

Implementation of Women's Education Schemes in Haryana's Government Schools under the National Education Policy (2020–2025):

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Abstract

Despite strong policy frameworks and initiatives introduced under the NEP 2020, women's education schemes in Haryana's government schools face several systemic challenges. Issues such as inadequate teacher training, poor infrastructure, lack of awareness, and deep-rooted socio-cultural norms have led to a significant gap between policy intentions, their implementation, and the actual realities of government schooling in Haryana.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Girls' Education in India: Policy and Implementation.

Education, though constitutionally recognized as a fundamental right, continues to remain an unfulfilled promise for many girls in India, as systemic gaps in implementation and entrenched socio-cultural barriers restrict their access to meaningful educational opportunities. The National Education Policy (2020) reinforces the transformative potential of education, asserting that “education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society, and promoting national development” (NEP 2020, p. 3).¹ This positions education not merely as a service, but as a powerful instrument for equality, social mobility, and empowerment.

The policy further aligns itself with global commitments such as Sustainable Development Goals

- 4, emphasizing the need to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.²

Within this framework, the discourse on girls' education shifts beyond access towards inclusion, participation, and empowerment. NEP 2020 explicitly recognizes education as “the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion, and equality”.³ Highlighting its role in bridging gender disparities.

¹National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020, p. 3. “Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society, and promoting national development.”

²Ibid p. 3. SDG 4

³Ibid p. 5.

A central pillar of the policy is equity and inclusion, which it identifies as the “cornerstone of all educational decisions”.⁴

It calls for targeted interventions to support “historically marginalized, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups”.⁵

Implicitly including girls who face layered disadvantages due to gender, class, and geography. The policy promises a system where “all students, irrespective of their place of residence, are provided a quality education system”.⁶

Thereby envisioning equal opportunity across rural and urban contexts.

In practical terms, NEP 2020 outlines several structural commitments aimed at improving access and retention. It emphasizes the need to “curtail dropout rates and ensure universal access to education at all levels”⁷ with a target of achieving “100% Gross Enrolment Ratio in preschool to secondary level by 2030.”⁸

Importantly, it acknowledges gender-specific barriers by calling for “safe and practical conveyances and or hostels, especially for the girl children”,⁹ recognizing safety and mobility as critical factors in girls’ education.

The policy also promises holistic development through reforms in pedagogy, stating that education must move towards “critical thinking, creativity and multidisciplinary learning”.¹⁰

⁴Ibid p. 5

⁵Ibid p. 5

⁶Ibid p. 5

⁷Ibid p. 10

⁸Ibid p. 10

⁹Ibid p. 10

¹⁰Ibid p. 3

While ensuring that learning environments are “safe and stimulating” with adequate infrastructure and resources.¹¹

These commitments collectively envision an education system that is not only accessible but also empowering and transformative.

However, despite these comprehensive and progressive commitments, the translation of policy into practice remains uneven. The lived realities in states such as Haryana reveal persistent challenges ranging from inadequate infrastructure and weak implementation mechanisms to deeply rooted gender norms that continue to limit the effectiveness of these initiatives. This creates a stark gap between what is promised on paper and what is experienced on the ground.

This divergence raises a critical question: if the frameworks for empowerment are already in place, why do significant barriers to girls’ education persist?

This research seeks to address this question by examining the implementation of women’s education schemes. It critically analyses whether the ambitious vision of NEP 2020 has translated into tangible change, or whether structural inefficiencies and socio-cultural constraints continue to undermine its impact.

The central argument of this study is that while India’s policy framework, particularly under NEP 2020, is ambitious, inclusive, and forward-looking, its effectiveness remains constrained by systemic and societal barriers. As a result, a significant gap persists between policy intent and lived reality, preventing education from fully realizing its potential as a tool of empowerment for girls. In addition to structural reforms, the National Education Policy 2020 also recognizes the crucial link between education and basic welfare, particularly nutrition and health.

¹¹Ibid p. 5

It acknowledges that “children are unable to learn optimally when they are undernourished or unwell” and therefore emphasizes the provision of “healthy meals” as an integral part of the schooling system.¹²

The policy further strengthens this commitment by extending the mid-day meal programme to preparatory classes in primary schools, ensuring that nutritional support begins at the earliest stages of formal education.¹³

By integrating nutrition with education, NEP envisions schools not merely as spaces of academic learning but as institutions that support the overall well-being and development of children. For girls in particular who often face disproportionate nutritional neglect and household responsibilities such provisions are critical in improving attendance, retention, and learning outcomes. Thus, the policy promises a more holistic approach, where access to education is complemented by the basic conditions necessary for students to meaningfully participate and succeed.

II. Methodology and Limitations

This study was conducted using primary data collected through a structured questionnaire which was given in their primary language, administered to a sample of 15 female students from government schools in the semi-urban region of Chakkarpur, Gurgaon, Haryana. The respondents represented a specific age distribution, with 5 students aged 12 and the remaining participants between 14 and 16 years.

¹²Ibid p. 9

¹³Ibid p. 8.

All responses were collected anonymously to ensure privacy and encourage honest participation, and no personal identifiers such as names were recorded. While all participants contributed through the survey, one student voluntarily engaged in more in-depth discussions, which further extended to conversations with her family. With prior consent, notes were documented. During the field work conducted for this research paper, one major limitation was that several girls interviewed were not fully comfortable or transparent while answering questions, which affected the depth and meaningfulness of the responses collected. Additionally, the sample size for the research was limited, restricting the diversity of perspectives and making it difficult to generalize the findings on a larger scale.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

For decades, education was celebrated as the ultimate equalizer a pathway through which social mobility, empowerment, and gender justice could supposedly be achieved. Governments and policymakers across post-independence India embraced this belief, treating rising enrolment rates and expanding access as evidence of progress. Yet beneath these statistics lay a far more complex reality: the presence of schools did not necessarily translate into freedom, agency, or meaningful transformation for girls.

Earlier discourse prioritized access and enrolment, assuming that expanding educational opportunities would naturally produce equality. Naila Kabeer, in *Reversed Realities*, argues that “resources, agency, and achievements are the three critical dimensions of empowerment”.¹⁴

¹⁴ Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*, Verso, 1994, p. 63. “Resources, agency, and achievements are the three critical dimensions of empowerment.”

She further notes that policies often “treat women as passive recipients rather than active agents” (Kabeer 72)¹⁵, a failure clearly visible in education schemes where rising enrolment masks persistent.

Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen reinforce this in *An Uncertain Glory*, arguing that “the problem is not so much that policies are lacking, but that they are poorly implemented” (Drèze and Sen 109)¹⁶, a diagnosis that applies directly to the Haryana context this study examines. Together, these scholars mark a shift from measuring policy provision to evaluating policy effectiveness the historiographical tradition within which this research is situated.

Suresh Kashinath Ghatge and Anuradha Parasar, in their 2022 empirical study of women's education across 1,042 Indian universities, expose a fundamental paradox at the heart of India's educational expansion. At its ideological root, they observe that “the problems affecting women's education is due to conservative mindset of society and the level measured of women is always lower in comparison to the men”.¹⁷ This devaluation has ancient precedent: “after the Vedic period, Aryasamaj was against women empowerment and totally denied the authority to study Vedas”.¹⁸

In the present, this historical exclusion manifests as concrete, everyday failure Indian women continue facing “lack of transport, lack of encouragement and not giving effort by the official incharge of education”,¹⁹ while the obstacles come due to the lack of coordination between home and the outside life environment”.²⁰ Most strikingly, their data reveals that “the willingness

¹⁵Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*, Verso, 1994, p. 63. “Resources, agency, and achievements are the three critical dimensions of empowerment.”

¹⁶Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions*, Princeton University Press, 2013,

p. 109. “The problem is not so much that policies are lacking, but that they are poorly implemented.” ¹⁷Ghatge, Suresh Kashinath, and Anuradha Parasar. “Women Education in India: An Empirical Study.” *NeuroQuantology*, vol. 20, no. 15, Nov. 2022, p. 6341.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 6341.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 6341.

²⁰Ibid, p. 6341.

towards education is greater among female candidates compared to the male candidates, but they remain unable to meet their target based on several social and religious perspectives".²¹

What Ghatge and Parasar ultimately demonstrate is that India's expansion of educational infrastructure has outpaced its confrontation with the cultural and structural conditions that determine whether women can actually use it. The institutions exist, the schemes have been launched, and the statistics show growing enrolment yet the distance between a girl's aspiration and her achievement remains governed by forces that policy has consistently failed to dismantle. Their study is therefore not simply an account of educational access but an indictment of the gap between what the state promises and what society permits.

OBJECTIVES OF NEP 2020

1. Equity and Inclusion

At the heart of the National Education Policy 2020 lies an unwavering commitment to equity and inclusion, which the policy identifies as the "cornerstone of all educational decisions"

(NEP 2020, p. 5).²² This framing is significant: it positions equity not as an auxiliary concern but as the foundational principle upon which all other educational reforms rest. The policy recognizes that India's diverse socio-economic landscape has historically produced severe educational disparities, and that any meaningful reform must begin by addressing the structural inequalities that deny millions of children their right to education.

²¹Ghatge, Suresh Kashinath, and Anuradha Parasar. "Women Education in India: An Empirical Study." *NeuroQuantology*, vol. 20, no. 15, Nov. 2022, p. 6350.

²²Ministry of Education, Government of India. *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India, 2020, p. 5.

To this end, NEP 2020 calls for targeted interventions in favour of "historically marginalized, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups".²³

A category that encompasses girls, children from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, children with disabilities, and those from economically weaker sections. The policy envisions education as "the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion, and equality".²⁴

Furthermore, the policy asserts the right of every child to quality education regardless of their place of residence or socio-economic background, acknowledging that geography and class have long determined educational outcomes in India.²⁵

By committing to dismantling these barriers, NEP 2020 aspires to build an education system that is genuinely inclusive one in which no child is left behind on account of circumstances beyond their control.

2. Universal Access and Enrolment

NEP 2020 articulates an ambitious vision of universal access to school education at all levels, spanning from early childhood to the secondary stage.²⁶

This represents a decisive expansion of the state's educational commitment, moving beyond the earlier focus on primary enrolment to encompass the full school trajectory of every child.

The policy sets a concrete target of achieving a 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio by 2030,²⁷ reflecting its aspiration to ensure that no child remains outside the formal education system.

²³Ibid., p. 5.

²⁴Ibid., p. 5

²⁵Ibid., p. 5. *Commitment to equal access to quality education regardless of location or socio-economic background.*

²⁶Ibid., p. 10..

²⁷Ibid., p. 10.

A particularly significant dimension of this commitment is the inclusion of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a formal foundational stage of schooling.²⁸

By recognizing that learning begins well before primary school, the policy acknowledges the critical importance of early developmental experiences in shaping long-term educational outcomes. The expansion of the school system to cover children from the age of three ensures that even the earliest years of a child's life are supported by structured and quality educational inputs.

3. Retention and Reduction of Dropouts

NEP 2020 makes an explicit commitment to “curtail dropout rates and ensure universal access to education at all levels”,²⁹ recognizing that mere enrolment is insufficient if children cannot be retained within the school system. Dropout rates in India, particularly at the secondary level, remain a serious concern, and the policy acknowledges that girls and students from disadvantaged communities are disproportionately affected by this challenge.³⁰

The policy identifies a lack of engagement and perceived irrelevance of education as key drivers of dropout, and therefore emphasizes the need to make schooling more meaningful, contextual, and aligned with students' lived realities.³¹

By reforming curriculum design and pedagogical approaches to foster curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking, NEP 2020 seeks to make schools places where children want to remain, rather than institutions they are compelled to leave. For girls especially, who often face competing

²⁸Ibid., p. 10. Target of achieving 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio by 2030.

²⁹Ibid., p. 10. Inclusion of Early Childhood Care and Education as a formal foundational stage of schooling.

³⁰Ibid., p. 10.

³¹Ibid., p. 10. *Emphasis on improving the engagement and relevance of education to reduce dropout rates.*

demands from household labour and early marriage, the relevance and quality of education become decisive factors in determining whether they continue their schooling.

4. Infrastructure and Accessibility

NEP 2020 recognizes that physical infrastructure is not merely a logistical concern but a fundamental determinant of educational access, particularly for girls. The policy explicitly provides for “safe and practical conveyances or hostels, especially for the girl child”,³² acknowledging that the distance between home and school is one of the most significant barriers preventing girls from continuing their education. In rural and semi-urban contexts, where schools are often located far from residential areas, the absence of safe transport is frequently cited as a reason for girls being withdrawn from the system by their families.

Beyond transport and residential facilities, the policy calls for the creation of learning environments that are “safe and stimulating”,³³ with adequate physical infrastructure and resources.³⁴

This includes functional classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and sanitation facilities. The latter being particularly critical for retaining girl students at the secondary level. The policy's recognition that the physical environment of a school shapes the quality of learning within it underscores its commitment to an education system where every child, regardless of location, has access to a dignified and supportive school experience.

³²Ibid., p. 10.

³³Ibid., p. 5.

³⁴Ibid., p. 5. Assurance of adequate school infrastructure and resources as a prerequisite for equitable education.

5. Nutrition and Welfare Support

One of the more distinctive features of NEP 2020 is its explicit recognition of the link between nutrition and educational outcomes. The policy acknowledges that “children are unable to learn optimally when they are undernourished or unwell”,³⁵ thereby situating nutritional support as an educational intervention rather than merely a welfare measure. This understanding reflects a holistic conception of the child, one whose capacity to learn is inseparable from their physical condition.

In response, the policy recommends the provision of nutritious meals, including breakfast in some cases, as an integral component of the school day.³⁶

It further extends the mid-day meal scheme to preparatory classes in primary schools, ensuring that nutritional

support is available from the earliest stage of formal education.³⁷

For girls who are frequently subject to nutritional neglect within the household and who may come to school without having eaten such provisions can be transformative, both in terms of their health and their ability to participate meaningfully in learning. By integrating nutrition with education, NEP 2020 envisions schools as institutions of holistic child welfare,³⁸ not merely sites of academic instruction.

6. Health, Hygiene, and Well-Being

NEP encompasses the broader health and well-being of students. The policy emphasizes the importance of regular health check-ups and growth monitoring as part of the school system's

³⁵Ibid., p. 9.

³⁶Ibid., p. 9. Policy recommendation for the provision of nutritious meals, including breakfast in some cases, to support learning readiness.

³⁷Ibid., p. 8. Extension of the mid-day meal scheme to preparatory classes in primary schools.

³⁸Ibid., p. 9. Integration of education with child welfare and overall well-being as a holistic policy vision.

responsibilities,³⁹ recognizing that many children lack access to basic healthcare outside the school environment. By embedding health monitoring within the school framework, the policy positions education as a point of welfare delivery for India's most vulnerable children.

Equally significant is the policy's attention to mental health and psychological well-being.⁴⁰

For girls who navigate layered pressures Including gender-based violence, domestic responsibilities, and the social stigma often associated with their pursuit of education mental health support within schools is not a luxury but a necessity.

The policy also includes sanitation and hygiene as curricular concerns,⁴¹ with particular relevance for girl students, for whom the availability of functional and private sanitation facilities has been shown to be a critical factor in secondary school retention.

7. Safety and Gender-Sensitive Support

NEP 2020 explicitly acknowledges the gender-specific barriers that prevent girls from accessing and completing their education,⁴² a recognition that marks a departure from gender-neutral policy language towards a more targeted and responsive framework. The policy understands that girls' educational trajectories are shaped not only by the availability of schools but by a complex web of social norms, safety concerns, and institutional inadequacies that disproportionately affect them. To address these barriers in concrete terms, the policy commits to the provision of safe transport and hostel facilities specifically designed to support girls' continuity in education.

³⁹Ibid., p. 9. Emphasis on regular health check-ups and growth monitoring as part of the school system's welfare mandate.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 9. Focus on mental health and psychological well-being alongside physical health within the school framework.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 9. Inclusion of sanitation and hygiene awareness as part of the curriculum, particularly relevant for girl students.

⁴²Ibid., p. 10. Explicit recognition of gender-specific barriers that prevent girls from accessing and completing education.

Current Status of Women's Education

Literacy Rates

Region	Male Literacy Rate	Female Literacy Rate	Gender Gap
India	84 - 85%	70 - 71%	14 - 15%
Haryana	84 - 85%	66 - 70%	15 - 18%

Dropout Rates

Level of Education	Dropout Rate	Insight
Primary	2 - 3%	Low dropout due to improved access
Upper Primary	3 - 4%	Slight increase
Secondary	8%+	Sharp rise, especially among girls

Higher Education and Enrolment

Indicator	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Insight
School Enrolment (overall)	48 - 50%	50 - 52%	Near parity
Secondary Completion	Lower	Higher	Girls drop out more
Higher Education Participation	Lower	Higher	Gender gap persists

The data reveals a consistent pattern. While access to education in India has improved and girl enrolment has approached parity, significant gender disparities persist in literacy and retention. This is particularly evident in states such as Haryana. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)⁴³, female literacy continues to lag behind male literacy at the national level. Census data further indicates an even wider gender gap at the state level in Haryana.

⁴³ National Family Health Survey, NFHS-5(2019-21): India Fact Sheet, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, 2021.

Analysis

Responses to the structured questionnaire administered at PM Shri Government Senior Secondary School, Chakkarpur (refer to Annexure A),⁴⁴ reveal a consistent and significant divergence between the commitments of NEP 2020 and the educational realities experienced by girls in this semi-urban government school. Across every domain examined, the policy's framework has not meaningfully reached its intended beneficiaries. On the question of scheme awareness, respondents confirmed that government entitlements "have not been clearly explained" to them, with most aware only of free textbooks and uniforms. Scholarships, digital programmes, menstrual hygiene schemes, and transport provisions all committed to under NEP 2020⁴⁵ remain unknown and unreceived. Benefits that do exist arrive "rarely and not in a reliable manner," directly undermining the policy's equity commitments. Teaching quality emerged as the most critical failure. When asked to describe classroom instruction, respondents stated:

"I rarely understand the lessons fully. I attend external tuitions to understand better."

The syllabus is frequently left incomplete, and individual attention is entirely absent. Attendance is further disrupted by household responsibilities compelling girls to leave early, a pattern that directly contradicts NEP 2020's commitment to curtailing dropout rates and ensuring full participation.⁴⁶ Infrastructure deficits compound these failures: washrooms are functional "only sometimes," sanitary products are "provided only occasionally," and digital tools are "limited and

⁴⁴Annexure A for the complete structured questionnaire responses collected from students at PM Shri Government Senior Secondary School, Chakkarpur, Gurgaon (2025).

⁴⁵ National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Education, Government of India, p. 5. The policy commits to equitable access to scholarships, digital infrastructure, menstrual hygiene facilities, and safe transport, with particular emphasis on underserved communities.

⁴⁶ National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Education, Government of India, p. 10. The policy explicitly commits to reducing dropout rates, ensuring full scholastic participation, and addressing gender-based barriers to attendance.

insufficient".⁴⁷ Socio-cultural pressures further threaten continuity, with respondents having personally considered dropping out "due to family pressure and a lack of institutional support,". When asked what single intervention would most improve their education, respondents identified:

"Better teaching quality and the proper provision of promised facilities."

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that NEP 2020's commitments to equitable, inclusive, and quality education remain largely aspirational for girls in semi-urban government schools. The gap is not merely one of resources but of implementation, accountability, and institutional will. Until policy reaches the classroom not just the policy document the lived experience of girls like those at PM Shri will continue to contradict the promises made on their behalf.

Qualitative Case Study: In-Depth Interview

This research included an in-depth interview with one student and two members of her family her mother and her paternal grandmother. The interview was conducted with prior consent, and all identifying information has been withheld to preserve confidentiality.⁴⁸ This qualitative dimension of the study provides a granular understanding of the household dynamics, financial pressures, and gendered attitudes that shape a girl's relationship with education factors that survey data alone cannot capture. The student is fourteen years old and was enrolled at PM Shri Government Senior

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.5.

⁴⁸In-depth interview conducted with a 14-year-old female student, her mother, and her grandmother at *PM Shri Government Senior Secondary School*, Chakkarpur, Gurgaon, Haryana, 2025. The identity of the respondent and her family members has been kept strictly confidential.

Secondary School; her younger sister, aged seven, attends the junior section of the same institution.⁴⁹

The student described a persistent difficulty in understanding concepts as they were taught in school, a gap she attributed directly to the quality of classroom instruction. Unable to follow lessons adequately, she was compelled to enrol in private tuition classes outside school hours in order to keep pace with the curriculum.

"I do not understand what is taught in class. I have to go for tuition outside to understand the lessons."

This placed an additional and significant financial burden on her family a burden that sits in sharp contradiction with NEP 2020's vision of a quality public education system sufficiently robust that no child should need to seek supplementary instruction at personal cost.

On the matter of nutrition, the student's account directly contradicts NEP 2020's stated commitment to providing nutritious meals as an integral component of schooling.⁵⁰ She described the meals provided at school as insufficiently nutritious and, on occasion, consisting of leftover food.

"The food at school is not good. Sometimes they give us leftover food."

For a policy that explicitly recognises that children "are unable to learn optimally when they are undernourished or unwell," the provision of substandard meals represents not merely a logistical

⁴⁹Ibid. The student's younger sister, aged 7, is enrolled in the junior section of the same school, indicating continued family engagement with the institution despite financial and attitudinal constraints.

⁵⁰*National Education Policy 2020*, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020, p. 9. "Children are unable to learn optimally when they are undernourished or unwell." Policy commits to provision of nutritious meals as integral to the schooling system.

shortcoming but a direct failure of the policy's own welfare logic. The impact of inadequate nutrition on concentration, attendance, and learning outcomes is well-documented, and its particular effect on adolescent girls who frequently face nutritional neglect within the household as well cannot be overstated.

The student further reported that she had never been provided with sanitary pads at school, nor had any nursing or health support been available to her when needed.⁵¹

"We have never been given sanitary pads in school. There is no nurse either."

The absence of menstrual hygiene provisions in a secondary school with a predominantly female student body

is a failure with direct consequences for attendance and dignity.

The interview with the student's mother illuminated the financial dimension of educational discontinuity with particular clarity. She explained that girls in the family had previously been withdrawn from school upon entering Class 9, the point at which the demands of secondary education additional textbooks, examination fees, and the cost of private tuition became financially unmanageable for the household.

"In our family, girls used to stop school at Class 9. After that, the fees, the books, the tuition it becomes too much for us to manage."

NEP 2020 explicitly commits to curtailing dropout rates and ensuring that financial constraints do not prevent girls from continuing their education,⁵² yet the mother's account describes precisely the scenario the policy was designed to prevent: a family willing in principle to educate its

⁵¹Ibid., p. 9. Commitment to menstrual hygiene provisions and student welfare support within the school system.

⁵²Ibid., p. 10. NEP 2020 commits to curtailing dropout rates and retaining girls within the school system, with specific provisions targeting financial and infrastructural barriers.

daughters, but unable to do so in practice because the costs of supplementing an inadequate public system fall entirely on the household.

The father's perspective, as relayed during the interview, reflects a deeply entrenched patriarchal attitude towards girls' education: in his view, educating daughters was unnecessary, as their futures were understood to lie in marriage rather than professional or personal development.

"What is the point of educating a girl? She will get married anyway."

This position that girls are destined for domestic roles and therefore do not require or deserve investment in education is precisely the kind of socio-cultural barrier that NEP 2020 seeks to dismantle through its equity and inclusion framework. Yet the policy's silence at the household level, its inability to reach and reshape the attitudes of families like this one, reveals the limits of a framework that addresses structural provision without adequately engaging the social and familial contexts in which girls' educational decisions are actually made.

The most significant counter-narrative to emerge from the interview was provided by the student's paternal grandmother, who had actively and persistently advocated for her granddaughter's right to continue her education against the father's opposition.

"I told them she must study. I will not let them stop her."

It was largely due to her intervention that the student remained enrolled.

Taken together, this case study presents a portrait of compounding disadvantage: a student who cannot understand her lessons without paid help, who eats inadequate meals, who has never received a sanitary pad from her school, whose examinations are erratic, whose father considers her education irrelevant, and whose continued enrolment depends on the determination of her grandmother. Each of these conditions individually represents a failure of implementation; together, they constitute a lived experience that stands in near-total opposition to the vision of empowering, equitable, and holistic education that NEP 2020 articulates. That this student remains in school at all is a testament to her own resilience and her grandmother's advocacy not to the system that was designed to support her.

Situating Primary Findings Within National Evidence Annual Status of Education Report 2023 Beyond Basics

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023, titled *Beyond Basics* and published by Pratham, is the largest independent survey of educational outcomes for adolescents in rural India, covering 34,745 youth aged 14 to 18 across 26 states.⁵³ Its findings provide national-scale evidence that directly corroborates the conditions documented in this study's primary data. While the report records that 86.8% of 14–18-year-olds are enrolled in school, it simultaneously reveals that the proportion not enrolled rises sharply from 3.9% at age 14 to 32.6% at age 18 (ASER 2023).⁵⁴ This pattern high enrolment at entry, steep dropout at secondary level confirms that retention, not access, is the central failure of the system, and directly contradicts NEP 2020's target of 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio by 2030 (NEP 2020, p. 10).⁵⁵

On learning quality, ASER 2023 finds that approximately 25% of 14–18-year-olds cannot read a Class 2 level text in their regional language.

⁵³Pratham Education Foundation, *Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023: Beyond Basics*, Pratham, 2024. Survey conducted across 28 districts in 26 states, covering 34,745 youth aged 14–18 in rural India.

⁵⁴Ibid. Enrolment data: 86.8% of 14–18-year-olds enrolled; proportion not enrolled rises from 3.9% at age 14 to 32.6% at age 18.

⁵⁵*National Education Policy 2020*, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020, p. 10. Target of 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio by 2030; commitment to curtailing dropout rates.

These are students who have spent years within the formal school system. This mirrors the primary findings from Chakkarpur, where respondents described understanding lessons only “rarely” and feeling unprepared for examinations because teaching was “frequently incomplete.” The ASER data confirms that this is not an isolated failure at one school but a systemic pattern replicated across rural India.

ASER 2023 also identifies persistent gender-specific barriers that deepen as girls progress through education. The report highlights that marriage norms remain a key driver of young women’s inability to continue studying, that females are enrolled in STEM streams at significantly lower rates than males, and that 48.3% of girls have no career role model whatsoever.⁵⁶ These findings resonate directly with this study’s case study, in which the student’s father considered her education irrelevant in anticipation of marriage, and with survey respondents who described career awareness as existing only “to a limited extent.” Taken together, the ASER data and the primary evidence from PM Shri Government Senior Secondary School tell the same story at different scales: girls in India’s government school system are enrolled but not learning, and present but not empowered

III. CONCLUSION

This research set out to examine whether NEP 2020’s commitments to girls’ education have translated into meaningful change within Haryana’s government school system. The policy is unambiguous in its vision: equity and inclusion as the “cornerstone of all educational decisions,” universal access, zero dropout, safe infrastructure, nutritional support, and gender-sensitive

⁵⁶Ibid. Marriage norms identified as a key barrier to girls’ continued education; females enrolled in STEM at 28.1% vs. 36.3% for males. 48.3% of females have no career role model.

provisions for every girl student (NEP 2020, p. 5).⁵⁷ The evidence gathered through this study primary, qualitative, and secondary demonstrates that this vision remains largely unrealised on the ground.

The primary data from PM Shri Government Senior Secondary School, Chakkarpur reveals a school in which girls are unaware of their own entitlements, receive benefits only partially and inconsistently, are taught by teachers who are sometimes absent and rarely explain concepts, lack access to sanitary products and adequate nutrition, and feel safe only sometimes within the institution that is supposed to protect them.^{58,59} The in-depth case study deepens this picture: a fourteen-year-old who requires paid private tuition to understand what the state is obligated to teach her; whose meals at school are inadequate or leftover; whose father considers her education irrelevant; and whose continued schooling exists only because her grandmother refused to accept its termination. That her education depends on a grandmother’s determination rather than on institutional guarantee is the clearest measure of how far the system falls short.

The ASER 2023 report confirms that these failures are not confined to one school or one district. Nationally, dropout rises from 3.9% at age 14 to 32.6% by age 18; one in four adolescents cannot read a Class 2 text after years in school; and marriage norms continue to function as a structural ceiling on girls’ aspirations (ASER 2023).⁶⁰ What this study documents at the level of one classroom, ASER confirms at the level of a nation.

⁵⁷*National Education Policy 2020*, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020, p. 5. “Full equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of all educational decisions.”

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 10. Commitment to curtailing dropout rates; provision of safe conveyances and hostels for girl students; target of 100% GER by 2030.

⁵⁹Primary questionnaire data and in-depth interview, *PM Shri Government Senior Secondary School*, Chakkarpur, Gurgaon, Haryana, 2025.

⁶⁰Pratham Education Foundation, *Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023: Beyond Basics*, Pratham, 2024. 32.6% of 18-year-olds unenrolled; 25% of 14–18-year-olds unable to read Class 2 level text; marriage norms identified as key barrier for girls.

NEP 2020 is an ambitious and genuinely inclusive framework. But ambition on paper does not feed a girl, teach a concept, or keep her in school when her family decides otherwise. Until implementation matches intent through accountability, resourcing, and the political will to enforce what the policy promises the gap between what NEP 2020 says and what girls in Haryana experience will remain. For the students of PM Shri Government Senior Secondary School, that gap is not an abstraction. It is the condition of their education.

ANNEXURE A

Structured Questionnaire Responses

PM Shri Government Senior Secondary School, Chakkarpur, Gurgaon Academic Year 2025

This annexure contains the complete structured questionnaire responses collected during primary field research. Responses are presented verbatim to preserve the authenticity of student perspectives.

Table 1: Structured Questionnaire Responses; PM Shri Government Senior Secondary School, Chakkarpur, Gurgaon (2025)

No.	Research Question	Response
SECTION A: AWARENESS OF SCHEMES AND RIGHTS		
1	Are you aware of any government schemes or rights specifically aimed at supporting girls' education?	<i>Not really; these schemes have not been clearly explained to us.</i>
2	Which government-provided educational benefits or schemes are you aware of?	<i>I am only aware of free textbooks and uniforms; I have not heard about most other schemes.</i>
3	How did you come to learn about these schemes or rights?	<i>I was not aware of them prior to this discussion.</i>
SECTION B: RECEIPT OF BENEFITS AND FACILITIES		
4	Do you receive all the educational facilities and benefits promised by the government?	<i>Only partially.</i>
5	Which facilities do you actually receive in your school?	<i>We receive books, but do not have access to proper digital learning tools or hygiene products.</i>
6	If certain facilities are missing, what specifically is not being provided?	<i>There is no proper access to computers, sanitary products are inconsistent, and scholarships are not received.</i>
7	How consistent is the delivery of government-provided benefits?	<i>Benefits are provided rarely and not in a reliable manner.</i>
SECTION C: ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION		
8	Are you able to attend school for the full academic day consistently?	<i>No, I frequently have to leave early.</i>
9	What are the primary reasons for irregular attendance or leaving early?	<i>Household responsibilities</i>
SECTION D: QUALITY OF TEACHING		
10	How regular are teachers in attending and conducting classes?	<i>Teachers are regular.</i>
11	Do teachers complete the syllabus within the required time frame?	<i>Only sometimes; often the syllabus remains incomplete.</i>

12	To what extent do you understand what is taught in class?	<i>I rarely understand the lessons fully. I attend external tuitions to understand better</i>
13	How would you describe the teaching methodology used in your classroom?	<i>Teachers mostly read from the textbook rather than explaining concepts.</i>
No.	Research Question	Response
14	Do teachers provide individual attention when students face difficulties in understanding?	<i>Nobody receives individual attention.</i>
SECTION E: LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EXAMINATION PREPAREDNESS		
15	Do you feel you are genuinely learning and gaining subject knowledge?	<i>Only to a limited extent.</i>
16	How prepared do you feel during examinations?	<i>We rarely have examinations</i>
SECTION F: INFRASTRUCTURE AND WELFARE FACILITIES		
17	Are essential facilities such as washrooms clean and functional?	<i>They are only sometimes clean and usable.</i>
18	Are menstrual hygiene products consistently available in school?	<i>They are provided only occasionally.</i>
19	Do you have adequate access to digital learning tools such as computers or smartboards?	<i>Access is limited and insufficient.</i>
20	Do you feel safe within the school environment?	<i>Yes</i>
SECTION G: SOCIO-CULTURAL OBSTACLES		
21	Have you experienced social or familial discouragement in pursuing your education?	<i>Yes, due to community and family pressure.</i>
22	What are the common reasons girls in your community discontinue their education?	<i>Household responsibilities and financial constraints are the main reasons.</i>
23	Have you personally considered discontinuing your education? If yes, why?	<i>Yes, due to family pressure and a lack of institutional support.</i>
SECTION H: FUTURE ASPIRATIONS AND CAREER AWARENESS		
24	Are you certain that you will be permitted to continue education beyond secondary school?	<i>I am not sure.</i>
25	Are you aware of future career opportunities available to girls?	<i>Only to a limited extent.</i>
SECTION I: OVERALL ASSESSMENT		
26	What do you consider the single biggest barrier to your education?	<i>Poor quality of teaching.</i>
27	In your view, what would most meaningfully improve your educational experience?	<i>Better teaching quality and the proper provision of promised facilities would make a significant difference.</i>

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