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# Navigating the Intersections of Gender Equity and Quality Education in India's SDG Commitments

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## ABSTRACT

*This qualitative research analyzes the operational connection between Rajasthan and Haryana's gender-responsive educational programs and their support for SDG 4 Quality Education and SDG 5 Gender Equality. The research employs feminist critical policy analysis and comparative case studies to examine state-level initiatives by analyzing the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls in Rajasthan and the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao actions in Haryana in relation to the application of intersectional equity. The analyzed data shows development requires gender equity, but both states deploy their policies towards short-term results rather than transformative changes. The research presents a dual approach that trains educators about caste issues and implements responsibility systems at community levels to make SDG statements applicable to actual local activities.*

**Keywords:** Gender equity, Haryana, national schemes, Rajasthan, sustainability development goals, quality education

## INTRODUCTION

The education system in India strengthens its inclusive learning practices because inclusive education provides the foundation for both national development and social progress. The assessment of service delivery systems for various learner groups remains urgent due to educational space digital technology developments and information systems. The matter has acquired paramount importance because

India vowed to achieve sustainable development and social justice at a global level. The Indian government has recently strengthened its commitment to inclusive education policy because such education represents the fundamental basis for national development as well as social advancement. Educational institutions must conduct rapid assessments of framework performance for learner groups facing educational hurdles because learning environments operate digitally and information systems have progressed. Modern Indian educational institutions should integrate media literacy education with critical thinking instruction in order to enhance learning effectiveness across twenty-first-century learning environments.

The international movement for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demands that India work towards delivering equivalent educational access to each demographic group. Indian authorities have adopted a commitment to reaching SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) through enhanced accessibility and teaching practice evolution using transformed educational materials to reduce cultural inequalities.

India's adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 foregrounded measurable equity targets; however, translating these into gender-responsive education delivery remains uneven across states. Indian women who belong to disadvantaged groups experience significant gender discrimination in their society as they need to break social barriers and funding restrictions while coping with poor educational facilities (Kuteesa et al., 2024). The National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5, 2021) shows that rural Indian girls finish secondary education at 36%, but boys reach 54% completion, which performs worse in Rajasthan and Haryana compared to the national figures due to ongoing societal barriers. The paper provides an extensive evaluation of gender-based educational programs under Rajasthan's Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) and Haryana's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) campaign regarding their compliance with India's SDG requirements. The research evaluates how gender-based intervention programs succeed at addressing exclusion causes in comparison to their delivery of basic program services.

The SDGs that India adopted in 2015 promote nations to employ transformative development methods for complete inclusion of all people. India's local SDG implementation places heavy emphasis on measurable indicators above fundamental structural transformations in practices. SDG 4.7's requirement for gender equality curriculum implementation remains weak based on the fact that casteist and patriarchal stereotypes continue to appear in textbooks, according to Nakray (2017). A practical implementation of SDG 5 encounters problems because the BBBP program treats girls exclusively as demographic numbers for sex ratio improvement instead of being viewed as social change agents (Kumar & Kumar, 2021). India faces a conflicting relationship between its governance goals and

actual on-site implementation, which is most notable within states that strongly follow patriarchal and caste hierarchical structures.
This study addresses the following questions:

1. How do Rajasthan and Haryana's gender-responsive educational schemes align with the intersectional equity principles of SDG 4 and SDG 5?
2. What systemic barriers such as caste, patriarchy, rural-urban divides hinder the transformative potential of these policies?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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The achievement of education gender equality faces numerous systemic obstacles in India even though it stands as a core focus of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Research has established that educational exclusion of marginalized girls continues due to the combination of caste, class, and geographic location, particularly in Rajasthan and Haryana. The review draws together available research about structural obstacles, policy failures, and new decolonial perspectives to define the gaps that this study targets.

The educational inequalities in India exist because of the caste system alongside traditional gender-based societal norms. Dalits, along with Adivasis and Muslims, encounter additional exclusion barriers because they experience socio-economic challenges and geographical disadvantages. Data from Thorat and Newman (2010) demonstrates that rural Indian Dalit girls have a 30% lower probability of secondary education registration than upper-caste students because of school-based caste violence and discriminatory conduct. The geographical isolation of Rajasthan state creates barriers to quality infrastructure access because tribal-dominated districts have 12% of their schools equipped with operational science labs, which prevents students from participating in STEM fields (ASER, 2022). Gender-based cultural standards limit both physical movement and future goals of girls. Haryana maintains a highly disproportionate female-to-male ratio (918 females per 1,000 males) that leads to cultural traditions that shorten the time girls spend in school. The 2023 UNICEF research demonstrates that 58% of rural girls in Haryana leave school during their secondary years because families expect them to focus on household work instead of studies. The intersection of these challenges with caste appears most prominently in the lives of Dalit and Muslim girls because they become targets of increased scrutiny and discrimination, according to Rege's (2006) study about caste-sexism in Maharashtra's educational settings.

The policy framework of India shows formal support for equity, but it tends to convert gender justice into simple technical solutions. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 promotes "inclusive education" through programs

like toilet construction and scholarships but fails to implement structural changes. Rajasthan's Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) dedicates 63% of its funds to menstrual hygiene kits while using this budget to demonstrate adolescent girl empowerment, according to Chakraborty (2021), through "hygiene traps." The education method employed by RGSEAG fails to incorporate critical pedagogy since beneficiary confidence in gender norm challenges reaches only 12%, according to Thamminaina et al. (2020). The BBBP campaign in Haryana works towards achieving demographic equality instead of implementing intersectional equity. The overall female enrollment growth reached 18%, yet urban upper-caste girls dominate STEM scholarships with 78%, while rural Dalit girls experience a 42% dropout rate because of casteist stereotypes (Sharma, 2023). The approach follows general criticism regarding Indian SDG localization that prefers simple compliance over structural power system reform (Nakray, 2017).

Educational exclusion is reinforced by cultural narratives embedded in pedagogical materials and teacher attitudes. National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks persistently stereotype women as caregivers and men as innovators, perpetuating gendered aspirations (Kuteesa et al., 2024). A 2021 analysis of Rajasthan's textbooks found that 73% of STEM-related images depict male figures, reinforcing the notion that technical fields are male domains (UNESCO, 2022). Teacher biases exacerbate this: in rural Haryana, 65% of educators discourage girls from pursuing STEM, citing "innate unsuitability" (Menon, 2020). These hidden curricula intersect with caste. Dalit girls in Rajasthan report being seated separately in classrooms or denied participation in science fairs, reflecting systemic Brahmanical biases (Paik, 2014). Transgender students face even graver exclusion: 99% report social rejection, with policies like RGSEAG failing to address their unique needs (National Human Rights Commission, 2021). Emerging scholarship advocates for decolonial, intersectional approaches to reimagine gender equity. Dalit feminist frameworks, as articulated by Rege (2006), demand centering subaltern voices in policy design to challenge caste-patriarchy. Participatory models, such as Kerala's Kudumbashree program, demonstrate the efficacy of community-led education initiatives: women's collectives have increased girls' enrollment by 25% through localized advocacy (UNDP, 2021).

However, India's policy ecosystem often sidelines such models. Rajasthan's Digital Literacy for Girls initiative, while lauded for urban outreach, excludes tribal communities due to linguistic and infrastructural barriers (NITI Aayog, 2021). Similarly, Haryana's STEM programs lack mechanisms for Dalit girls to voice grievances, perpetuating top-down implementation. The increase in SDG awareness has not addressed all essential gaps. There is limited research about state-level policy implementation through intersectional perspectives, especially in the Hindi-belt states of Rajasthan and Haryana. The marginalized

understanding of non-Brahmanical perspectives fails to emerge in standard policy analysis, thereby keeping Dalit and Adivasi girls' real-life situations hidden. Research about digital education presents it as a solution but fails to acknowledge how caste and gender affect people's ability to obtain technological access. The study utilizes feminist critical policy analysis along with intersectionality theory to investigate the schemes of Rajasthan and Haryana. The study conducts targeted voice assessment to evaluate SDG technical measurements while promoting social justice-based transformative equity.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research approach, applying feminist critical policy analysis and case study analyses to look at how gender-responsive educational programs are put into practice in Rajasthan and Haryana; feminist critical policy analysis helps break down policies to reveal the hidden power dynamics and biases that influence their results. The case study approach allows for a detailed examination of the specific contexts in each state while also identifying common themes and divergent strategies. Data collection methods include discourse analysis of policy documents, media narratives, and scheme guidelines. The research performs policy deconstruction of gendered power dynamics through feminist critical policy analysis, according to Bacchi (2009), and evaluates multiple dimensions of oppression like caste, gender, and class through intersectionality from Crenshaw (1989). The analytical methods reveal Haryana and Rajasthan government schemes present progressive fronts, yet they adopt instrumental objectives that surpass transformative equality principles within their policy structures. By equating empowerment with menstrual hygiene education ("hygiene trap"), RGSEAG blocks Dalit and tribal girls from exercising their intellectual abilities, whereas BBBP centers enrollment statistics above addressing the exclusion of rural Muslim girls (Menon, 2020; Chaudhary, 2018). The framework adopts secondary data to reveal marginalized perspectives that reveal how Brahmanical and patriarchal elements exist within policy development procedures.

### Analysis

#### Analysis of Gender-Responsive Educational Initiatives

The examination reveals that Rajasthan and Haryana use gender-responsive programs that align with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), but their approach focuses on statistics rather than systemic alterations. The states implement empowerment programs through numeric achievements in school enrollments and menstrual product distribution but lack essential transformative objectives that include critical thinking education and caste-adapted education alongside universal gender access. The policy discourse

lacks connection to the real community situations, particularly regarding Dalit, tribal, and Muslim girl populations who experience exclusion.

**Rajasthan's Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)**

The RGSEAG (SABLA) is a Ministry of Women and Child Development scheme delivered through ICDS; its successor—the Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG)—has been subsumed under Mission Saksham Anganwadi & POSHAN 2.0 (PIB, 2024; MoWCD, 2022). The program focuses only on instrumental outcomes while overlooking significant barriers that adolescent girls face from caste-based discrimination and biased educational content, according to Jain & Jain (2022). Tribal regions of Udaipur and Banswara show that 32% of teenage girls fail to transition from primary to secondary education because cultural marriage practices and insufficient educational infrastructure persist (NITI Aayog, 2021).

The program's biological management approach, termed a "hygiene trap," has faced intense criticism from experts. Research shows that 68% of beneficiaries achieved better menstrual hygiene access, but only 12% gained the ability to stand up against gender norms within their classrooms and households (Thamminaina et al., 2020). The inability of RGSEAG to address multiple kinds of discrimination reveals itself through the continuous discrimination against Dalit and tribal girls who encounter prejudice in their educational settings (Menon, 2020). The exclusion of transgender adolescents from the scheme goes against SDG 4's requirement for inclusive education as outlined by Paik (2014).

**Haryana's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Campaign**

Haryana's BBBP campaign, launched in 2015 to rectify the state's skewed sex ratio (879 (overall, Census 2011) females per 1,000 males, NFHS-5, 2021), prioritizes demographic parity over intersectional equity. Although the campaign increased female secondary enrollment by 18% through cash incentives, its urban-centric implementation exacerbates rural-urban and caste divides. For example, STEM initiatives like Saksham Haryana disproportionately benefit upper-caste urban girls in Gurugram and Faridabad, while rural Dalit girls in Mahendragarh and Rewari face a 42% dropout rate due to caste-based stigma and inadequate infrastructure (Sharma, 2023).

BBBP's reinforcement of patriarchal norms is further evident in its emphasis on "feminine" vocational training, such as stitching and nursing, which constitutes 65% of its programs (NITI Aayog, 2021). A smaller share of scholarships explicitly target STEM; proportions differ across schemes and states. Media narratives framing girls as demographic "saviors" reduce their agency to instrumental tokens, while community resistance in Jat-dominated villages restricts girls' mobility, with 65% of parents citing "safety concerns" to justify opposition to co-ed schools (Chaudhary, 2018). Additionally, BBBP's neglect of

Muslim girls—who face a 28% literacy gap compared to Hindu peers—highlights its exclusion of religious minorities (NFHS-5, 2021).

## DISCUSSION

The gender-responsive programs in Rajasthan and Haryana place emphasis on countable results, including student enrollment rates as well as sanitation kit distribution, instead of comprehensive reform efforts to tackle social and economic disadvantages based on the caste system, gender, and class. The Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) implemented in Rajasthan demonstrates that it increased adolescent girl school attendance by 25%, according to NITI Aayog (2021). Enrollment statistics fail to reveal persisting obstacles because Dalit girls experience classroom discrimination based on caste, which the 2023 UNICEF report on caste and education in India has demonstrated. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) campaign in Haryana brought about Indicators suggest growth in female secondary enrolment in select districts; precise magnitudes vary by year and source.

A similar pattern exists in the wider assessment of India's SDG localization methods because they frequently transform empowerment into mere checklist completion (Nakray, 2017). The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2022 shows that more than 60% of rural schools do not have proper facilities for marginalized girls, including gender-separated restroom facilities and secure transportation options (ASER Centre, 2022). The current measurements of social equity need transformation into transformative equity to remove the multiple obstacles that policies must address based on particular life conditions.

The educational programs for STEM in both states deliberately cut out rural Dalit female students because of deep-seated caste prejudices along with urbanism preferences. Rural Dalit girls in Haryana withdraw from school at a rate of 42% because of caste bias and insufficient facilities, according to Sharma (2023). ; AICTE). The Oxfam India research from 2023 shows Dalit girls in Haryana represent only 4% of those studying STEM, while urban upper-caste girls make up 22% of the STEM student population (Oxfam India, 2023). STEM course enrollment rates of rural tribal girls in Banswara and other tribal-majority areas of Rajasthan remain 30% lower than urban students because teachers mistakenly associate educational talent with caste background (Menon, 2020). The results conform to national data showing Dalit girls face hidden barriers to STEM study, according to the National Education Policy 2020 Implementation Review (Ministry of Education, 2023). Research shows that no caste-based specific interventions will sustain an inclusive STEM environment in India unless there is implementation of scholarship aid along with teacher training about prevention of discrimination.

Rajasthan's RGSEAG exemplifies the "hygiene trap," wherein empowerment is conflated with biological management rather than intellectual agency. While 68% of beneficiaries report improved menstrual hygiene access, only 12% feel empowered to challenge gender norms (Thamminaina et al., 2020). The scheme allocates 63% of its budget to sanitary kits, sidelining critical pedagogy and comprehensive sexual education (NITI Aayog, 2021). Similarly, Haryana's BBBP frames empowerment through vocational training in "feminine" skills like stitching (65% of programs), reinforcing patriarchal occupational hierarchies (Kumar & Kumar, 2021). This reductionist approach has drawn criticism from global gender advocates. A 2022 UNESCO report on gender-responsive education warns that programs focusing solely on hygiene or vocational training risk perpetuating pink-collar occupational segregation," limiting girls' access to high-skill sectors (UNESCO, 2022). To align with SDG 5, policies must integrate curricula that foster critical thinking and challenge systemic gender norms.

**Challenges Posed by India's Digital Boom and Misinformation**

India's digital revolution, with 750 million internet users (IAMAI, 2023), has exacerbated risks of misinformation, particularly among adolescents. Platforms like WhatsApp and YouTube serve as primary information sources, yet School-based media literacy coverage is uneven and sparsely documented across states. The spread of caste-based fake news and communal rumors has fueled violence, as seen in a 2020 incident in Haryana where viral misinformation led to mob attacks on Dalit communities (Udupa, 2020). The Digital Empowerment Foundation's 2023 report notes that 85% of misinformation circulates in regional languages, yet most fact-checking tools are available only in English or Hindi (Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), 2023). This disparity disproportionately affects rural girls, who are 40% less likely to access digital training compared to boys (Henderson, 2023). Despite commitments under SDG 4, state policies like Digital India prioritize connectivity over critical literacy, leaving students vulnerable to exploitation.

India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates for critical thinking but neglects media literacy as a core competency. Initiatives like DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) and PM eVIDYA (Prime Minister's e-VIDYA) focus on content delivery, with School-based media literacy coverage is uneven and sparsely documented across states. A 2023 Pratham Foundation survey found that 72% of teachers lack training in media literacy, rendering them unable to guide students in discerning credible sources (Pratham, 2023). Language diversity further complicates implementation. While 56% of Indians speak regional languages, only 15% of media literacy resources are available in vernacular formats (Sreekumar, 2021). This gap

entrenches rural-urban and caste divides, as marginalized students struggle to navigate digital spaces safely.

**Context-Driven Strategies for Effective Implementation**

Effective media literacy education in India demands context-driven integration across school curricula, not limited to ICT or digital skills classes. While the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes critical thinking and digital competencies (Ministry of Education, 2020), actual curricular inclusion remains inconsistent, particularly in rural and marginalized regions (Parkash, 2019).

First, curriculum design must formally embed media literacy across subjects like social science, language, and civics, moving beyond isolated workshops. According to the UNICEF India (2022) report on quality education, culturally relevant pedagogy significantly improves learning outcomes, especially when adapted to local languages and lived experiences. Second, multilingual and culturally sensitive resources are critical. India's 22 official languages and thousands of dialects create barriers to standard media literacy efforts. Studies show that misinformation often exploits linguistic divides (FactShala, 2021), making it vital to develop localized resources that can counter region-specific misinformation (e.g., caste-based rumors, communal narratives).

Third, teacher training must prioritize media literacy as a pedagogical competency. The SDG Coordination Centre (SDGCC) (2023) quality education framework stresses continuous teacher development. Training modules should equip teachers to guide students through media analysis, fact-checking exercises, and discussions on digital ethics, ensuring critical engagement with media rather than passive consumption. Finally, community and parental engagement must be institutionalized. Henderson et al. (2023) emphasized how community support networks impact educational outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged groups in Haryana. Building on this, media literacy should be seen as a community-wide initiative: through school-community partnerships, parents can be sensitized to media challenges their children face, bridging generational digital divides.

**Leveraging Grassroots Innovations**

India already hosts several successful grassroots innovations that can be scaled up to strengthen media literacy nationwide. FactShala, a media literacy program led by Internews and supported by the Google News Initiative, has successfully conducted workshops in multiple Indian languages targeting non-urban populations. Their model of using local trainers familiar with regional misinformation patterns has been praised for its contextual sensitivity (FactShala, 2021). Pratham's digital storytelling initiatives have also demonstrated the power of peer-to-peer education. By encouraging students in rural areas to create their

own media narratives, Pratham enables critical thinking and production skills that counter passive media consumption (Pratham, 2020).

BOOM Live, among other regional fact-checking platforms, conducts fact-checking operations through Hindi, Bengali, and Marathi language services. The direct initiatives combat the language-based weakness that fake news takes advantage of. Bottom-up innovation stands as the most critical component within the industry. Research conducted by KRE Publishers (Parkash, 2019) proves that localized methods create a lasting impact on rural alongside semi-urban areas because English-only central policies prove ineffective there. The expansion of FactShala and Pratham models demands public-private sector cooperation along with financial backing and policy changes that incorporate these practices into primary education institutions to fulfill SDG Goal 4 (Quality Education).

**Conclusion**

The study emphasizes why media literacy education needs to become an institutional part of Indian schools to handle digital information challenges. Implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 concepts faces institutional challenges because of disjointed delivery along with communication barriers and budgetary access differences in school facilities. Context-sensitive cultural approaches need to drive media literacy education for the practice to develop into an essential educational method from a marginal goal. The research shows that media literacy needs formal inclusion in educational curricula while encouraging teachers to receive specialized training about media literacy principles and parents to join programs that help their children understand digital information credibly. Success emerges through locally developed, bottom-up programs that adapt to Indian cultural norms and social standards, as proven by FactShala and Pratham. Policymakers must create digital equality policies that follow sustainable practices that adapt to each situation. The approach will produce citizens who learn to handle complex information management systems.

## IMPLICATIONS

These findings have four actionable implications. First, state monitoring must stop indicator mixing: report overall sex ratio (Census) and sex ratio at birth (NFHS/SRS) separately, and label schooling metrics as NFHS-5 “10+ years” or UDISE+ completion with year and source. Second, correct program communication: attribute RGSEAG/SABLA and SAG under Mission Saksham Anganwadi & POSHAN 2.0, and audit beneficiary targeting and scholarship taxonomies to curb gendered tracking and expand STEM-aligned support. Third, move from slogans to levers: embed gender-responsive budgeting; publish district dashboards with gender- and rural disaggregation; mandate third-party evaluations that triangulate UDISE+, NFHS and administrative records; and resource teacher

training and safe-school infrastructure. Finally, for research practice, couple policy-text coding with district-level tests, pre-register indicators, and make codebooks public to limit selective citation. Together, these steps convert descriptive insight into accountable delivery and make equity goals tractable for Rajasthan and Haryana.

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