

Empowering Through Education: A Savitribai Phule Perspective on Women's Roles in the New Education Policy (NEP)

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ABSTRACT

The new education policy introduced by the government has rolled out various programs aimed at uplifting the situation of women. While these initiatives are commendable, there is a glaring gap when it comes to addressing the unique challenges faced by Dalit women. These women, who belong to the most marginalized sections of society, are often left out of the broader discourse on women's empowerment. The policies designed for their upliftment are few and far between, reflecting a systemic oversight. Even when such policies exist, Dalit women remain largely uninformed due to the lack of effective communication and outreach strategies. Their limited awareness is compounded by the daily struggles of managing household chores and enduring caste-class oppression, which further restrict their access to educational and employment opportunities.

Moreover, the focus of the existing programs often leans towards low-skilled jobs, which, while providing some economic relief, fail to impart the true essence of education. Education, in its most powerful form, is a tool for empowerment and social transformation. However, the current approach reduces it to a mere means of economic survival. As a result, Dalit women, even if they manage to acquire some form of education or skill, are not equipped to challenge the socio-cultural norms that oppress them. This perpetuates a cycle where they remain disempowered, unable to break free from the shackles of caste and gender discrimination.

Savitri Bai Phule, a pioneering social reformer and educator, understood the transformative power of education. She consistently emphasized that education should not only be about literacy but should also empower women to become agents of social change. Phule believed that true education would enable women to question and dismantle the structures of oppression that held them back. This paper will critically analyze the status of women in India, particularly Dalit women, through the lens of Savitri Bai Phule's teachings. By utilizing secondary data, this study will explore how current policies fall short in realizing Phule's vision of an empowered and socially conscious female populace, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and transformative approach to education for Dalit women.

Keywords: NEP, Dalit, caste-class, labour force, social change.

INTRODUCTION

The new education policy, introduced by the government on July 31, 2020, is a significant development in the 21st century. It marks India's third policy revision since 1986. Education is a fundamental aspect of our lives, comparable in importance to basic necessities like food, housing, and healthcare. Furthermore, women's education plays a crucial role in the overall development of society.

The new education policy has introduced several initiatives dedicated to women's empowerment. It encompasses various socio-economic aspects that affect the entire female population. The government has incorporated gender sensitization and an inclusive approach to benefit women. Additionally, online learning and digital courses have been integrated into this program.

One noteworthy aspect of this policy is the allocation of 12% of funds specifically for women, and it also addresses the concerns of the transgender community. These measures demonstrate the government's commitment to enhancing the education and empowerment of women across the nation. "The policy aims at Universalization of education from preschool to Secondary level, with 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in school education by 2030. The broader goal of NEP has been visualized in terms of ensuring 100% enrollment for girls in schooling by 2030 and 50% enrolment in higher education by 2035." (Chase, Keneiseno; 2022)

This policy is highly effective in several ways as it endeavours to increase the literacy rate among women and minimize the gender gap between men and women. The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) aims to "promote lifelong learning opportunities for everyone" and strives to "deliver inclusive and equitable quality education for all" by 2030. In this context, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) in India is a commendable initiative as it incorporates a gender perspective and introduces numerous other measures. The NEP 2020 places a strong emphasis on educating children and youth, with a particular focus on girls, who come from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds." (Hoque Md Asraul and Badiya Arup; 2022)

"In this program, the government has introduced several initiatives, such as Samagra Shiksha - An Integrated Scheme for School Education, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs), Women-Specific Programs of DST (Department of Science and Technology), and the provision of nutrition for female students. These initiatives specifically target socio-economically disadvantaged groups and address gender inequities in teacher recruitment. Furthermore, special attention has been given to designing curricula that cater to the educational needs of girls. The New Education Policy 2020 aims to minimize gender discrimination, reduce the gap in female literacy rates, provide women with opportunities for economic growth, enhance women's knowledge about health, combat HIV/AIDS and Malaria, discourage early marriages among girls, and improve preparedness for natural disasters and climate change, among other objectives." (Chandrashekarya. T and Kumari V Lalita; 2021)

In all of these programs, the idea of bringing about social change seems to have taken a backseat, with a primary focus on skill-based education. This shift in focus can be traced back to the 1990s when the government adopted a new education policy that was driven by the need for a large labor force, particularly for heavy industries and other sectors. As a result, women's labor became readily available and affordable in various workplaces.

This situation led to women shouldering dual responsibilities – managing their families and jobs simultaneously. In such circumstances, technology primarily served as a means to assist them in completing their tasks. Women found themselves burdened with household chores, family responsibilities, their jobs, and childcare duties.

Not only that, one hand, had women labour (earning) never considered a breadwinner in family, if they live with spouse and children. Second, they always earn less income rather than any male person. Due to specially a trademark of "they are physically weak from any male. however, they can become main driving force of social change. Although, lower caste- class women suffers huge level of harassment and abusive words on workplaces. Those women comes from high caste-class are getting higher education and do any jobs their choices but those do not come privilege background and uneducated or have low literacy level bound to manual work at nearby places. Indeed, not only do women labourers often go unrecognized as breadwinners in their families when living with their spouses and children, but they also typically earn lower incomes compared to their male counterparts. This income disparity is often attributed to the stereotype that women are physically weaker than men, which unjustly affects their earning potential.

Nevertheless, it's crucial to recognize that women have the potential to be the driving force behind social change. However, it's important to acknowledge that lower-caste and lower-class women often face significant levels of harassment and verbal abuse in their workplaces. While women from higher caste and class backgrounds have more opportunities for higher education and the freedom to choose their jobs, those who lack these privileges, and may be uneducated or have lower literacy levels, often find themselves confined to manual labor in nearby areas. "This inequality underscores the need for more comprehensive efforts to uplift and empower marginalized women in society. Thus, Meena Gopal argues that caste and gender are

inextricably intertwined in the division of labour. Meena Gopal's argument that caste and gender are inextricably intertwined in the division of labor suggests that in certain societies, particularly in the context of India where caste is a significant social factor, one's caste identity significantly influences their gender roles and the types of labor they are expected to perform.”(Gopal ,M;2013)

“In such a system, individuals are not only subject to gender-based expectations but also to the rigid hierarchy of the caste system, which dictates their social status and occupation. This intersectionality of caste and gender means that individuals from different caste backgrounds may experience unique and complex challenges and opportunities in the labor market and society as a whole. Meena Gopal's argument highlights the importance of recognizing how multiple social identities intersect to shape individuals' experiences and roles in society.”(ibid)The New Education Policy appears to primarily emphasize the economic empowerment of women, but it's essential to recognize that women's empowerment encompasses not only economic aspects but also socio-cultural dimensions. In societies where women hold prestigious positions and enjoy social equality, their access to education is on par with men, as was seen in ancient times.

However, when women are treated as private property and their sexuality is controlled, their overall development and access to education can be severely hindered. In such cases, social reform and policy measures become crucial in improving their conditions.

Savitri Bai Phule serves as an inspirational figure in the realm of women's empowerment. She understood the true essence of education and dedicated her life to advocating for women's education. Her legacy reminds us of the importance of education and the need for social reform to uplift the status of women and ensure their holistic development.

“Savitri and Jyotirao ushered in social reforms by the establishment of schools for women and the backward classes. Her journey to school was loaded with a number of difficulties. The orthodox people tried to dissuade her from attending school by flinging dung on her .But Savitri's will power was strong, and she always carried another sari, to change after reaching school. Savitri was determined in her endeavours of imparting education to women and the oppressed classes. She was a great social reformer, and infused a spirit of learning among the masses and enlightened them on the relevance of education. The education which Savitri imparted to women was not that which would make them compatible spouses, but one which would empower them to voice their opinion and fight for social justice. The historic handicaps of class and gender in the nineteenth century Maharashtra could not restrain or subdue her indomitable spirit.”(Rita,Braganze;2021)

In this paper, our primary objectives are threefold. First, we aim to revisit the concept of education, exploring its meaning and significance in the contemporary context. Second, we delve into a comprehensive analysis of the New Education Policy, with a specific focus on the role it plays in the empowerment of women. This section will involve an in-depth examination of the policy's provisions, its impact on women's education and roles, and its potential for driving positive change.

In the third section, we critically examine the ideas and contributions of Savitri Bai Phule to the discourse on education, particularly in the context of the New Education Policy. We seek to understand how her vision aligns with or diverges from the current policy landscape and how her ideas continue to influence women's education today.

Furthermore, we aim to assess the extent to which women have become entrepreneurs and gained independence through educational programs facilitated by the New Education Policy. We will examine how these programs have transformed the lives of women, fostering economic self-reliance and societal change. Through this comprehensive exploration, we hope to shed light on the evolving landscape of education, its role in women's empowerment, and the enduring impact of visionary figures like Savitri Bai Phule.

Revisiting Education history of India

"Before the Charter Act of 1813, the East India Company had no interest in the revival and improvement of literature or the encouragement of the learned native languages of India. The indigenous education system

included Sanskrit pathshalas or tolis, generally held in the homes of the teachers or in temples, and they were financially supported by rajas or landlords.”(Selvamani,P;2019)

However, during this period, education was traditionally accessed primarily by Brahmin families because Brahmin teachers had the responsibility of providing education. Similarly, this cultural practice was prevalent during the Mughal era. Subsequently, the British took the initiative to establish a modern state and opened three presidency colleges in Bombay, Mumbai, and Calcutta. For the first time, the government introduced entrance-based admissions to these colleges. After completing their graduation, students easily secured jobs in the British government. Only students from more privileged backgrounds had the opportunity to acquire this skill set.

“This policy had a significant impact on the early 19th century national congress, serving as the foundation for the initiation of vocational and technical training. It also led to the boycott of government-aided colleges and schools, as efforts were made to establish national schools and colleges.”(ibid)After independence, Jawaharlal Nehru embarked on drafting a five-year plan for India with the goal of transforming the country into a modern and technologically advanced nation. “His strong interest in British educational planning influenced many commissions and acts that continued in a similar vein. His vision of making India technologically rich was a driving force behind these initiatives. Consequently, local elites benefited significantly from the national plan, as they were educated within this system and contributed their services”(https://www.lokogandhar.com/history-of-women-education-in-india).

However, when Nehru's vision failed to address the needs of marginalized sections of society, he shifted towards advocating for a secular democracy and a state-led economy. He propagated the slogan "education for all" and promoted the establishment of institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) to advance India's technological capabilities.

Post-independence, Nehru initiated several policies to improve the education situation in India. The Kothari Commission, for instance, aimed to reform the education system. According to the commission, education's purpose was to enhance productivity, foster social and national unity, strengthen democracy, modernize the country, and instill social, moral, and spiritual values. A key pillar of Indian education policy was the provision of free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. Other features included the development of languages, prioritizing science and mathematics over social sciences and arts subjects, and the introduction of non-formal education for children who dropped out of school or were engaged in labor.

In 1986, when Rajiv Gandhi came to power, he launched the New Education Policy (NEP), with a major goal of ensuring that more than 90% of the rural population lived within a kilometer of a school. The NEP also targeted disabled children, women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Through this program, an attempt was made to bridge caste-based disparities.(ibid)

Despite the progress made since British rule, gender, caste, and religious disparities still persist. Challenges include high dropout rates, especially after the 10th grade, low learning levels, inadequate infrastructure, poorly functioning schools, teacher absenteeism, poor education quality, and insufficient funding. Efforts have been ongoing to improve the education system, but the main goals have not yet been fully achieved. During BJP Regime “RSS schools teach a Hindu-centric world view, which works both to highlight the difference between Hindus and non-Hindus and at the same time to emphasize the role of Hinduism as the source of all human wisdom. The proposed legislation to legalize RSS schools, enabling them to receive state funding, would be a significant policy change for a country so traditionally committed to the provision of secular education.”

Status of Women's Education in India

Before the advent of civilization, there was no clear distinction between the labor roles of men and women. Gradually, as humanity progressed and invented new machines and equipment, the modes of production and ways of life changed. People learned to control nature, domesticate animals, and organize human labor.

In the primitive age, evidence from cave paintings in central India suggests that there was no rigid sexual division of labor, as is sometimes assumed, such as the notion that men primarily hunted while women gathered. In the case of central India during the Mesopotamian period, it is likely that women participated in hunting, in addition to their crucial role in gathering, which accounted for a significant portion of the food supply in tropical climates. As such, the economic roles of women were equal to, if not more significant than, those of men.”(https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/1993_28/14/) Women also a part of this change. In Vedic times, women enjoyed a high social status. Women enjoyed equality in all walks of life Female education was very much prized. The initiation was essential for girls to secure a suitable life partner. The atharvaveda says that a woman become successful in married life partner when she is properly trained during learning period. They studied the sacred text had full access to different branches of knowledge.”(<https://www.lokogandhar.com/history-of-women-education-in-india>). In the post-Vedic period, the status of women's education experienced a decline, largely due to the perception of women as property and their restricted mobility. Religion became closely associated with family institutions, and women were denied access to education, resulting in limited knowledge and control over their lives. However, in Buddhism and Jainism, which emerged during this period, there was a slight improvement in women's conditions, as these religions opposed the traditional Hindu caste system and rejected the notion of "Manuvadi." The status of women further deteriorated during the Mughal period, as social evils were imposed on Hindu women within family structures. The Mughals introduced practices such as child marriage and Sati Pratha, and they restricted the remarriage of widows in Hindu families. Only women from upper castes were allowed to study religious texts, while Dalit women were entirely barred from accessing sacred texts.

During British colonial times, efforts were made to address the education gap for women. However, significant improvements were slow to materialize. Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Lohiya, and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar worked towards abolishing the Sati system and establishing girls' schools in Bengal. Kesav Chandra Sen advocated against early marriages for girls and promoted widow remarriage. In 1871, the Victoria Institution for girls was established. Other influential social reformers like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Jyotirao Phule, and Savitribai Phule contributed to women's education.

Throughout Vedic times until the present, the patriarchal mindset has perpetuated the unequal division of labor between men and women. This mindset has reinforced the Brahminical idea and caste-based hierarchies within society. Dalit women, on one hand, faced tremendous social discrimination and exclusion from upper-caste men, and on the other hand, were completely denied basic education. Several social reformers have played crucial roles in improving the status of women in society, with Savitribai Phule being a pioneering figure in the field of education. Her contributions paved the way for the upliftment of Dalit women and the broader advancement of women's rights.

Since gaining independence, several policies have been implemented in India to promote women's education. However, the condition of Dalit women has not improved significantly. Many of them remain uneducated or have inadequate literacy skills, which limits their ability to access employment in industrial areas and relegates them to low-income jobs.

In rural areas, Dalit women often work in fields dominated by higher castes, while in urban areas, they are often engaged in industries such as construction, packaging, and related sectors. Unfortunately, they face a triple exploitation based on class, caste, and gender, all of which are intertwined and interlinked. These factors significantly impact the lives of Dalit women. While some women have had the opportunity to receive an education, they are still not widely considered the primary income source in society. The challenges faced by Dalit women highlight the need for continued efforts to address the intersectional issues of gender, caste, and class disparities to improve their overall status and opportunities.

Education Changes Women's Lives: Investigating Women-Related Policies

“In 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtien played a pivotal role by taking the initiative to focus on girls' and women's basic education. This declaration highlighted the critical need to prioritize education for girls and women as an essential component of achieving education for all.”(Lall, Marie and House Chetam;2005)

Following this, the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in the same year strongly reinforced the idea that education is a fundamental human right. It emphasized that education should be directed towards the full development of human resources and the realization of human dignity and potential. Additionally, it placed particular attention on addressing gender disparities in education, with a strong commitment to promoting education for women and girls.(Ibid)

These two significant events in 1990 marked a global commitment to advancing gender equality through education. They recognized that providing access to quality education for girls and women is essential for empowering them, fostering their potential, and promoting human dignity. These initiatives have had a lasting impact on educational policies and efforts worldwide, with a continued focus on achieving equal educational opportunities for all, regardless of gender.

“Everyone has a right to education, which shall be directed to the full development of human resources, and human dignity and potential, with particular attention to women and the girl child.”¹.(Ramchandran, Vimala;1998) Women-related policies initially had a limited presence on the government agenda but gradually gained prominence in government planning. The period from 1986 to 1991 marked a significant and creative phase in the history of basic education and women's education in India. During this time, the government launched several new initiatives with the support of various international organizations and agencies:

“British ODA supported the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project.

The Swedish government aided the Rajasthan ShikshaKarmi project in 1987.

The Netherlands supported MahilaSamakhya - Education for Women's Equality in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat in 1988.

UNICEF funded the Bihar Education Project.

The World Bank supported the Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project in 1990.”

The Swedish government aided Rajasthan LokJumbish in 1992.

These externally aided education projects aimed to explore alternative administrative mechanisms for the allocation of funds and the management of educational programs. This period witnessed increased international collaboration and funding to promote women's education and improve the overall state of basic education in India.”(ibid)

It is unfortunate that despite the implementation of these programs, they did not achieve their intended goals. Several significant issues contributed to their lack of success.

One major mistake made by the government was not involving local communities in the planning and execution of these programs. Local people are often more aware of the specific problems, cultural nuances, and needs of their communities. Their participation and insights could have significantly improved the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Another critical problem was the lack of female staff appointed to these programs, especially for girls' education. Without female staff members, girls may not have felt entirely comfortable in their learning environments, which could have contributed to higher dropout rates among them.

Additionally, controlling dropout rates for girls and women in schools proved to be a challenge. There was a significant gap between policy formulation and on-the-ground implementation, leading to tension between local staff and urban decision-makers.

Despite the appeal of these policies, they ultimately fell short of achieving their desired goals. This highlights the importance of not only formulating effective policies but also ensuring their proper implementation and considering the local context and community involvement to address the unique challenges that may arise.¹

In reference to the “New Education Policy (NEP) of 2020, it's important to note that this policy is the third iteration, replacing the 1986 education policy. Specifically, under the section titled 'Education for Women's Equality,' the policy acknowledges that education can serve as a catalyst for fundamental change in the status of women. The NEP emphasizes that the National Education system will play an active and positive role in empowering women.”

This empowerment-focused program places a significant emphasis on various aspects, including curriculum development, teacher training, and active participation in educational institutions. The NEP aims to bring about positive changes in the status of women through education, ensuring that women have equal opportunities and access to quality education. But vocational and professional cases completely eliminated in these policies. The introduction of the New Education Policy in July 2020 by the Union Minister of India aimed at educating and empowering modern girls is indeed a significant step forward. Various schemes and initiatives have been launched to support this goal, including:

“BetiBachao, BetiPadhao: This initiative primarily focuses on preventing gender-based abortion and promoting girl education.

SukanyaSamriddhiYojana: This scheme aims to provide financial relief and support for marriage expenses and higher education for girls, with the government offering funds for these purposes.

BalikaSamridhiYojana: Designed to ease the financial burden of marriage and education for girls.

Mukhyamantri Rajshri Yojana: Launched in Rajasthan, this initiative supports young girls financially to ensure they continue their education.

MukhyamantriLadaliYojana: This scheme operates in different states and provides financial support to young girls for their education while encouraging parents not to discontinue their daughters' education.

CBSE Udaan Scheme: Focused on motivating girls to enroll in engineering and technical colleges.

National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education: Provides financial assistance to girls from disadvantaged backgrounds after completing the 10th grade.”(HoqueMdAsraul and Baidya Arup;2022)

These programs collectively aim to educate women across different socioeconomic backgrounds. However, there are some criticisms:

Representation: The policy document uses the term "girl" several times, but it often refers to underrepresented groups, leading to questions about how well it serves girls from diverse backgrounds.

Addressing Unique Needs: The policy is criticized for not adequately addressing the unique needs of girls, such as menstrual hygiene, transgender issues, and how to allocate and utilize funds effectively.

Northeast Student Concerns: The policy has been criticized for not paying enough attention to the smooth transition of funds for students from the Northeast region.

Inclusive Approach: While the policy mentions women sensitization programs and teaching disabled children, there are concerns about how comprehensive these efforts are.

Explicit Development: Some argue that the policy lacks explicit development plans for girls' education.

In summary, while these initiatives are significant steps towards empowering girls and women through education, there are areas where further improvement and inclusivity are needed to ensure that girls from all backgrounds can benefit fully from these programs.

Savitribai Phule's Vision for Education

The current status of women's development in India is marked by both progress and contradictions. While there have been positive changes, several disparities persist, often influenced by factors such as education, rural or urban residence, and caste or class background.

“Educated vs. Non-Educated: Education plays a critical role in women's empowerment. Educated women tend to have more opportunities for personal and economic growth. However, there is still a significant gap between educated and non-educated women in terms of access to opportunities and resources.

Rural vs. Urban: Urban areas tend to offer better educational and economic opportunities, leading to higher levels of education among urban girls and women. In contrast, rural areas face challenges such as limited access to quality education, which can result in lower educational attainment for girls in these regions.

Upper Class-Caste vs. Lower Class-Caste: Socioeconomic factors, including class and caste, continue to play a significant role in women's development. Women from upper-class and upper-caste backgrounds often have more resources and opportunities compared to those from lower-class and lower-caste backgrounds. This perpetuates inequalities in access to education, employment, and social opportunities.”(https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1814172)

The government has introduced several policies aimed at advancing the lives of women, including initiatives to promote education and economic empowerment. While there has been an increase in the female literacy rate, progress in rural areas has been slower compared to urban areas. Addressing these disparities requires targeted efforts to improve access to quality education, economic opportunities, and social support for women in marginalized communities.

Overall, while there have been positive changes in women's development in India, it is essential to continue addressing the existing contradictions and disparities to ensure that all women, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to lead empowered lives. “In doing research, researchers have found that parents' poverty, social prejudice, lack of social mobility, lack of security, crime against women, gender discrimination, patriarchal society, disregard for women's education, etc. However, it cannot be denied, that the people of the village society have become aware. Village girls are being educated in higher education today.”²(Parimal, Mandal;2021) Of course, government of India are taking initiative of making policies but it was not achieve their goals on expectation level on grass root level.

Therefore, the current female literacy rate of India lags behind the male literacy rate, the former at 65.6% and the latter at 81.3%. The female education rate of India at 65.6% is significantly lower than the world average at 79.7%. The situation is more critical in rural areas, where fewer girls go to schools as compared to boys and the number of dropout rate is alarming among girls.³(Chandrashakarya,T.KmariV.I ,Lalita(2021)The situation of uneducated women in India is often characterized by their involvement in unorganized sectors, where they work in roles such as domestic work. However, it's challenging to provide precise figures due to the lack of official data. What is known is that a significant percentage of women, particularly from lower economic groups, are engaged in informal employment.

As of 2017-2018, around 59.3% of rural women and 51% of urban women were engaged in informal employment, while a smaller percentage were in regular salaried employment. Despite increased enrollment in education, the workforce participation of women remains relatively low. Various factors, including caste and

class, contribute to this phenomenon. For instance, many Dalit women work in roles such as midwives, nannies, and in the leather and sanitary industries, which are often low-income jobs.

Women in these roles are often not considered the primary breadwinners in their families. They typically shoulder dual responsibilities, both in their families and at work. In many cases, women pursue education not for social change or improvement but rather to contribute financially to their families, as the cost of living is high. This highlights the economic necessity of education for women.

Savitri Bai Phule, on the other hand, dedicated her entire life to fighting against social evils and advocating for the empowerment of women. Her efforts aimed to bring about real social change and improve the status of women, moving beyond the mere pursuit of earning a living.

“Thereafter, she went on to work towards questioning and eradicating a lot of social evils. From adopting her son, Yaswant her husband after rescued a pregnant women who was about to end her life, to setting up a delivery room was women with forced pregnancies named ‘BalhatyaPratibandhakGriha’, Savitribai fought zealously against ignorance and taboo. She is the one who broke the stereotypes against inter-caste marriage and performed the last rites of her husband, to name a few. SavitribaiPhule was the first women in india, about whom we know, who believed that educating women is the only tool for a better future. Born on January 3, 1831, she was India’s first feminist who grew in a country ruled by the British Raj, where women rights were non-existent. She achieved the revolutionary act of establishing the first school for girls. Therefore, she is rightfully regarded as the first female teacher of India.”⁴(Goure,Malika,Arachana;2016)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while the new education policy has made some positive changes in the lives of women and has encouraged parents to allow their daughters to pursue education, the conditions of Dalit girls and women have not improved significantly. There are several challenges they face:

Lack of Awareness: Many Dalit girls and women may not be well-informed about the policies that could benefit them. Additionally, local dominant individuals or groups may exploit their lack of awareness for personal gain.

Caste-Based Restrictions: Dalit girls and women often face restrictions and discrimination from dominant caste communities when they try to access educational opportunities outside their immediate areas. This can hinder their development.

Household Responsibilities: In lower-caste and lower-class families where both parents are working, the elder daughter often takes on the responsibility of managing household chores and caring for younger siblings. This added burden can limit her ability to focus on education.

Economic Focus: The new education policy primarily emphasizes job-based education and economic empowerment. While this is important, it sometimes overlooks the broader aspect of intellectual development and social change.

It is challenging to predict whether Dalit girls and women will not become the main driving force of social change in the future, as Savitri Bai Phule did. The current circumstances, including economic and social disparities, must be addressed comprehensively to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their caste or class, have equal opportunities for education and personal development. Encouraging intellectual growth and social awareness alongside economic empowerment is essential for fostering future leaders and agents of change among Dalit girls and women.

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