

Role of Education in the Empowerment of Women in India: An Analysis

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Abstract

India is a leader in women's education, supported by a government and civil society dedicated to this vital cause. Women's education is essential for national progress and empowerment. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru stated, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual; however, if you educate a woman, you educate a whole family." When women, who make up nearly half the population, are empowered, they strengthen the economy and society. Education empowers women to confront challenges and transform their lives, making it a key factor for India's aspirations to become a global superpower. It reduces inequalities, enhances women's status within families, and promotes participation. Equal access to education is a fundamental right for women. Educated women can become strong leaders and agents of change, understanding their rights and speaking out against discrimination and violence. Despite the rising rates of women's education, the status of girls' education has not met established goals. This study evaluates the current state of women's education in India, highlighting that while progress is being made, it is not occurring effectively enough. The paper draws on secondary data and information regarding women's literacy from 1901 to 2011.

Keywords: Education, preoccupation, milestone, empowerment, participation

INTRODUCTION

EFA program was launched in 2002 by the Government of India after its 86th Constitutional Amendment made education from age 6-14 the fundamental right of every Indian child. Education plays a vital role in empowering women and girls. It provides them with the knowledge and skills necessary to gain autonomy, participate in decision-making processes and contribute to their communities. However, despite the recognized importance of education, women and girls continue to face significant challenges and barriers in achieving equal access to education.

Globally, women and girls face persistent barriers to education. These barriers can stem from cultural, social and economic factors, and they often lead to disparities in educational opportunities between girls and boys. For example, in many developing countries, gender disparities in education persist due to traditional social norms and practices, such as early marriages and the burden of household responsibilities. Additionally, factors such as poverty, conflict and limited access to resources also contribute to these disparities. As a result, women and girls are denied the opportunity to reach their full potential and contribute to society on an equal footing with their male counterparts.

Education has countless benefits for women and girls. Firstly, it allows women and girls to gain knowledge, develop skills and make informed decisions. Education empowers women and girls to challenge societal norms and stereotypes, enabling them to advocate for their rights and participate in the

public sphere. Additionally, education provides women and girls with opportunities to secure better jobs, earn higher incomes and support their families financially. Education also allows women and girls to become agents of change within their communities, promoting gender equality and social justice. Empowerment can be viewed as a means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation. The empowerment strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power, and experience. Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing an individual to think, autonomously take action, and control work. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's life. There are always several elements in the society which are deprived of their basic rights in every society, state, and nation, but these elements lack the awareness of their rights. If we enlist such elements from the society, then women would top this list. Women are the most important factor of every society. Even though everybody is aware of this fact, but nobody is ready to accept this fact. As a result, the importance that used to be given to women is declining today. As a consequence of this growing tendency to underestimate women, such as to make them occupy a secondary position in society and to deprive them of their basic rights, the need for empowering women was felt. Empowering women has become the focus of considerable discussion and attention all over the world. Today we enjoy the benefits 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 inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women are an age-old issue all over the world. Thus women's quest for equality with men is a universal phenomenon. Women should be equal to men in matters of education, employment, inheritance, marriage, and politics, etc. Their quest for equality has given birth to the formation of many women's associations and the launching of movements. The Constitution of our nation doesn't discriminate between men and women, but our society has deprived women of certain basic rights, which were bestowed upon them by our Constitution. Empowerment allows individuals to reach their full potential, to improve their political and social participation, and to believe in their own capabilities.⁶⁸

1. DISCUSSION

Women's Education Status in India.

The constitutional directive to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years has remained unfulfilled till now. Educational experts admit that this failure is mainly due to the slow progress of education among girls. Literacy and educational levels are increasing for Indian women, but there is a gap between male and female literacy rates, which can be seen in the table below.

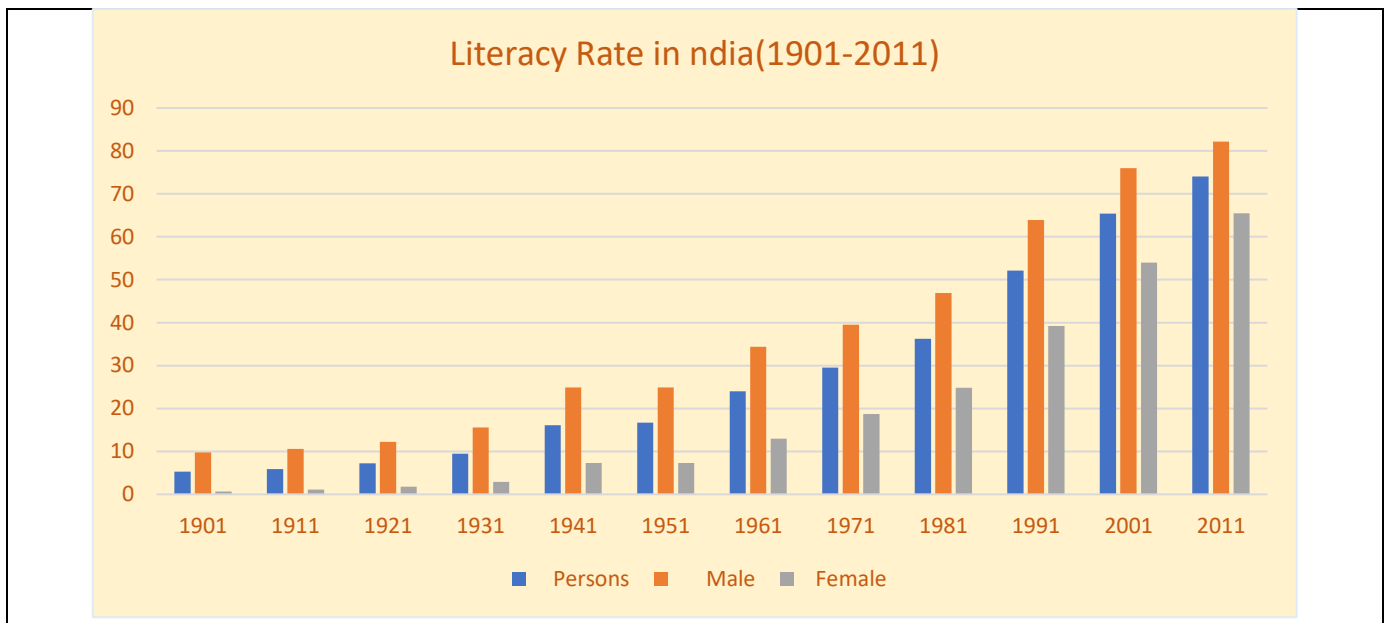
Year	Persons	Male	Female
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
1961	24.0	34.4	13.0
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8

1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Census of India (2011)

Literacy Rate in India (1901-2011)

The proportion of people with education rose to 74.04% in 2011, with 82.14% of men and 65.46% of women, respectively. According to the 2011 census, just 58.8% of rural women are literate. The national average for female literacy was 65.46%, while the average for male literacy was 82.14%. India is the largest democracy in the world, home to billions of people, about half of whom are women. What impact does women's education have on India's progress? Families also suffer when females do not receive an education. Mothers with education apply what they have learned to enhance the health of their family members, including their children. Their families are shielded from disease by their awareness of health risks. Families also suffer when females do not receive an education.



Literacy Rate in India (1901-2011)

Source: Census of India (2011)

Compared to households with educated moms, the child mortality rate is significantly greater in those with less educated mothers. "Educating girls is not an option, it is a necessity" is becoming one of Indian society's top objectives. Eliminating gender differences in school is something that we all desire.100

Importance of women's education

A woman's education educates the entire family, whereas a man's education educates a single person. Mother India is empowered when women are empowered. Jawaharlal Nehru, PT. In India, the education of women is crucial to the nation's overall progress. It not only aids in the improvement of both domestic

and external quality of life, but in the development of half of the human resources. It won't be incorrect to say that education is the solution to every issue. Many definitions of education have been proposed by thinkers, but M. Phule's definition is the most significant of them all. According to M. Phule, "Education is that which demonstrates the difference between what is good and what is evil". If we consider the above definition, we come to know that whatever revolutions that have taken place in our history, education is at the base of them.

According to the concept given above, education has been at the core of every revolution that has occurred in our history. One learns what is right and wrong, what is good and evil, what is just and unjust, etc., through education. It is education that allows injustice to be voiced. The 3-fold formula which Dr. B. R. Ambedkar gave to Indian society includes the most important thing, which is education. In other words, he has emphasized education. The goal of education is to change behaviour in all areas, including viewpoint, attitude, and mindset. In addition to encouraging their daughters' education, educated mothers are better able to mentor all of their children. Additionally, educated women can contribute to a decrease in infant mortality, the population's growth, and the rate.^{83.6}

In India, gender discrimination persists, and much more has to be done to improve women's education. The disparity between male and female literacy rates is one obvious example. Men's literacy rate is over 82.14%, however women's is just 65.46 percent. It was believed that the women should just be housewives and that education had a significant influence on them. Education as a tool for female empowerment. The empowerment of women is a fundamental aspect of any society, state, or country. The person who controls a child's daily life is a lady. Women make up a sizable section of our society. Women's empowerment can be significantly impacted by education.

The topic of women's political rights is at the forefront of numerous official and informal movements around the world, and women's empowerment is a global problem. At the 1985 NAROIBI International Women's Conference, the idea of women's empowerment was first presented. An important step toward women's empowerment is education. Because it gives them the ability to respond to the difficulties, face their custom in their lives.

Therefore, we cannot undervalue the role that education plays in empowering women. ^{88.5}

2. Challenge in Women's Education

Despite the recognized benefits of education, women and girls continue to face significant challenges and barriers in achieving equal access to education. These challenges include:

Gender inequality: It still exists in many communities, and women and girls are frequently marginalized and subjected to discrimination.

Cultural barriers: These can include customs that limit females' access to school, like early marriage and female genital mutilation. Because families cannot afford the expenses of education, uniforms, and transportation, poverty frequently serves as a barrier to education.

Discrimination and violence: Physical and sexual violence against women and girls in schools is still a major problem.

Gender bias: In addition to influencing girls' aspirations and their views of their roles in society, gender bias in schools and classrooms can also result in occupational segregation and differences in labour market activity. Gender stereotypes can have a long-lasting effect on academic performance and field of study choice, particularly for young women pursuing STEM fields. These stereotypes can be conveyed through the layout of classrooms and schools or the actions of peers, teachers, and staff.

Poverty: One of the key determinants of a girl's ability to obtain and finish her education is her level of poverty. In terms of access to and completion of education, research continuously confirms that girls who experience several disadvantages—such as low family income, living in distant or underserved areas, having a disability, or belonging to a minority ethnolinguistic group—fall behind the most.

Discrimination and violence: Physical and sexual violence against women and girls in schools is still a major problem. Additionally, violence keeps females from getting an education and finishing it; many are compelled to walk long distances to school, which puts them at higher danger of violence, and many are victims of violence while attending school. According to the most recent figures, every year, almost 60 million girls are sexually assaulted while they are traveling to or from school. In addition to lowering attendance and increasing dropout rates, this frequently has detrimental effects on their general well-being and mental and physical health. Eliminating gender-based violence in schools is crucial because an estimated 246 million children encounter violence in and around schools each year.

Sexual exploitation or abuse against adolescents can result in adolescent pregnancies. Communities frequently stigmatize and even discriminate against girls who become pregnant. Disparate gender standards combined with the stigmatization load can cause females to leave school early and never return.

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Child marriage is also a critical challenge.

Child marriage is a serious problem as well. Compared to their counterparts who married later, girls who marry early are significantly more likely to drop out of school and finish fewer years of education. Additionally, they are subjected to higher levels of violence committed by their partner and are more likely to become parents early in life. This in turn impacts their capacity to make a living, as well as their children's education and health. Girls who complete secondary school have a six-fold higher marriage rate than youngsters who have little to no education.

A 2017 study found that over 41,000 girls under the age of 18 get married every day. Stopping this practice would raise women's predicted educational achievement and, consequently, their earning potential. The paper forecasts that preventing child marriage might result in annual benefits of almost US\$500 billion. Enrolment rates for primary and secondary schools are approaching parity between boys and girls worldwide (92% male, 90% female). The completion rates for girls are lower in low-income countries, where 63% of female primary school students finish primary school, compared to 67% of male primary school students, even though enrolment rates are comparable. Two-thirds of all countries have achieved gender parity in primary school enrolments. Girls' secondary school completion rates are still below average in low-income nations, where just 38% of them complete lower secondary school, compared to 43% of boys. Similar differences in lesser income are shown in upper secondary completion rates.

There is a learning problem affecting both boys and girls. The percentage of kids who cannot read well by the age of ten is known as Learning Poverty (LP). Although girls are typically 4 percentage points less likely than boys to be learning-poor, both groups' percentages are nonetheless quite high. In low- and middle-income nations, the average percentage of women living in learning poverty is 50%, whereas the average for men is 56%. In low-income nations, where learning poverty averages over 93% for both boys and girls, the disparity is less pronounced.

Higher education enrolments marginally benefit young women in many nations, but improved learning achievements do not translate into improved career and life outcomes for women. Globally, there is a significant gender disparity in labour force participation rates. With some of the lowest percentages of female labour force participation—26% and 20%, respectively—South Asia, the Middle East, and North

Africa are particularly affected. Given that rates in other regions, such as East Asia (59%) and Latin America (53%) are still lower than those for men, these are incredibly low rates.⁹⁴

3. Conclusion

For a country to be progressive and flourish, women are essential. Prioritizing their education is crucial to imagining a better future for women in our society, and their efforts are crucial for improving the country. Making the shift from a position of weakness to one of strength and influence is known as empowerment. Education promotes involvement in public affairs, local governments, and governance, which aids in the eradication of gender inequality.

Additionally, it is essential to educate and inspire women to fully pursue their education. Women with higher levels of education are more likely to stand up for their rights, put their health and wellbeing first, and make sure their kids get a better education. This has a cascading effect that benefits subsequent generations and makes society more just. We must address the persistent issues and determine concrete measures for a better future as we consider the vital role that education plays in empowering women in India. Let's unite to support women's education and acknowledge its transformative potential in improving lives and transforming our communities.

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