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Issues of Tribal Women in Access to Education with Special Reference to National education Policy 2020

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ABSTRACT

“Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world”

–NELSEN MANDELA

Education is universally accepted as the most influential instrument in globalization and empowering women and safeguarding them from violation of their basic right as humans irrespective of gender and socio-economic status. Education being a fundamental right should not be violated based on biological differences between humans. Catastrophically inequity based on gender still prevails in many parts of our country. Investing in a women education can revamp and even save lives—the lives of women and in result can save society as a whole. The Indian government has expressed a strong commitment towards education of every individual in the country especially female child and tribal communities of the nation who are still majorly disadvantaged groups of the society. To fulfill this commitment the Union Cabinet has passed the National Education Policy 2020 where a gender-responsive educational curriculum will reverse the gender bias and discrimination faced by the socio-economic section of the society in the educational system and society. This Article tries to understand and appraise the status of female literacy in tribal communities, obstacles they experience in receiving education with special reference to the New Education Policy 2020. The policy aims to achieve 100 percent gross enrollment ratio (GER) in school education by 2030 and 50 percent GER in higher education by 2035. The policies and schemes made to support women education are the glimpse reflection of the objectives of the Constitution of India which ensures the right to education as a basic right of every individual irrespective of their gender under Article 21.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is considered to be the key to success of a nation and especially education of women is certainly the most important for the development of any society. Napoleon was asked once, what was the great need of France he replied saying “progress of the nation is impossible

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without educated mother and if the women of my country are not educated about half of the people will be illiterate". When we talk about the woman from tribal communities, the community which comprises about 8.2% of the total population of the country a population of more than 10.2 million, India has the largest tribal population in the world. Majority of the tribal population of the country are economically poor and marginalized community and have very low level of literacy especially females of these communities. Students from these tribal communities are socially and economically backward majorly because they are educationally backward which is not because of lack of ability but due to lack of resources available and approachable to them. A large number of tribal women have missed education at different stages and to empower them there is a great need of providing opportunities to them so as to enable them to assume leadership qualities for economic self-reliance and even social transformation.² The disparity of education is even more marked among tribal women, who have the lowest literacy rates in the country. The male-female gap in literacy and educational attainment among the scheduled tribes is significant. Education, especially in its elementary form, is considered of utmost importance to the tribals because it is crucial for total development of tribal communities.³ The Universal declaration of Human Rights also states that everyone has right to education⁴ and there are other national (Article 21 of Constitution of India , Right to Education Act 2009) and international provisions stating that right to education is the basic right every individual have irrespective of socio-economic status and gender.

II. NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 AND ITS COMMITMENTS

After 74 years of Independence, India has witnessed visible improvement in education. In particular Right to Education Act 2009 was a very progressive initiative taken and it has successfully managed to increase the Gross Enrollment of students in the upper primary level by 19.4% between the year 2009-2016. Government by bringing various schemes of sanitation and safety has also helped in achieving this enrollment percentage in the country. The 2011 census recorded literacy rate of women at 65.5%. But despite these significant improvements education system in the country continues to grapple with challenges of inequity and exclusion of rural, marginalized groups in the society. Access to quality education is still a dream for most population belonging vulnerable and marginalized groups. The high dropout rate among tribal students—70.9% for classes I to X according to the Statistics on School Education, 2010-

² Dr.P NEERAJA "An Analysis of Tribal Women Education in India" International Conference on Social Science and Humanity IPEDR vol.5 (2011)

³ Dr.Kabita Kumari Sahu "Chaallenging Issues Of Tribal Education In India" IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance -ISSN: 2321-5933, p-ISSN: 2321-5925. Volume 3, Issue 2. Ver. II (Mar-Apr. 2014), PP 48-52

⁴ Article 26, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

11—is a glaring example of the challenges that need to be addressed. India has the single-largest tribal population in the world yet a considerable proportion of tribal children especially women child remain outside the school system. The New Education Policy 2020 (herein after called ‘NEP’) brought by the Government which tries to address these major issues associated with education for tribes and women. As of 2015-16, Gross Enrolment Ratio was 56.2% at senior secondary level as compared to 99.2% at primary level. GER denotes enrolment as a percent of the population of corresponding age group. Further, noted that the decline in GER is higher for certain socio-economically disadvantaged groups like females, transgender, members of scheduled castes / tribes. It also submits the reason for dropping number is engagement in domestic activities, reluctance of parents to send female child to school, lack of infrastructure, language-familiarity, unavailability of female teachers and toilets for them. The NEP recommends strengthening of existing schemes and policies which are targeted for such socio-economically disadvantaged groups (schemes for free bicycles for girls or scholarships) to tackle dropouts⁵. The policy lays down the approach of gender as a cross-cutting priority to achieve egalitarianism in pedagogy with states cooperation and local community organizations. A gender inclusion fund (GIF) will also be setup to assist female and transgender students in getting access to education.⁶ The fund will focus on ensuring 100% enrollment of girls in schooling and a record participation rate in higher education, decrease gender gaps at all levels, practice gender equity and inclusion in society. To obtain gender balance among teachers (especially in some rural area), unconventional track for woman-educator will be adopted prioritizing skills, quality and efficiency. NEP 2020 will focus on the safety and security of school-going girls both inside and outside of the campus. The schools should guarantee premises which are harassment-free, non-discriminatory before enlisting yearly consignment. It will boost the presence of female students taking classes. The policy will identify social mores and gender stereotypes that prevent girls from accessing education and causing regular dropouts. The teachers, Anganwadi workers, and local social entrepreneurs will be trained to deliver proper consultation to female student’s families. Other suggestion is to establish Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to unfurl education to the far-off places in the country. The policy also tries to remove the language barrier by providing education in regional language at least up to grade 5 as a medium of instruction. However it could have a bleak impression in addition to the increasing classism in the country *as those who can afford fancy English-medium education will pull further ahead of talent from the hinterland*. There is

⁵ <www.prsindia.org > accessed 20 February 2021

⁶ <https://www.prsindia.org/theprsblog/national-education-policy-recommendations-and-current-scenario> accessed 20 February 2021

possibility of women facing partisanship in English learning by their parents as still in the country majorly priority is given more to the male child compared to female and they prefer providing better education facilities to male child by sending them to private schools due to their preconceived notions of private run schools being better place to study and progress while sending female child to government schools it being less expensive. So comprehensively the new education policy is trying to mark the footing in bringing the women specially those belonging to tribal communities into mainstream by trying to provide them with easy access to education.

III. TRIBAL WOMEN ACCESS TO EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

With the nation-wide lockdown in the country from March 23, India had closed its schools and educational institutions. With rising Covid-19 cases, schools continued to remain closed in the country. Although administration was troubled about the students coming from remote and far-off places especially those belonging to disadvantaged group of the society i.e, women, tribal students and alike who will be most affected due to lack of resources. Barely 18% of tribal students enrolled in residential schools had access to online education during the Covid-19 outbreak. In the first indication of what could be a severe learning gap, data collated by tribal affairs ministry shows that 13,000 of the 73,391 students enrolled in 285 Eklavya Model Residential schools (EMRS), attended online classes in almost a year since the schools closed in March. As per the data, 38,000 students enrolled in STEP app, a gamified learning app. However, only 13,000 students — 17.77% of the total students — enrolled in EMRS, accessed the online classes.⁷ A report by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights indicates that 40% of girls in the 15-18 age groups are out of school⁸. The true and most significant barriers to access education for woman and individuals belonging to disadvantaged groups and tribal communities are discriminatory gender norms, distance-related barriers to education, patriarchal thinking and alike. The education policy makers should advocate in promoting and protecting the measures to enhance woman student's especially belonging to tribal community retention in educational institutions to get them in the mainstream at par with other individuals.

IV. CONCLUSION

The acquiring of National Education Policy 2020 is a reformist attempt in revitalizing the

⁷ <<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/only-18-tribal-students-had-access-to-online-education/articleshow/80795439.cms>> Accessed 20 February 2021.

⁸ The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act,2009

reforms required for female education and especially belonging to disadvantaged groups and tribal communities. The policy proposes to bring a spectrum of reforms for this group of society. The new Policy acknowledges the issues of gender discrimination and inequity and lack of resources faced by woman belonging to tribal communities. The Policy assures rebuilding the education system through some significant steps such as Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF) towards equitable education platform for female students. The dropout rate of girls in upper primary level is elevating upto 18% according to the government data. Females are not allowed to make trip to far away distances for education due to apprehension of safety, absence of washroom, and public facilities in educational institutions. Concerning such issues, NEP 2020 tries to focus on the safety and security of school-going girls both inside and outside the premises. The institutions have to assure harassment-free, equal opportunity friendly and non-discriminatory campus before enlisting for annual authorization. All educational institutions will be assigned to conduct awareness sessions on gender complexities to break stereotyped gender roles, explaining the importance of harassment-free environment and equal treatment of every individual irrespective of gender, and on legal protections and entitlements for girls and women including the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), the Maternity Benefit Act and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act.⁹ The Policy is although over-ambitious but its actual reality check will be known once it hits the ground and its enforceability and implementation in several phases will be unfolded where the real challenges awaits.

⁹ OM PRIYADARSHI < <https://interviewtimes.net/nep-2020-a-new-dawn-for-gender-inclusive>> Accessed 20 February 2021