



ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

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Abstract

Education is not only the main pillar of nation-building, but through education, a nation moves towards progress. By the united force of men and women, especially women, a country leads its way to the path of success. Women's empowerment is a necessity for this success. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said: "If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered". Education has been identified as a crucial factor in women's empowerment, enabling them to participate fully in social, economic, and political spheres. Education helps women become aware of their rights, dignity, and opportunities. However, women still face significant barriers to accessing education, particularly in developing countries. This paper provides a comprehensive review of the literature on women's access to education and importance of education in women empowerment. It examines the various factors that affect women's access to education, including cultural norms, poverty, discrimination, and lack of resources. The paper also highlights the challenges that remain in ensuring women's access to education, status of women education, need for women empowerment and the policies, provisions and programs that can help overcome these challenges.

Keywords: Women, Education, Empowerment, Equality, Gender discrimination.

Introduction

Women make up nearly half of the world's population. However, they suffered greatly as a result of the hegemonic masculine mentality, which denied them equal chances across the globe. In recent years, the status of women around the world has significantly improved due to the emergence of feminist views (Sen, 1999). One of the most urgent demands of these women's rights campaigns has been access to education. Since educated women may contribute significantly to the nation's growth, women's education in India has long been a top priority for both the government and civil society (Bhat, 2015; Kaur, 2018). Education is seen as a fundamental right and a basic necessity for all residents of any country. It can help people become independent, which makes it a potent instrument for lowering inequality. This is especially necessary for women, who encounter discrimination in numerous areas. Education is considered a significant turning point in women's empowerment since it empowers them to confront their established roles, overcome obstacles, and transform their lives (Ojha, 2016). The most effective way to alter women's status in society is through education. Many of our nation's women are still exploited, ignorant, and regressive. In addition to lowering inequality, education also helps them rise in the family hierarchy. Through empowerment and capacity building, women can gain knowledge and skills that will help them enhance their quality of life. Only when women are empowered and educated can they contribute to the fullest extent of their abilities, which is necessary for India to become a developed country (Yousuf, 2019).

In addition to becoming knowledgeable citizens, parents, and family members, educated women can play a significant part in our nation's economic development. The slow pace of women's education growth in rural areas suggests that a significant portion of our nation's women remain illiterate, weak, exploited, and backward (Ojha, 2016). As a result, "educating the women" is the most effective strategy for changing the status of women in society, reducing inequality, and enhancing their standing within the family (Kaur, 2018). Acquiring knowledge is simply one aspect of education; another is putting that knowledge to use through skill development and vocational training. The Gender Gap Index 2023 (GGI) calculates the difference between men and women in four key areas: political empowerment, health and survival, educational attainment, and economic participation and opportunity. The global gender gap score in 2023 stands at 68.4%, indicating a modest improvement of 0.3% points compared to the previous year. At the current rate of progress, it would take 131 years to achieve full gender parity, showing a significant slowdown in the overall rate of change.

India has ranked at 127 out of 146 countries in terms of gender parity - an improvement of eight places from last year - according to the World Economic Forum's annual Gender Gap Report, 2023. This is equivalent to the situation of women in India, where they face discrimination based on their gender in all spheres of life, including education, economics, and empowerment. Amartya Sen makes an excellent case for the idea that societies should view women as active agents of social change rather than as passive recipients of assistance, arguing that women's rights to education, employment, and property have a significant impact on their capacity to manage their surroundings and advance economic growth (Sen, 1999).

“To educate your women first and leave them to themselves, They will tell you what reforms are necessary.” – Swami Vivekananda (Ghara, T. K. 2017).

According to Prof. A P J Abdul Kalam (TOI), – “Responsible citizens, particularly women, are especially important for the nation because their perception, way of life, and value system will lead to the development of a good family, a good society, and, ultimately, a good nation.” (Grayson & Hodges, 2017).

According to Mahatama Jyotiba Phule, "Education is that which demonstrates the difference between what is good and what is evil" (Bhat, R. A. 2016). It can bring lots of attitudinal changes which is very crucial for socio-economic and political progress of the country.

Evolution of Women’s Education in India

In ancient India, women had the right to participate in the important Upanayana ceremony, which would have granted them the same access to the Vedas as men. Unfortunately, they were prohibited from it and, consequently, from Vedic instruction in later times. In India, women's education dates back to the third century B.C., when instruction was given orally. Women were employed as researchers at universities such as Nalanda, Vikramshila, and Takshila during that time. Muslim rulers founded universities in Delhi, Lucknow, and Allahabad in the eleventh century, where women participated in a range of educational programs.

The princesses received a liberal education from the Mughal rulers. Among the learned women of the royal family were GulBadan Begum, the daughter of Babar and author of the Humayun Namah; Nur Jahan, the renowned wife of Jahangir; Mumtaz Mahal, the wife of Shah Jahan; Jahanara Begum, the eldest daughter of Shah Jahan; and Zibunnisa Begum, the eldest daughter of Aurangzeb (Jaysawal, N., & Saha, S. 2023). During this time, several Bengali zamindars and the daughters of Rajput lords were literate. A new chapter in Indian

educational history is opened by the British era. The British attempted to educate women in a ritualistic way. In the early 19th century, missionaries and their educational establishments began advocating for girls' education throughout the British era. The development of women's education was greatly aided by the creation of municipalities and the local fund cess. In 1857, three colleges were founded in three different presidencies: Madras (Chennai), Calcutta (Kolkata), and Bombay (today known as Mumbai).

Middle-class girls found it difficult to pursue higher education, but Christian and Parsi women were far more likely to do so than Hindu women. The Indian National Congress played a major role in emancipating women. In 1885, a Ladies' Association was established within a year of its founding. The number of highly educated women in the public sphere increased by the 1890s (Jenefa, 2012). Important political and social roles were later played by notable Indian women, including Ramabai Ranade, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Rameshwari Nehru, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Aruna Asif Ali, Sucheta Kriplani, Usha Mehta, and Vilasini Devi Shenai.

The British government of India was compelled to create a new educational strategy for women in 1913, and it suggested a curriculum specifically designed for women that would be useful to them, such as music and needlework (Jaysawal, N., & Saha, S. 2023). New centers of liberty for women were established at Banaras Hindu University in 1916, Aligarh Muslim University in 1920, and Delhi University in 1922. After the Independence, women's education, especially higher education took off.

Status of Women Education in India

India is the largest democracy in the world, home to billions of people, about half of them are women. What impact does women's education have on India's progress, then? Families also suffer when females fail to get an education (Ojha, 2016). Mothers who have received education implement what they have learned to enhance the health of their children and other family members. Their families are protected from disease by their awareness of health risks. Compared to households with educated mothers, the child mortality rate is significantly greater in those with less educated mothers. "Educating girls is not an option, it is a necessity" (Rahman, M. 2014). It is becoming one of Indian society's top objectives. Adi Shankaracharya, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekanand, Mahatma Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru all spoke out against the cruel oppression and crimes committed against women in the name of tradition.

The constitutional mandate/directive to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years has not been met till now. Educationists acknowledge that girls' slower educational advancement is the primary cause of this failure. Although Indian women's literacy and educational levels are rising, there is still a disparity between the male and female literacy rates. (Table-1)

Table 1: The Literacy Rate in India 1911-2011 (Census of India)

Census Year	Total %	Male %	Female %
1911	5.9	10.6	1.0
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	18.3	27.16	8.86
1961	28.3	40.4	15.35
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: *Census of India* (2011)

Year 2011 census witnessed an improvement in the percentage of educated people to 74.04%, with 82.14% of men and 65.46% of women, respectively. According to the 2011 census, just 58.8% of rural women are literate. Bihar had the lowest average literacy rate in India, at less than 50%, while Kerala had the highest among Indian states, at 90.02%.

Table 1 illustrates that, prior to independence; women's literacy rates were significantly lower than men's. This can be seen by the fact that throughout these four decades, the literacy rate for women increased from 1.0% to 7.3%, while the literacy rate for men increased from 10.6% to 24.9%. Over time, the male literacy rate has nearly tripled, from 27.16% in 1951 to 75.26% in 2001 as the government has implemented a number of initiatives to raise the literacy rate.

Unexpectedly, during the years 1951–2011, the female literacy rate increased more quickly than the male literacy rate. The growth is nearly six times, i.e. from 8.86% in 1951 to 65.46% in 2001.

Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that just half of the female population is literate, falling behind three-fourths of the male population.

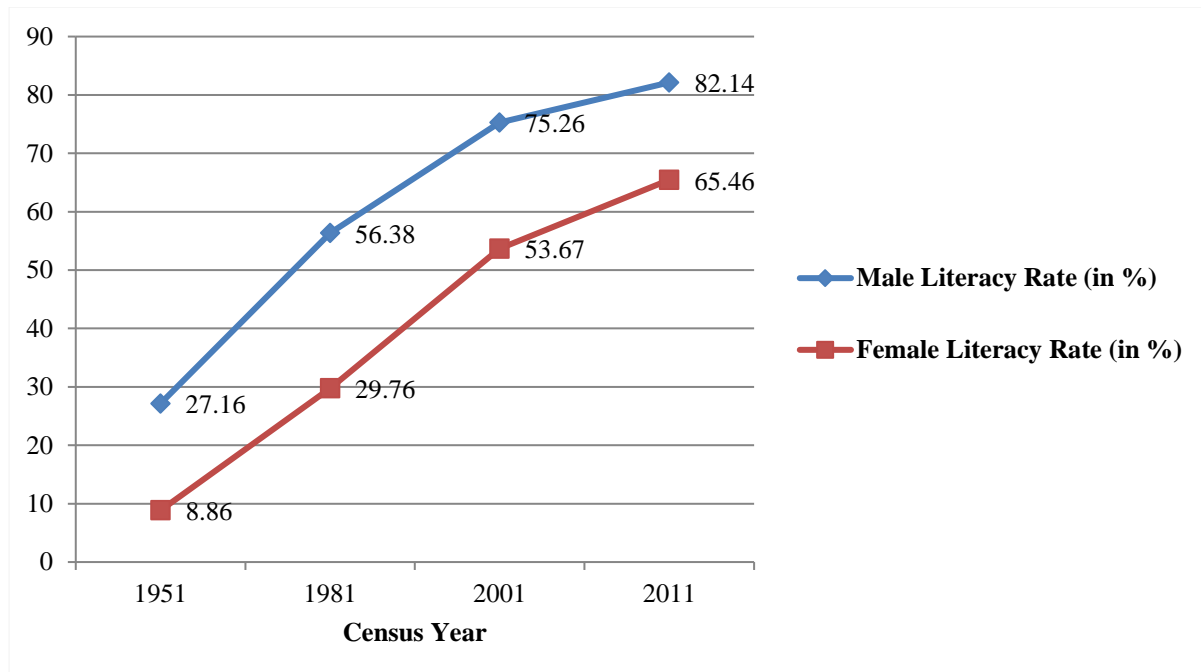


Fig. 1: Growth trends in literacy rate (Census year wise)

Barriers of Women Education

In Indian families, particularly in rural areas, girl children take on the role of a second mother by taking on household duties including cooking, cleaning, bringing water, gathering wood, taking care of their siblings etc. and discouraged from attending school.

The second social evil is the system of bonded labor, which is a depressing phenomenon that prevents girls from attending school in the poor families of agricultural laborers and washermen.

The main reasons of child neglect and discrimination against girls are the dowery system and other social customs.

The lower school enrollment of girls is one of the fundamental issues that continue to be a barrier to women's education. Over 50% of girls in India are non-starters. Dropout rates among girls appear to be rather high, particularly in rural, tribal, and slum communities. Girls in India are almost twice as likely as boys to experience dropout and stagnation, according to the data that is available at present (Rahman, M. 2014).

The educational atmosphere for girls in India is not particularly stimulating or inspiring. The majority of the instructional strategies are outdated, rigid, and uninteresting (Varghese, 2012). Many schools lack basic amenities like drinking water, toilets as well as adequate infrastructure and qualified teachers especially female teachers, who are preferred by parents for the safety of their female children.

India is the country with the highest rate of child labor in the world, according to UN data, with over 50 million children employed in construction, glass bangles factories, beedi, carpet manufacturing, and other domestic jobs (Mandal, 2013). Due to their great productivity and low cost girls are chosen in the majority of industries. Children, particularly girls, are viewed as financial assets in many poor families since they provide earnings for a living and help protect against financial problems brought on by the death or incapacity of parents (Singh & Singh, 2017).

Concept of Women Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individual to think, take action and control work in an autonomous way (Bhat, 2016; Kaur, 2018). It means freedom from any form of slavery or oppression. Additionally, it guarantees freedom from year-round bondage. It demands a complete reorganization of social and economic relationships (Jenny, C. M. 2016). It is a story of identity and liberation in which various characters compete for prestige. Women empowerment is a process of giving women the ability to access and contribute positively to their social development, political participation and economic development (Sundaram et al., 2014). People who are empowered are able to recognize their identities and abilities in all areas of life. It includes having more access to information and resources, having more freedom to choose, and being unrestricted by social norms, beliefs, and behaviors. According to India's most recent census, women make up 48.49% of the population and roughly 90% of those working in the unorganized sector (Shetty & Hans, 2015).

The tale of women's development in India is stated to establish a connection between the rhetoric of women's empowerment and the actual situation of declining funding for programs pertaining to women's health, education, etc. Beginning at home and continuing into schools and other educational and employment institutions, women are denied access to and opportunity for their proper place, possession, and status (Engida, 2021). The problems start to affect not only women but the entire society as a whole (Eger et al., 2018). A global concern is women's empowerment, and debates about women's political rights are at the

forefront of numerous official and unofficial initiatives across the globe. At the 1985 NAROIBI International Women's Conference, the idea of women's empowerment was first presented.

Need for Women Empowerment

Women can gain knowledge, skills, and strategies via empowerment that will aid in their social and personal development and increase their awareness of societal issues. Special measures must be implemented to support women's employment, health, and education. Improving the female-to-male ratio requires economic empowerment, which can only be achieved when women receive an education (Tandon, 2016). The primary cause of women's exploitation and negligence is a lack of knowledge. Only literacy and education can allow women to understand the Indian's constitutional and legislative provisions that are designed to strengthen them. Women can contribute to the development of their countries once they have received an education (Wahyudi, 2022). In India and around the world, a small number of women now occupy powerful positions but there is still room for improvement if more women are educated. The desire of women is gender equity and empowerment becomes the means of achieving it with honour. Indian women are regarded as shakthi, meaning powerful. Governments must also play a crucial role in empowering people. Interventions require well-thought-out strategies that are carried out methodically and give roles to women (Shetty & Hans, 2019). Conceptually and methodologically, women's empowerment and development are related. In order to empower women to achieve their goals on par with men in various areas of life and to foster and maintain a culture based on equality, unity, and dignity, it is important to promote their education. Women become economically sound through education, which is the foundation for all forms of women's empowerment, including social, psychological, technological, and political. It helps them to go beyond barriers.

Education is important for Empowerment of Women

Women's empowerment is a relatively new idea. The first year of New Millennium 2001 was declared as "Women Empowerment Year". Women's education improves families and, eventually, creates the perfect culture for a progressive country. A progressive nation is one in which all of its citizens are economically, socially, culturally, and politically independent, regardless of their sex, religion, caste, creed, or colour (Muhammad et al., 2021).

Education transforms development, according to new UNESCO data. It states:

The per capita income would rise by 23% over the course of 40 years if all children had equal access to schooling.

Child marriages and child mortality may decrease by a sixth and maternal deaths by two-thirds if all women received an elementary education.

UNESCO's latest analysis demonstrates that:

Education empowers women Young women and girls with greater education are more likely to be aware of their rights and to feel empowered to claim them.

Education promotes tolerance Education encourages people to engage in their societies' political life, fosters the tolerance and trust that maintain democracy, and helps people know democracy.

Education equality improves job opportunities and increases economic growth Gains in productivity would accelerate economic growth if all children had equal access to schooling.

Education is part of the solution to environmental problems More educated people are more likely to recycle their waste and utilise water and energy more efficiently.

Educating women avoids early marriages Increasing the number of women who receive education can help prevent child marriage. Additionally, it aids in the elimination of bad customs like early marriage, dower, and Sati Pratha.

Education saves mother's lives Pregnancy and delivery problems continue to be the leading cause of death for many women in several nations. These deaths can be avoided by education.

Some child diseases are preventable but not without education Some of the deadliest diseases that affect children can be avoided with simple treatments like clean water and malaria nets, but only if mothers are trained to use them.

Education saves children's lives Women who are educated are better able to spot early symptoms of sickness, ask for help, and take appropriate action. Child mortality would decrease by one-sixth if all women in developing nations complete their primary education.

Education fights hunger Education can help reduce the terrible effects of starvation on children's life.

National Policies, Special Laws, and Constitutional Provisions Supporting Women's Empowerment

The Indian Constitution acknowledged the value of women as a human resource and granted them equality. Numerous articles of the Constitution highlight the importance of women's socioeconomic advancement and decision-making participation. These are:

- Article 14 Men and women to have equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic and social spheres.

- Article 15(1) Prohibits discrimination against any citizens on the grounds of religion, race, sex, caste etc.
- Article 16 Equality of opportunities in matter of public appointments for all citizens.
- Article 39(d) Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- Article 42 The state to make provision for ensuring first and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Additionally, the government has passed specific laws to protect women's rights and elevate their status in society. These are:

- The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 grants women the ability to inherit their parents' property.
- According to the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, taking dowries is illegal, which stops women from being exploited.
- The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 mandates that women receive the same remuneration for labour of equal value.
- Abortion is permitted under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971, which grants women the freedom to get an abortion based on their physical and mental health.
- The goal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1983 is to prevent a variety of offences against women.
- The 1986 Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act forbids the vulgar presentation of women in media, including television, films, and newspapers.
- For women who are victims of domestic violence of any form, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005 offers more effective protection of their constitutionally granted rights.

Conclusion

In order to wrap up the current situation, it can be claimed that education and women's empowerment are closely linked. Another significant factor in this respect is that the issue of women's empowerment has been confronted with major challenges in these societies, which originate from certain negative norms and attitudes like child labour, child marriage, illiteracy, superstition, partial parental attitudes, female feticides, etc. and Under such circumstances, women's empowerment is critically needed (Mandal, 2013). In order to promote women's empowerment, an atmosphere that would enable women to take part in

educational programs and profit from them must be established (Varghese, 2012). For the purpose of empowering women worldwide, educational and other policies should be put into practice. Man can not eliminate poverty, unemployment, and inequality on his own (Ojha, 2016). Women must participate equally and actively. Women cannot fully understand the significance of their rights until they receive an education. Higher literacy and education levels, better health care for women and their children, equal ownership of productive resources, greater involvement in the commercial and economic sectors, awareness of their rights, an improved standard of living, and the development of self-reliance, self-confidence, and self-respect in women are all goals of women's empowerment (Jha, 2014). The government recently introduced the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao program, which aims to empower girls financially and socially. It also helps raise awareness and improves the effectiveness of welfare programs for women. National implementation of such programs is necessary to achieve the desired improvements. It is important to remember that both men and women must take the initiative to pursue lifelong learning. Empowerment like that is real.

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