.

3. Health disorders

As girls are married at a very young age, they are not educated enough to know the complications of early marriage in terms of health issues, and they develop certain health disorders. As they are illiterate, they are not able to understand the problems that child marriage leads to maternal mortality and the health problems they get by giving birth to a child at a very young age. Most of the children born to young girls will be premature babies and underweight babies. Yadav K P (2006) has highlighted the negative implications of child marriage for which young girls are the major victims when compared to boys. They face mental instability, depression, trauma, loneliness, physical and mental stress and so on. They are forced to take the responsibility of maintaining the family at a very young age.

4. Drop Out Rates in Schools

As girls are forced to marry at a very young age, the dropout rates in the schools will increase. A survey conducted by the Human and Natural Resources Development Society(HANDS), a non-profit organization in Anantpur district, says that many school teachers have not been following up on the reasons for their students dropping out, though the Education Department, too, has been fighting against underage marriages. A government school headmistress in the Singanamala village of the Anantapur district issued a transfer certificate to a 9th-standard girl as per the request of her students without making proper inquiries. It

has been alleged that around 10 girls in that school were married off. In another instance, a class 10th student of another school stopped attending the class for months after her marriage was fixed. The school authorities did not do any enquiries and this incident came to light after the officials from Education Department visited that school recently, according to the report of C P Venugopal which was published in the New Indian Express in 2022.

5. Hinders Economic Growth of the country

When young girls marry at a very young age, they are not educated, and they do not develop any skills that will help them get a job. When they are unemployed, it will affect the economic growth of the country as per capita income of the country will be very low, and even the dependency ratio will increase.

6. Lack of Awareness regarding Legislative Acts

Certain legislative acts are in favor of preventing child marriages, such as the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Amendment Bill 2021, and so on. The reason for this is the illiteracy of girl children. As they are not educated they cannot question their rights and they will become the scapegoats of child marriage.

There are certain inferences that show how illiteracy among girls leads to child marriage which are explained as below-

Poverty, illiteracy and ignorance of the law are forcing several girls in rural Anantpur to get married before turning 18. Human and Natural Resources Development Society(HANDS), a non-profit organization in Anantpur, studied certain instances of child marriages and found that illiteracy among parents was forcing them to marry off their daughters once they attained puberty. Most parents, the study revealed, were unaware of the legal implications of child marriages. It was learnt that 74% of child brides were in the age group of 15 to 17 according to the report published in the New Indian Express in October 2022. Unfortunately, many school teachers have not been following up on the reasons for their students dropping out, though the Education Department, too, has been fighting against underage marriages.

Kishor Brahmapurkar (2017) asserts that female literacy has been significantly lower than male literacy in rural areas of 15 states and 3 Union Territories except for Meghalaya and Sikkim state and Goa and Andaman and Nicobar Union Territories. The reason for this may be several parents did not have permitted their female children to go to schools and another reason could be child marriage of girls. Another reason might be that most people are below the poverty line and were not at all conscious that children should get the free education according to the law. Hence there is lot of gender gap between education of female and the male.

According to the 2001 and 2011 censuses, the percentage of female literacy in India was 54.16% and 65.46%, respectively. Though there was an increase of 11.3% during 2001-2011, however, this was 3.6% lower than that during the period of 1991-2001. This declining trend over a decade is a matter of concern for sustainable development as it affects women's empowerment.

Challenges in Girls' Education

It is a well-known fact that in the 21st century, education plays a very important role in creating a strong foundation for every individual. It transforms every individual's life, both personally and professionally. But in India, it is very difficult for girls to get an education as they face several issues such as gender discrimination, early marriage, poverty, and so on. For this problem, The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) could be a savior as it mainly focuses on Girl's education.

Yadav et, al, (2022) have highlighted the obstacles faced by the country like India in providing education to all girl children in the entire country including remote and backward regions of the country. They have also focused on certain challenges faced by the country in imparting education such as poverty, superstitious beliefs, illiteracy of the parents, early marriages, lack of awareness about legislative acts and so on.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strives for equitable and inclusive education for each and everyone with special attention on children and youth, especially girls from socially and economically backward groups. The policy's focus is very important in order to educate women which aim at providing free and compulsory education to all children till they attain 18 years. Some of the important provisions inculcated by National Education Policy towards Girl's education are as follows-

1. Introducing gender-sensitive education
2. Raising awareness about the importance of Girl's education
3. Providing Scholarships
4. Providing Financial Assistance to girls

5. Strengthening the infrastructure of schools, especially in rural areas.

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, which has invested a huge amount in girls' education and 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, because the number of girls enrolled in secondary school in India is much lower than the number of boys registered.

The reasons for increasing dropout rates among girls are as follows-

1. Poverty
2. Early Marriage
3. Gender Discrimination
4. Lack of access to quality education
5. Superstitious beliefs in the family
6. Lack of transportation problem in rural areas
7. Lack of safety and so on.

The above-mentioned reasons discourage girls from pursuing education. Girls and even their parents should be given awareness regarding this. Although there is a low rate of gender discrimination in urban areas when compared to rural areas, girls are still facing safety issues. Continuous efforts are required in this direction to take India to the next level in terms of education.

Vijay Kumar Dharukar (2023) has focused on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which aims at transforming India into the new era of educational policies. This work draws attention on the various levels of NEP starting from primary level to the postgraduate level. It also highlights research and extension activities that play a major role in the implementation of NEP. It has also highlighted the ancient education system, new remedies and also action plans and programs to implement educational policy effectively. This work also focuses on the contributions of educationists and social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda and Deendayal Upadhyaya who have stressed on the importance of education of women and girls. It also gives light to the quality and excellence that should be maintained by the nation in implementing NEP.

In India, the goal of SDG 4 is to promote quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. It also aims at providing education for the large population. India adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. It also concentrates on eradicating poverty and developing, focusing mainly on economic growth. As poverty is eradicated, there will be drastic changes in the number of child marriages. Girls will be encouraged to get an education and improve their livelihood. Eradicating child marriage should be the priority in all the policies of the government.

Conclusion

Rusen Kumar et, al., have highlighted certain facts about the education system and also National Education Policy (NEP). Education policy has played an immensely important role in the development of an educational system in India since pre-independence days. This work is all about the first education policy of the 21st century which replaces the thirty-four year old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986. Built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability, this policy is aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, suited to 21st century needs and aimed at bringing out the unique capabilities of each student.

National Education Policy(NEP) 2020 gives hope to address the challenges of the present society in terms of education. It is very essential to empower girls to make them to believe in themselves and also in their capabilities to get educated. They should be provided with role models to be literate, which will help them achieve their goals and develop their own skills. They should be made aware that women should be economically independent to lead a successful life. These measures should be strictly implemented along with the effective implementation of NEP. Otherwise, gender equality will not be achieved in India. Education is the prime factor in achieving success in life, and each and every girl should be educated with no compromises at any level. Then, only it is possible to create a just and equitable society.

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