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What is This?

Policy Discourse and Exclusion-Inclusion of Women in Higher Education in India*

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Abstract

Indian educational policies are conceptualised within a very narrow framework and, therefore, gender concerns find little meaningful space in the final policy documents. This is because the cultural concerns colour the vision and value frames of the policy makers. The article interrogates the process of policy formulation by looking at selected XI Plan documents. The aim is to analyse the process of policy development, unravel the rhetoric of inclusion-exclusion and the myopic decisions which hardly touch the structures of exclusivity. The exercise for the XII Plan is underway and one hopes it will move away from mere rhetoric and be an improvement both in terms of conceptualisation and delivery.

Overview

Restructuring of the system of higher education is a worldwide phenomenon. There is also a shift to a corporate profit culture in higher education which is in sharp contrast to the traditional image of the university as an agent of social change and of mobility. Indian higher education system is also undergoing changes

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in this direction although, due to political, economic and social compulsions, the focus also remains on equality and social access. This concern is generally reflected in the different instruments of educational policy which identify several parameters which deserve attention in the changing scenario. Gender is one of them. Therefore, looking at educational policy and whether it promotes gender equality in higher education will tell a lot about the equality commitments of the system towards women. Further, women still do not enjoy parity with men in *participation and outcomes* although *access* has improved. On the whole, their entry into higher education is not unproblematic. Therefore, higher education as an instrument to achieve high status as well as equality is an appropriate site to examine attempts to promote gender equality in society.

The central premise of this article is that the Indian educational policies designed to promote the education of girls and women are conceptualised within a very narrow framework, on the one hand, and are fragmented by a fractured vision of both the system of higher education and of Indian society, on the other. As a result, gender concerns receive very little meaningful space in the final policy documents. This is because the cultural concerns colour the vision and value frames of the policy makers. Further, inclusion requires an understanding of socio-cultural contexts and processes that produce the values and biases which go into the making of policy.

While the first part of the article focuses on access, participation and outcomes, the second part analyses some of the policy documents from a gendered perspective. It unravels the process of policy making and formulation and exclusion-inclusion of women and their differentiation, within the framework of equality, in higher education in the XI Plan (2007–12).[1] It interrogates the process of policy formulation by looking at texts of selected reports as primary data sources. These texts reflect the multi-stage and multi-tier character of policy framing. The aim is not merely to discuss the policy but also to analyse the process of policy development, unravel the rhetoric of inclusion and why very myopic decisions are taken which hardly touch the structures of exclusivity. Moreover, the implications of this process for the democratic nature of policy making in the system of higher education can also be understood. The exercise for the XII Plan is underway and one hopes it will move away from mere rhetoric and be an improvement over the earlier ones both in terms of conceptualisation and delivery.

Finally, the persistent gender gap in education reflects poorly on the Indian policies which have failed to incorporate the requirements of Indian women at the level of conceptualisation and implementation. Further, in this day and age when global trends and the market are impacting all aspects of the educational system and higher education is in a flux, when the provision of free and highly subsidised public higher education is a receding possibility, it is time to review the contemporary policy documents from a gendered perspective to see if they are more likely to increase the advantage or disadvantage for potential and actual women students and faculty in higher education.

Women in Higher Education: Access, Participation and Outcomes

Indian women, like women elsewhere, are heterogeneous and the societal system of stratification is reflected in differential access to women from different socio-economic groups but the gender gap affects all of them. This is in spite of young women achieving better than men at the school board examinations.

Numerically, the Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world, with 376 universities and 20,677 colleges (out of these 2,166 are women's colleges) and 504,812 teachers in 2006–07. However, the gross enrollment ratio is very low at 12.4 per cent for all students: 14.5 for men and 10.0 for women.[2] Women comprise 40.55 per cent of total enrollment of 11,612,505.[3] In addition, 1,540,460 students were enrolled in distance education of which 39.9 per cent (614,659) are women (GoI, 2007: 26). Women comprise 38.6 per cent at undergraduate, 45.9 per cent at graduate and 41.7 per cent of enrollment at research level [GoI, 2007].[4]

Higher education was mostly publicly funded till the early 1990s (exceptions were some professional colleges set up in two states in the 1980s). It was also subsidised to a great extent so that its individual cost was very low. Even then, the gender gap was high and it was worse for the women from disadvantaged groups whose access was supported by the Constitutional provisions. For example, in 2006–07, the proportion of Scheduled Caste[5] students was 11.8 per cent (4.2 per cent women, 7.6 per cent men) and Scheduled Tribe[6] students were 4.5 per cent (1.7 per cent women, 3.8 per cent men).[7] They generally join general education courses and are denied access to elite/courses and institutions. Proportionately and numerically access is very limited to them as a whole but more so to the women from these groups. For instance, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women comprised 10.1 per cent and 4.4 per cent, respectively of all women enrolled in 2006–07 in HE (GoI, 2007: 26).

As the demands of the liberalised economy changed vis-à-vis higher education in the 1990s, the state or provincial governments allowed the setting up of new private unaided[8] (and for-profit institutions called self-financing colleges or universities) which offered the new market driven subjects. But they were offered at a high individual cost. These are called self-financing courses,[9] colleges and institutions. On the other hand, very few government-aided[10] higher educational institutions (HEIs) have been established in this period. The existing public institutions, besides suffering from poor quality, are also offering the market-driven courses at a cost (also called self-financing courses) leading to the privatisation of public universities.[11]

According to the XI Plan Document, as it was circulated to the National Development Council (NDC), the share of private unaided institutions in the X Plan increased from 42.6 per cent in 2001 to 63.21 per cent in 2006. The enrollment increased from 32.89–51.53 per cent in the same period. The projected educational expansion is from 10 per cent of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to

15 per cent by 2012. Half of this 5 per cent is expected to be in the private sector. This is especially going to be in the area of professional higher education (including teacher education) and in the so-called masculine disciplines.

Women are entering higher education in ever larger numbers and gaps in the enrollment of women and men have decreased as per the latest statistics available for 2006–07 (UGC, 2007). However, while the maximum number and proportion of women enrol for education (48.7 per cent) and arts, humanities and the social sciences (45.8 per cent), their enrollment in sciences (38.0 per cent) has also been increasing due to the devaluation of pure sciences because men do not enrol in them.[12] Their proportion in education has decreased since 2000–01 when it was 51 per cent and in 1980–81 it was 51.7 per cent. This deserves attention when the number of private self-financing colleges of education has increased. On the other hand, there has been a gradual increase in women's enrollment in commerce (35.2 per cent). Similarly, the enrollments in engineering, law and veterinary science have also increased substantially although they are not more than men in any of these fields.[13] They still remain predominantly male domains with women occupying only about 20 per cent seats. Thus, *access*, on the whole, has certainly improved. They are also choosing the traditional masculine subjects as is reflected in higher education enrollments in the first professional degree or undergraduate professional programmes.

Medical education has been a gender-balanced subject wherein the proportion of women is 44.3 per cent. It has not been a masculine subject in India (or South Asia or even in the Philippines) unlike in the Western, developed world because in a society where women are physically secluded, especially in north India,[14] women patients could not be treated by male doctors. (This could be explored in the other countries practicing female seclusion for comparison.)

However, *gender inequality in participation* has declined very little, e.g., in the choice of subfields or specialisations, as for example, men are over-represented in physical, mathematical and computer sciences and women in biological sciences both in the educational and occupational spheres. This is being referred to as *horizontal* segregation vis-à-vis *vertical* segregation. Even in medicine specialisations are differentiated in terms of status. This can be substantiated by the number of doctorates awarded in different subjects to women and men. In 2003–04, when the author looked at the annual report of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), out of 567 doctorates awarded (a majority in the social sciences), 36 per cent were women and 64 per cent were men. The proportion of doctorates by Schools was: School of Social Sciences—47.2 per cent; Life Sciences—75 per cent (8/12); and Centre for Biotechnology—68.5 per cent (8/11). Again, women in science deserve special attention viz-a-viz access, retention and re-entry especially when men are exiting pure sciences and women are finding space in it.

According to Bamji,

According to the INSA report (2004: 1), over 37 per cent of Ph.Ds in science are women but the number of women working in faculty positions in research institutions

and prestigious universities is less than 15 per cent except in DBT and ICMR. Also very few women are fellows of science academies or recipients of prestigious awards like the Bhatnagar award even in biology—a field where there are more female than male students. **Thus the glass ceiling is more apparent at the level of practicing science and recognition than at the entry level**. (2008: 1) [emphasis in the original]

This takes us to an analysis of *outcomes* which requires looking at the benefits of education, one of which is the job prospects in the market or labour force participation of women. Here the focus is on their participation in the academic and administrative positions in the system. For example, women academics have very low representation in senior academic and research positions as well as in senior administrative and managerial positions. Gender desegregated data on faculty are not available in India. In 1993–94, the women teachers in colleges and universities were 18 per cent when the author collected unpublished statistics from the University Grants Commission (UGC). The break up shows that 21 per cent were in the colleges (note that there are many women's colleges) and 11.6 per cent in the universities. Further, in 2004, in Jawaharlal Nehru University, the proportion of women faculty was 25 per cent. Their distribution among different levels was: 15.7 per cent professors, 34.5 per cent associate professors and 35.5 per cent assistant professors.[15] Faculty-wise too they have less representation in the same subjects in which they are very low as students.

The *second dimension impacting outcomes* relates to the subject choices and their links with occupations. As mentioned above, in spite of gender equality in access, women are more likely to graduate from education, arts, humanities and social sciences and men from engineering, natural sciences and mathematics. These educational choices do not necessarily lead to high status and high-paying occupations or outcomes especially with respect to the kind of jobs they get or take up. It is because the cultural discourse encourages women to make educational choices leading to caretaking occupations. Thus, so long as women and men choose different subjects or there is disparity in participation, gender parity in access is not going to lead to parity in labour force participation and in outcomes.

Given this situation of women in higher education, wherein the twin processes of exclusion and inclusion are working simultaneously, scholars and activists working with women have drawn the attention of the government, the planners, and policy makers to make it more inclusive. Therefore, whenever the process of planning of the country's development is undertaken, the issue of women and their development is also taken up. Extensive countrywide and intensive consultations are held with experts and activists and their suggestions and recommendations are also invited. They are critical to being included in the five-year plans of the UGC which is the implementing agency. The latest exercise took place in the preceding last few years (they start before the plan period but continue well into the plan period), before the government finalised the XI Plan (2007–12). The reports are

being critically analysed below from an inclusive perspective because the final document sets the tone for what women get or do not get in the next five years.

Exclusion of Women in Educational Policy: XI Plan Reports and Documents

In preparation of the XI Plan, several committees were constituted by the government, relevant ministries and bodies associated with higher education. These comprise of policy-focused groups which advocate gender equity in higher education. Below is a critical analysis of the documents that have provided the framework of what is to be done for women in higher education in the XI Plan. Only a few examples are cited as illustrations from the plan documents but one could do a gender audit of these documents. It provides a critique of these documents as aspects of discourse and representation. There are six documents which are reviewed here in order of their importance in the administrative and power hierarchy of policy formulation but conversely in decreasing visibility and increasing exclusion of women in the final outcomes or recommendations about them. In other words, the first two documents are inclusive in their approach, framework and recommendations. In the next three documents women are almost excluded in the final recommendations and it is these which are critical in the power and decision-making hierarchy and in the ascending order.

1. **The Report of the Sub-Group on Access for Women and Schemes for Women for the XI Plan** (2006), appointed by UGC, submitted a very comprehensive report.[16]
2. **The Committee on Women In Science (WIS**—year not mentioned) also submitted its recommendations to the planning commission based on the *INSA* (Indian National Science Academy) *Report on Science Career For Women*.[17] The INSA Report and its recommendations[18] were also incorporated into those sent by WIS to the planning commission.[19]

Both the reports provide an overall perspective, suggest strategies and make recommendations for the inclusion and retention of women in higher education. Both mention support to girls from the school stage, which is a conduit to higher education. The Report of the UGC subgroup (henceforth referred to as UGC subgroup) is extensive and in-depth as is the INSA report. Both provide a social context. The UGC subgroup looks at women within the overall and general population but also within the different social groups, namely, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, minorities. It has a twin focus: the institutions and the backward areas with special focus on women in the backward groups.

It goes on to recommend that women should mandatorily get a percentage in all schemes meant for identified social groups in correspondence with their

proportion in the population. In addition to special schemes for women, the sub-group recommends that they should also get a proportion in all schemes of UGC.

In addition, rural-urban and regional imbalances in the context of gender receive a lot of attention in the two documents. For instance, it is mentioned that there are smaller numbers of women from small towns, rural areas, poor families and vernacular language schools. WIS report also observes that women scientists are generally from urban areas, high castes and classes.

Both the reports are comprehensive because they are written by scholars who are familiar with the situation on the ground and are committed to improving the situation of women faculty and students in higher education. Therefore, they are exhaustive and there are common issues, concerns and recommendations. However, government agencies who initiate these committees make no effort to integrate the recommendations of the two committees and to sift points of convergence and divergence and then compile a comprehensive report. Therefore, women in general education and universities, on the one hand, and women in science, on the other, are treated as separate categories.

3. While carrying forward the regional and socio-cultural context, the **UGC XI Plan Report** selects a few suggestions and ongoing schemes from the UGC subgroup report. Under *gender equity*, it incorporates provision of hostels and other infrastructure facilities for women in colleges and universities; day care centres, capacity building programme for women managers in higher education, and scholarships. All these are ongoing schemes and, thus, there is no addition to the X Plan schemes.

There is a separate paragraph on *social group equity*, which includes Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward Classes/minorities and the poor. The first two groups were provided reservation in education in the Indian Constitution and now the third group is also included through a constitutional amendment taking the reserved seats to a maximum of 50 per cent. In this context, it is also recommended that the Equal Opportunity Cells be established in every university. However, gender is missing in the discussion on social groups.

In the UGC Plan proposals, with the exception of the chapter on Access, Equity and Inclusiveness, exclusion of women is reflected in all chapters such as Quality and Excellence, Relevance and Value Based Education, ICT Integration and Governance, Financing of Higher Education, Emerging Issues and Challenges, Strategies, Policies and Programmes of Action. As if issues of quality, values, ICT integration, etc. do not have a gender or an equity dimension. This exclusion is then carried over into suggestions, recommendations and financial implications.

4. **The *Draft Report of the Working Group on Higher Education* of the Planning Commission** sets out a broad agenda for the XI Plan. In the section on expansion of Access in the chapter on policy perspective, it mentions women only in the context of hostels and scholarships. The same recommendation is repeated for increasing the enrollment of women

in professional education. The sections on research, distance education, quality, faculty development, infrastructure development, curriculum development, use of technologies, database management, special schemes for persons with different abilities, do not mention women or gender as a parameter.

Later on, women are again mentioned along with the poor (urban, rural, and tribal) only for the purpose of gainful employment with reference to community colleges. Again, the chapter on Financial Requirements reiterates its position of promoting inclusiveness and equity through grants for women's hostels in colleges and universities. The next section on social group equity misses out women.

The Draft Report comes back to issues relating to access in the chapter on Equity and Inclusive Education. Using the NSS data in the discussion on enrollment at a disaggregate level—the focus is on inter-state, inter-caste, inter-religious, rural-urban, occupational, male-female disparities. It reiterates the well-known fact that gender overlaps with the rest of the parameters of disadvantage—something similar to the report of the UGC subgroup on women as well. Yet all this is ignored in the rest of the document.

Documents (3.) and (4.) converge on two points, namely, excluding women from all aspects of higher education and from social groups for all practical purposes and limiting to recommendations regarding hostels and scholarships for women.

5. **The Approach Paper to the XI Plan of the Planning Commission** (2006), says that 'the plan must focus on ways of improving women's socio-economic status by mainstreaming gender equity concerns in all sectoral policies and programmes. Special efforts should be made to ensure that the benefits of government schemes accrue in appropriate proportions to women and girls'. (p. 105). Here too the social context marked by region, caste, tribe and social disadvantage is highlighted. The focus is on general expansion in higher education as well as of the scientific pool and also on quality. Providing access to high quality institutions for the poor and the socially disadvantaged is also given priority. Gender is missing altogether.

6. **The Plan Document as it was circulated to the NDC**[20] also focuses on social groups and women, and clubs the two together only for fellowships. So much so that even when it is proposed thatan Equal Opportunity Office for social groups will be established in every university, issues of gender are left out. As an exception, gender along with the other parameters of disadvantage is mentioned in the context of hostels for girls at the district level.

Again, it is mentioned in the same document that 6,000 colleges and 150 universities in underserved areas will be strengthened—it is not stated that the areas will be those where the proportion of women (along with Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and minority students) who do not

access higher education, is high. Again, in order to strengthen state technical institutions it is envisaged that one-time assistance for project based support and funds will be given to 200 state engineering institutions. The question is: while giving the grant what will be the parameters on the basis of which colleges will become entitled for the special grants: will they be colleges in under served areas, in which a substantial proportion of students are women and those from the disadvantaged sections? For science and technology, it is proposed that bright young students will be identified who can take up scientific research as a career. Here too women are missing from the proposed strategy even though the Women in Science committee had made specific recommendations.

To sum up, except the UGC subgroup and the INSA report on women in science documents (1 & 2), *gender equity is separated from social group equity* as if, women in these groups are not handicapped or are at par with men in access and utilisation of education. Alternatively, women in general are homogenous and so there is no need to talk about them across caste, class, etc.

Thus, they adopt a very fragmented approach—as if they are bereft of any understanding of the social context without which it is difficult to understand women's participation or lack of participation in higher education. Or even when the social context is mentioned it remains as a backdrop. The understanding of multiple and overlapping disadvantage is not applied to the recommendations. This in spite of a very long understanding that women have multiple handicaps and deserve special attention within the marginal groups. As mentioned earlier, the recommendation to set up Equal Opportunity Office for social groups in every higher education institute overlooks women's inclusion even from these groups.

The framework and the understanding in which the first two are embedded are not utilised for improving the existing strategies and programmes and to move forward. Nevertheless, the last four reports are critical because their recommendations go into the final policy document and what support women get from the government (in fact, hostels and scholarships are the most agreed upon measures in all the documents). Most of them, however, provide patchwork solutions handed down for quite sometime as if they are stuck in a time warp.

The gender concerns are also not integrated or mainstreamed into other chapters on higher education as if financing, quality etc. do not have gender implications and deserve attention.

Women in science find no mention in most of the documents except the need to push women into professional and technical courses.

Exclusion-Inclusion of Women: Policy Process and Development

Allan (2008) suggests four ways to improve the policy discourses. These are: promoting awareness of policy as discourse; analysing frameworks and assumptions

of policy reports; examining implications of policy recommendations; and looking at how policy discourses construct images of women.

Experts also refer to policy development process as passing through several stages and levels and is not linear or self-contained. Rather it is likely to occur at several levels simultaneously. Moreover, formulation and implementation are not distinct phases of the process of policy development but are seamlessly integrated and therefore it is better to talk of policy development or policy process instead of policy. In addition, 'policy is not merely represented by texts or statements…. It is a complex process by which the resources of power are mobilised in order to operationalise value' (Bell and Stevenson, 2006:142). Nonetheless, it is possible to view them as discrete stages for purposes of policy analysis.

Conceptualisation and Formulation

Educational policies adopt a compartmentalised approach by assigning a chapter to women in addition to separate chapters to others from the disadvantaged sections of society, for instance, gender and social groups are two of them. The two are neither integrated in a common frame nor does gender make an entry into the discussion on social groups. Again, there is no integration of gender within issues of finance (e.g. gender budget and audit), or of professional education (gender and subject choice). As a result, gender stands apart and gets very little attention. Thus, the fractured vision of the education players at the national level ensures that strategies and programmes for women remain distanced from social reality and thereby do not move forward.

Moreover, there is lack of correspondence between policy discourse and what is finally recommended. There is, for example, disjuncture between the two sets of documents, namely, the reports of the first level committees (numbers 1–2), consisting generally of experts in the field, and their suggestions and recommendations, on the one hand, and the reports of the higher level committees such as the UGC, planning commission, etc. (numbered 3–6), on the other.

On the whole, there is no inclusive broad and comprehensive conceptual framework reflected in the documents. Lacking a common frame and vision, the formulation of policy is limited to the existing provision of special schemes, hostels, fellowships, more colleges, etc. The critical documents are not informed of a perspective consisting of incremental understanding from the last five year plans and experience thereof.

The existing situation has led to another anomaly, i.e. separate strategies are suggested for improving the enrollment and retention of women and the students from social groups and categories. Their specific needs and suggested strategies are neither integrated nor an overall comprehensive framework provided for the education of all the disadvantaged groups (Chanana, 1993: 86). This happens even when the problem is of a general nature.[21]

Implementation and Monitoring

It is also not enough to formulate policies and programmes or to introduce schemes and set aside funds because even the best ones may not be implemented. In addition, there is need to learn more about the outcomes of earlier initiatives, schemes, policies, and strategies to promote gender equity in education. For instance, what is the utilisation rate of general schemes by the women and also those meant for women.

For instance, in response to a UGC circular, very few universities constituted committees against sexual harassment on the campuses and there are no inbuilt mechanisms to monitor the implementation. Another example is of childcare centres, a gender neutral facility, many universities have not established them. Why? What can be done to promote this scheme? UGC has given grants for building hostels for women to several universities. There is no feedback on its utilisation and its impact on women's enrollment and retention. Again, the information about state-level initiatives, such as reservation of seats in HEIs by Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, or the impact of free school education or scholarships to girls in schools on their transition to college will also deserve attention.

Moreover, how have women in general and women among the socially disadvantaged groups benefited from the existing schemes and programmes? Neither is there any recommendation made nor strategy suggested to include women from the under-represented categories. If women are to get equitable access then the proportion of women in each social group has to be targeted for which the UGC subgroup has also worked out the percentage growth for the plan period for each group.

To Reiterate

Researchers and activists have provided enough data to substantiate the fact that disadvantage for women is multi-layered. And that there is need to identify women in all the groups, namely, among the minorities, the disabled, the urban deprived, those living in isolated areas, among certain castes and tribes (GoI, 2001: 6). Therefore, the educational policies and programmes are expected to overcome the constraints imposed by social reality (Chanana, 1993). Further, policies and programme should be formulated keeping in focus the links between social disadvantage and gender. Sadly, there is a lot of rhetoric about it in the documents under discussion which remains in the background or remains a preamble but becomes marginal in the final outcome.

While inclusive approach will require stress on increasing access, retention and re-entry of women and their participation within an enabling environment the final recommendations for the XI Plan have come down to two, namely, hostels[22] and scholarships[23] and do not go beyond the existing schemes for women.

Even these are not comprehensive enough. This is in spite of the fact that the UGC subgroup provides a feedback on the X Plan schemes and recommendations for their continuance. Yet the final outcome is bereft of any such understanding. How good is such a half-baked public policy which lacks perspective and is not contextualised?

As mentioned earlier, the first two committees or subgroups consisting of professional women in higher education made comprehensive recommendations which were contextually embedded but they were not high on the power hierarchy in comparison to the agencies such as UGC, Planning Commission and the National Development Council. *The receding importance of the gender perspective in the policy process is inversely related to the power enjoyed by the last three agencies.* According to Bell and Stevenson,

> The texts of educational policy frequently reflect a variety of discourses that compete within the socio-political environment, an arena within which, by definition, a range of ideologies are struggling for supremacy. Such discourses will not only reflect differing value perspectives, but also the differential access to power since those with the power resources to mobilize can more readily shape policy debates. These discourses are therefore contested…. (2006: 160)

The consequence is that gender equity is pushed to the background. As examples of fine tuning the needs of women students and the social context, the recommendations of the UGC subgroup and the WIS report about hostels and fellowships are worth looking at.

> The UGC subgroup recommends that the eligibility condition of at least 30 per cent of enrolment of women in an institution for **hostel** grants be reviewed. Even after the review it may not be viable to have hostels for one college for women or one coeducational college. Therefore, the model of a hostel for a cluster of institutions at the district headquarter is suggested as the alternative. It also recommends that financial support and hostels should begin from the colleges and schools which are the catchment areas for the universities (UGC, 2006: 36–37).

The UGC subgroup also recommends *scholarships and fellowships* to women in self-financing courses both in the public and private HEIs and in distance education in order to promote access to professional and technical courses in addition to support for coaching and private tuition across the spectrum of higher education system (UGC, 2006: 35). WIS recommends the expansion of the special scholarships and fellowships depending on the life stage of women so that those who want to come back can do either after marriage or after relocation due to husband's transfer (Bamji, 2008: 3).

Lacking a contextual perspective for the provision of two schemes the effect is likely to be marginal. In fact, one is forced to ask the questions: how far is this public policy really for public good? What kind of democratic processes end up

in such a narrow vision and end product? Are we serious about the role of education in promoting change and gender equality in the age of globalisation and privatisation? This is especially so when global changes are viewed as gendered, racialised and classed. Again, when profit is the central parameter defining educational priorities and choices, considerations of gender, marginality, race, caste, class, ethnicity are lost (Brine, 1999).

Thus, the agencies involved in planning and in providing a vision and direction to growth and development of higher education have to adopt an overall approach or model which will encompass the general population as well as the social groups including women in all types of educational institutions. Sadly, this is not happening with the higher level agencies which call the shots and whose recommendations go into the final policy documents. Higher education can not be a change agent without a holistic view and without engaging with all the complexities of gender equality as it is expressed both within the educational system and in the wider society in which the system operates. It is a challenge to address these issues and to incorporate them in the policy.

Finally, the foregoing discussion demonstrates that policy analysis from a gendered perspective is missing (Chanana, 2006). Further, no effort is made to integrate equality into all policies and programmes from the stage of formulation to implementation. Needless to say that it is critical to incorporate gender concerns in the overall policy relating to the educational institutions and affecting students, faculty and staff. For this to happen, a comprehensive conceptual framework has to evolve for the inclusion of women in higher education and to bring an end to the process of exclusion. In its absence, one has to understand why are the policy recommendations stuck in a time warp. Will the XII Plan come out of it which is currently in the process of formulation?

Why Stuck in a Time Warp?

The paradox lies in the fact that while, on the one hand, the state policy and public discourse on education put a premium on the need to promote education among girls and women to generate positive forces at the macro-level, the macro policy, on the other hand, is coloured by the cultural contours surrounding the societal conception of the feminine role. Lesley and Watson (1999: 6) refer to the embeddedness of women's exclusion in some of the critical concepts in social policy discourse. Therefore, according to them, the discourse of inclusion and exclusion has to be replaced with an inclusive discourse of difference (Gale and Densmore, 2000: 123). Rees (1999) contends that a paradigm shift is required to integrate equality into all policies and programmes from the stage of formulation to implementation.

The history of women's education reveals a dialectic between the demand for women's education and the opposition encountered in the process; how to live up to the promise of education and also perform the feminine role. The state policy

can neutralise the adverse impact of socio-cultural practices by providing for the kind of education that is socially desirable. However, educational policies have to be informed by social sensibilities but be forward looking. The differentiation between social access (Acker, 1984) and access to education is used by scholars to bring home to the policymakers and those who implement the programmes that making facilities available is not a sufficient condition to attract girls and women to formal educational institutions (Chanana, 2001: 3). What is needed is socially responsive infrastructure and facilities, such as socially acceptable location of schools (and hostels).

It seems that the dominant discourses of femininity and cultural reproduction impact on the recommendations in the final analysis. Thus, Bell and Stevenson (2006: 29) argue that while policies are decisively shaped by powerful structural forces of an economic, ideological and cultural nature it is critical to understand how societal culture shapes state policy.

When we pay close attention to the frameworks of cultural meaning people use to interpret their experience and general social behaviour, we see not only the recipients of educational policy but also its authorised formulators and purveyors as fully cultural animals as well (Sutton and Levinson, 2001: 3).

According to Lesley and Watson, 'There are many ways in which the… state both constructed and was underpinned by, delineated roles for women, mainstream social policy analysis remains sadly uninformed by questions of gender' (1999: 1). Sadgopal (2004: 59) argues that exclusion and discrimination are inherent in the present operating education policy. Sutton and Levinson (2001: 1) contend that policy is a complex social practice and is also a process of normative cultural production.

Going through the various documents it is evident how the educational policies are subverted in the process of its formulation by the gendered visions of custodians of formal education, namely, educational administrators, planners and policy makers. Thus, the process of subversion, conscious and explicit or indirect and implicit, continues unhindered (Chanana, 2001: 57).[24] It has a negative impact on the inclusion of women in higher education. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that policies remain informed and underpinned by questions of gender throughout the stages of conceptualisation and formulation to make them meaningfully operational.

Notes

1. Since its Independence, India has been planning its development on a five yearly basis and these are known as Plans. As mentioned above, currently the XI Plan is underway. Before finalisation of the Plan document, countrywide extensive and intensive consultations and deliberations are undertaken and reports prepared at different levels by experts. These go into the making of the final document.

2. It is much lower in the rest of the South Asian region, for example, as per the data for 2007, Bangladesh 7 per cent [9 per cent male, 5 per cent female]; Bhutan 5 per cent [7 per cent men, 3 per cent women]; Nepal 11 per cent [breakup not given]; Pakistan 5 per cent [6 per cent men, 5 per cent women]. The other countries of the South Asian region such as Afghanistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka have not provided any information although Sri Lanka would be much better on all the parameters [UNESCO 2009].

3. This figure excludes students enrolled in polytechnics and Industrial Training Institutes, which are post secondary, but run diploma and certificate courses and do not grant degrees.

4. The percentages are worked out from table B-1, pp. 9–13, India 2007. It includes the category 'others' i.e., of unspecified subjects such as law, agriculture, veterinary science, music and fine arts etc.

5. The untouchable castes which were provided constitutional protection through reservation of seats in all public educational and occupational organisations were labelled Schedules Castes. Now they are also referred to as Dalits or the exploited.

6. Some of the tribes were also provided the same protection as the SCs. They are also now referred to as Scheduled Tribes (ST) or Adivasis or the original inhabitants.

7. The reservation for SCs is 15 per cent, for STs 7.5 per cent. From the current year, 27 per cent seats have been reserved for the other backward castes or OBCs.

8. Unaided institutions do not receive any financial aid from the government to run the institutions. They are expected to make no profit since the land is given to them at almost no cost. They are also set up as charitable trusts and organisations, etc. This is how the private educational institutions under the colonial period were established. Now, however, they flout all the provisions and make profit and so I prefer to call them for-profit ones.

9. The high cost of professional and market driven higher education mainly in the private but also in the public or state universities and colleges sector is likely to have gendered impact. In a country (in other countries of the Asian region with the culture of son preference as well) the reluctance of parents to educate daughters is well known. For instance, high cost of marriage in the form of dowry is likely to be a barrier to women's education and subsequent utilisation in the market. Parents choose between the expenses on a daughter's dowry and her education especially if they have a son or sons. So dowry and son preference complicate the situation. There is a flip side to it too. The value of a daughter in the marriage market increases as the chances of a groom with equivalent or higher qualifications and a high status job increases.

10. They receive 90–95 per cent funds from the UGC or state governments.

11. The public sector HEIs have also introduced the same academic courses and programmes which are fee paying. Though the amount of tuition fees is much lower in the public HEIs in comparison to the private ones, yet it is difficult for those from the disadvantaged groups to bear the costs.

12. I have explained the increase in women's enrollment in the sciences elsewhere (Chanana 2007).

13. What is noteworthy is that there is a decline in the women's enrollment proportionately (not numerically though) in most of the subjects such as science, commerce, education, engineering, medicine, law, agriculture and even veterinary science between 2005–06 to 2006–07.

14. In Northern India women from across religions, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Jainism were generally secluded. While female seclusion is a social practice widely associated with Islam it would be interesting to get statistical data to substantiate the point that the traditional social practice of female seclusion pushed women into modern education of medicine and profession of medical doctor—something which has come rather late to the US (after the 1960s–70s women's movement).

15. This was culled out from the telephone directory.

16. I am very grateful to Prof. Armaity Desai, former chairperson UGC, and chair of the subgroup to send me the report.

17. I am very grateful to Prof. Mahtab Bamji, member of both the committees, who sent me the INSA report and the recommendations of the women in science for the planning commission. She is located in Hyderabad. She retired from the National Institute of Nutrition and is now associated with an NGO, Dangoria Charitable Trust, working in the villages of Medak district, with its headquarters in Narsapur district. In addition, I have been in communication with Prof.Vineeta Bal, M.D., (National Institute of Immunology, Aruna Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi 110 067) and Prof. Rohini Godbole, Centre for High Energy Physics, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560012, India. Both of them were members of the committee to draft recommendations for inclusion of women in Science. I am grateful to them for a quick response to my SOS.

18. The study on which this report is based was undertaken by SNDT university, Mumbai.

19. Personal communication from Prof. Rohini Godbole. Prof. Godbole was a member of S &T advisory committee to cabinet SAC(C).

20. The document circulated to the National Development Council was sent by Prof. Bhushan, NUEPA, for the consultation meet.

21. No doubt the recommended schemes can be effective in bringing in more women into higher education and also in retaining them there but the impact will remain marginal unless an inclusive framework is conceptualised and impact is monitored.

22. Married students hostels, a gender neutral facility, based on my experience in JNU, is also very supportive of women students to complete Ph.D. This will be very important for science students. Additionally, child care centres, a gender neutral facility, be mandatory in all HEIs which may be used by both women and men students and faculty.

23. In this context the example of DST fellowships was recommended for all women scientists across the country. In response to an advertisement, two thousand women responded, out of which 1100 were from Life sciences. In each subject 9–10 per cent got selected except life sciences where 6 per cent got in, the numbers are evidence that women scientists want to come back. (SNDT report) WIS also recommends modification of recruitment rules especially in the case of women scientists, namely, husbands and wives cannot be appointed in the same institution.

24. For instance, when the feminists raised the issue of 'home science' being labelled as a feminine discipline, they were arguing for a broader framework and for making it gender neutral. But several elite private co-educational schools in Delhi discontinued this subject thereby closing the option of a career (as home science school teachers) to women. Perhaps, considerations of cost went into this myopic decision because home science entails setting up laboratories. It also meant saving on teacher salary.

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