

## Education and Women Empowerment: Examining the Importance and Impact

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### ABSTRACT

*Education is an essential component to bring transformations in any society. Education for Women in India has been a necessary pre-occupation of both administrative and civil society. It is considered one of the most effective mechanisms for women empowerment because it legitimizes them to respond to the challenges, challenge their traditional roles, and change their everyday lives. Education eliminates inequalities and disparities as the means of recovering their status within and outside of their families. Education helps in the overall development of a person and brings social developments—the goal of empowering individuals and groups shapes and directs development discourse in contemporary societies. Gaining more decision-making capacity, deepening an understanding of relations, configuring one's life, and controlling conditions affecting one's life are recognized as the various dimensions of empowerment. Education is the indispensable prerequisite for any individual and a constitutional right. It helps the individual minimize disparity and plays a central role in human development that influences the overall growth of the social economy. The empowerment of women is the critical mechanism for achieving gender equality, which is apprehended as meaning that individual obligations, freedoms, and opportunities do not depend on whether they are born female or male. Education is considered one of the most potent ways of inspiring women to engage fully in the development process with the awareness, skills, and self-confidence available. It provided them the chance to make more meaningful political engagement decisions and make choices about life. Thus, education benefits from building self-confidence, self-efficacy, decision-making power and increases gender parity in organizations and institutions. This study endeavors to examine the impact and importance of education in women empowerment and highlight the concerns and challenges.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Education, Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, Decision-making, Literacy, Importance*

### INTRODUCTION

Women and men in India are given *de jure* equality and freedom. Article 14 of the Constitution of India guarantees equal rights and opportunities to men and women in all spheres. Article 42 empowers the State to make special provisions to ensure just and humane conditions for work and maternity itself. Article 51 (A) e imposes upon every citizen a fundamental duty to renounce the practices derogatory women's dignity. However, this *de jure* equality has not yet materialized into a *de facto* equality, despite the efforts made in the Five Year Plans and other initiatives.

Women empowerment is the cornerstone for achieving gender equality, characterized as individuals' responsibilities, rights, and opportunities being independent of their gender. Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the patriarchal hegemony ideology has made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. However, the rise of feminist ideas has led to a significant improvement of women's condition around the globe in contemporary times.

Access to an equal education has been one of the most important demands of these women's rights movements. Women's education in the Indian context has also been a major pre-occupation of both the government and civil society, as educated women play a significant role in the country's development. Education is the most potent tool for improving the world. Empowering women and equipping countries for overall economic growth is a crucial point. Empowerment can create a social environment wherein one can make decisions and make choices individually and collectively for social transformation. Empowerment encourages the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power, and experience.

Empowerment is the process of empowering or authorizing an individual to think, autonomously take action, and control work. It is the process by which an individual can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's life. There are always several elements in the society that are deprived of their basic rights in every society, State, and nation. As a result of this growing tendency of underestimating women, such as to occupy a secondary position in society and deprive them of their basic rights, the need for empowering women was experienced and observed. Empowering women has become the focal point of discussion and attention globally. Today we enjoy the privileges of being citizens of a free nation, but we need to think about whether each of the citizens of our country is free or enjoying freedom, in the true sense of the term.

The disparities between men and women and discrimination against women are age-old issues all over the world. Thus, women's struggle for equality with men is a global phenomenon. Women should be equal with men in education, employment, inheritance, marriage, politics, etc. Their struggle for equality has given birth to the establishment of many women's associations and the launching of movements. The Constitution of India doesn't discriminate between men and women, but the social norms have deprived women of certain basic rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution. Empowerment allows individuals to exercise their full potential, improve their political and social participation, and believe in their capabilities.

### **Education and gender equality**

Attaining gender equality in and through education is at the nucleus of the human rights agenda and indispensable to achieving the transformational 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. International trends rapidly recognize the intrinsic and extrinsic needs for investing in women's education, especially for adolescent girls, including the circumstances affected by fragility and conflict. Educating girls delivers a ripple effect that benefits the girls themselves and makes their families, groups, communities, and countries safer, healthier, and more prosperous.

As per the Global Partnership for Education's Gender Equality Policy and Strategy 2016-2020 (GEPS), attaining gender equality refers to the "equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women, men, girls, and boys, and equal power to shape their own lives and contribute to

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society." Attaining gender equality in and through education requires a system-wide institutional change in the way plans and policies are developed to ensure no one is neglected.

Gender equality is a fundamental cross-cutting theme in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as segmented in the education goal (SDG 4), and key to the achievement of other SDGs, including ending poverty (SDG 1), enhancing health and well-being (SDG 3), supporting gender equality and women's rights (SDG 5), establishing decent work (SDG 8) and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16).

Attaining gender equality in and through education mandates developing equitable organizations that generate policies, budgets, and plans that enable all to succeed, irrespective of their gender. This needs giving attention to the organizational arrangements, management frameworks, social norms, relationship dynamics, political and economic matters that shape education, and addressing gender-related disadvantages that deliver different outcomes for girls and boys, women and men.

### **Importance of Education in Empowering Women**

Empowerment authorizes women to acquire knowledge, skills, and techniques that will help them in their personal and social growth and foster sensitivity towards societal problems. Special efforts are required to be taken for the education, health, and employment of women. Economic empowerment is essential for improving the female sex ratio, but economic empowerment is possible only when women are educated.

Lack of education is considered the root cause of women's exploitation and negligence. Only literacy and education can help women understand the Indian's constitutional and legislative provisions to strengthen them. Education is "potential affirming and performance confirming." Empowerment of a girl starts even enterprise makes empowerment operational. That is the whole journey for a mother, too: from a painful situation to a gainful one. When women are educated, they are empowered to contribute to nation-building. A few women hold influential positions in India and the world, but there is still room for improvement if more women are educated. Perhaps with an increase in women having the mantle in a male-dominated political arena, the socio-political situation of the whole world will improve. Empowerment becomes the means of achieving it with dignity.

Women's education leads to significant social development. Some of the most notable social advantages include lower infant mortality rates and lower maternal mortality rates. Bridging the gender gap in education also increases gender equality, which is vital because it ensures equal rights and opportunities for people irrespective of gender. Women's education has cognitive advantages for women as well. Improved cognitive abilities enhance the quality of life for women and also lead to other advantages. Educated women are expected to be better able to make decisions related to themselves and their communities. Cognitive abilities also translate to enhanced political participation among women. Educated women are more likely to engage and contribute to civic matters. They attend political gatherings, and there are several examples wherein educated women in the developing world could secure advantages for themselves through political interventions. Evidence also suggests an increased chance of democratic governance in countries with well-educated women.

Empowerment calls for critical intervention by governments too. Interventions need neatly designed approaches with assigned roles for women and executed systematically. Women's development and women empowerment are correlated conceptually and methodologically. Thus, promoting education among women is essential in empowering them to accomplish their goals on par with men in different spheres of life, nurturing and sustaining a culture of unity, equity, and dignity. Cultural and knowledge value-addition makes a case for social emancipation, political nurturing, and economic empowerment that much stronger. Education makes women economically sound, which is a source of overall empowerment. It enables them to overcome obstacles in their way of achieving equality with dignity.

### **Recent Literacy Trends in India**

Literacy in India is a key to social and economic progress. Literacy of girls is vital not only to social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation. The level of literacy and educational attainment are crucial indicators of the development of any given society. Spread and diffusion of literacy are generally associated with an essential trait of today's civilization, such as modernization, communication, and commerce. A high literacy level and educational achievements lead to more significant development, awareness, and empowerment of women and girls. Education leads to greater control over one's life and choices. World Bank studies have established the direct and functional correlation between literacy and productivity and literacy and the overall quality of human life. The 15<sup>th</sup> official census in India was calculated in the year 2011. After the 2011 census, the literacy rate in India was found to be 74.04%. The percentage of female literacy in the country was 54.16 percent in 2001. The female literacy rate had increased from 8.86 percent in 1951 to 65.46 percent in 2011. Though this seems like a great accomplishment, it is still a concern that so many people in India cannot read and write. The number of children who do not get an education in rural areas is still high.

If we consider the female literacy rate in India, it is lower than the man literacy rate. Today the female literacy rate area 65.46%, where the male literacy rate is over 80%. The disparities in literacy rates among the states are also extreme. Kerala has the highest female literacy rate. On the other hand, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have low female literacy rates. Illiteracy in India is characterized by more significant gaps between urban and rural societies. The rural community depends mainly on agriculture, and the illiteracy rate is high, while the urban population is more of the employee class and more educated. A challenge in thinking through our concerns about gender and education lies in unearthing the dialectical linkages between the formal education system and, more importantly, social and economic processes and their influence on girls' and women's lives.

*Literacy rate of India post-independence*

<i>Census Year</i>	<i>Overall Literacy Rate (%)</i>	<i>Male Literacy Rate (%)</i>	<i>Female Literacy Rate (%)</i>
1951	18.30	27.20	8.90
1961	28.30	40.40	15.40
1971	34.50	46.00	22.00
1981	43.50	56.40	29.80
1991	52.20	64.10	39.80
2001	64.80	75.30	53.70
2011	74.00	80.90	64.60

*State-wise Literacy Rate (Census 2011)*

<i>State /Union Territory</i>	<i>Overall Literacy Rate (%)</i>	<i>Male Literacy Rate (%)</i>	<i>Female Literacy Rate (%)</i>
J&K	68.74	78.26	58.01
Himachal Pradesh	83.78	90.83	76.60
Punjab	76.68	81.48	71.34
Chandigarh	86.43	90.54	81.38
Uttarakhand	79.63	88.33	70.70
Haryana	76.64	85.38	66.77
NCT of Delhi	86.34	91.03	80.93
Rajasthan	67.06	80.51	52.66
Uttar Pradesh	69.72	79.24	59.26
Bihar	63.82	73.39	53.33
Sikkim	82.20	87.29	76.43
Arunachal Pradesh	66.95	73.69	59.57
Nagaland	80.11	83.29	76.69
Manipur	79.85	86.49	73.17
Mizoram	91.58	93.72	89.40
Tripura	87.75	92.18	83.15
Meghalaya	75.48	77.17	73.78
Assam	73.18	78.81	67.27
West Bengal	77.08	82.67	71.16
Jharkhand	67.63	78.45	56.21
Odisha	73.45	82.40	64.36
Chhattisgarh	71.04	81.45	60.59
Madhya Pradesh	70.63	80.53	60.02

Gujarat	79.31	87.23	70.73
Daman & Diu	87.07	91.48	79.59
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	77.65	86.46	65.93
Maharashtra	82.91	89.82	75.48
Andhra Pradesh	67.66	75.56	59.74
Karnataka	75.60	82.85	68.13
Goa	87.40	92.81	81.84
Lakshadweep	92.28	96.11	88.25
Kerala	93.91	<u>96.02</u>	91.98
Tamil Nadu	80.33	86.81	73.86
Puducherry	86.55	92.12	81.22
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	86.27	90.11	81.84

### Measures and Mechanisms for the Empowerment of Women

According to the Human Development Report (1993), literacy is the first step in learning and knowledge building. So literacy indicators are essential for any measurement of human development. In India, National Policy on Education (NPE) was set up in 1986 to develop education and eradicate illiteracy. The higher illiteracy rate of women is undoubtedly attributing women to depend on men and play a subordinate role.

Within the framework of a democratic structure, our legislation, development policies, plans, and programs have aimed to advance women in different realms. From the Fifth five-year plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. The Mahila Samakhya Programme (Education for Women's Empowerment), started in 1987, focuses mainly on the socially excluded and the landless women. This program is an example of creative collaboration between the voluntary sector and the State. In recent years, the empowerment of women is considered the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was established by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to protect women's rights and legal entitlements. The National Policy on Education (1986, revised in 1992) is perhaps the most luminous document on women's education. It emerged as a breakthrough in addressing gender issues in government policy, which projected that education could be used as an agent of fundamental change in the status of women. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), started in 1994, has a holistic approach to reducing gender and social disparities and universalizing access, retention, and achievement. Enrolment of girls has shown a significant upward trend in DPEP districts as compared to non-DPEP districts. The 86th Constitutional Amendment made free and compulsory education a fundamental right for all children in the 6-14 age group, which increased the enrolment of girls in schools that is 64.1% in 1980-81 to 85.2% in 1999-2000.

The Government of India declared 2001 as Women's Empowerment Year. The national policy of empowerment of women has set specific clear-cut goals and objectives. The policy aimed at

upliftment, development, and empowerment in socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects, by creating in them awareness on various issues of human rights, fundamental freedom, providing access to health care, quality education at all levels, career building, vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational opportunities, health, safety, social security, and public life, etc. about their empowerment. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA – Education for All), launched in 2001-02, is the national umbrella program spearheading the universalization of elementary education through a community-owned approach, with a community-specific focus on the provision of quality education. One of the challenges accepted during the 12th plan was establishing more Women's Universities. Inequality in education is a Global Issue. The highest levels of inequality in education were in South Asia (42 %), the Arab States (41 %), and Sub-Saharan Africa (37 %). There has been limited progress in reducing disparities in education, except in Europe and Central Asia (Human Development Report 2014).

## CONCLUSION

It is observed that educated women are more empowered as compared to uneducated ones. Women play an imperative role in making a nation progressive and guide it towards development. They are essential possessions of lively humanity required for national improvement, so if we have to see a bright future of women in our country, giving education to them must be a pre-occupation. Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power. The education of women is the most powerful tool to change the part of society. Education also reduces inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. To ensure and encourage women's education at all levels, there is also a need to establish schools, colleges, and universities, even exclusively for women in the states. The education advances the idea of participation in government, panchayats, public matters, etc., to eliminate gender discrimination.

There is a strong correlation between education and women empowerment. Another critical aspect in this regard is that, in these societies, the issue of women empowerment has been facing particular serious challenges. These challenges are outcomes of certain evil norms and attitudes such as child labor, child marriage, illiteracy, superstition, the partial attitude of the parents, female feticides, etc. In such a situation, women empowerment is an urgent necessity.

To promote women empowerment, it is essential to make an environment that allows women to engage in educational programs and share the advantages. The educational and other policies for women empowerment should be implemented in reality for empowering women in the world. Equal and active participation of women in all spheres is a necessity in today's world. Unless women are educated, they will not be able to understand their rights and their importance. Empowerment of women aims at striving towards acquiring higher literacy level and education, better health care for women and their children, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of their rights, improved standard of living, and to achieve self-reliance, self-confidence, and self-respect among women.

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