

# Education and Women Empowerment: A Study of Impact and Challenges

Asia khatun<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Mamata Patra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Rama Devi Women's University,  
Bhubaneswar, India

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar, India

## Abstract

Education is a basic human right and a major source of women's empowerment and gender equality in India. This study explores the link between education and empowerment of women, focusing on constitutional provisions, policy frameworks, and persistent challenges. Although female literacy has improved, there are still major differences in gender because of socio-cultural factors, poverty, and unequal availability of resources. The study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach using secondary data from Census reports, government policies, and scholarly literature. It finds both the traditional problems (patriarchy, early marriage, economic constraints) and the modern ones (digital divide and infrastructural gaps and poor policy implementation). The results show that education increases the decision-making power of women, economic independence, and social participation. Nonetheless, the barriers to including everyone in accessing quality education are the restrictions in the implementation of policies like the Right to Education Act and structural inequalities. The paper is conclusive that legal and policy frameworks offer a strong base, although empowering women cannot be achieved without proper implementation and elimination of systemic barriers as well as concentrating on inclusive and equitable education

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Women, Empowerment, Equality, Human Right, Development.

## 1. Introduction

Education is known as one of the fundamental human rights and a crucial factor in socio-economic and psychological development. For women, education is both a means of personal development and a powerful tool for advancing gender equality and empowerment. Educated women are able to make healthier families, be economically productive, and democratically engaged. Where there is equality in the entire sphere particularly in education, there is prosperity, sustainability, hope, and a life filled with honor, love, sincerity, and devotion (Kmila Habib, 2019). Educated women are better able to use resources to create lasting, positive change in society. They should have more control over resources like land and property. When women have access to education, they gain a stronger voice, so it is

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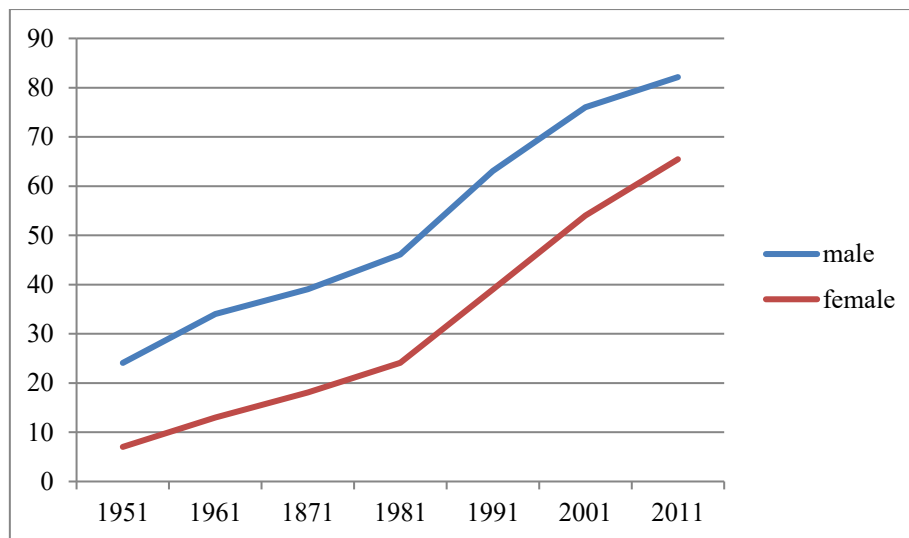
important to protect and strengthen their right to express them. This helps increase tolerance and reduces discrimination against women. Education is the key to overcoming barriers and challenges (Kmila Habib, 2019). Dr. B. R. Ambedkar strongly supports women's education as a cornerstone of societal advance and empowerment. According to him, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved" (Yeasmin, 2018). Therefore, the Constitution of India encourages women to have an education by providing equal treatment, non-discrimination, and affirmative action. In India, education falls under both the union and state jurisdiction as a concurrent subject, and the expansion and progress of education is the responsibility of both the centre and the state. Both are responsible to ensure that every individual has the required proficiency, knowledge and attitude to execute the duty as a responsible citizen. Hence article 14, 15(1), 15(3), 21(A), 42, 45, 39(A), and 51A (k) exclusively talk about equal opportunities of education and development. All these articles require gender-free access to education and allow women special assistance. However, women are still facing significant obstacle to getting education, particularly in developing countries and India is not exception from this list (Irshad Ahmad Reshi, 2022). India continues to face profound socio-economic inequalities that severely impact women, despite its economic progress. Poverty, unequal resource distribution, restrictive cultural traditions, and remote locations remain primary barriers preventing millions of girls and women from accessing education (asf.org.in). In rural and remote areas they are further disadvantaged by the poor infrastructure that includes remote schools, insecurity of transportation and proper sanitation facilities. These issues add up over time resulting in low literacy and increased drop-outs among women as opposed to men (vadeya, 2024).

Free and compulsory education is guaranteed to all children to the age of 6-14 years in the constitution but this has not been achieved. The education level of women has risen, but there is a gap between female and male literacy rates, as shown in the table below.

**Table 1: Literacy Rate of India**

Year	Persons	Male	Female
1951	16.07	24.09	07.03
1961	24.00	34.04	13.00
1971	29.05	39.05	18.07
1981	36.02	46.09	24.08
1991	52.01	63.09	39.02
2001	65.38	76.00	54.00
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

(Census of India, 2011)



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Indian literacy rate is a subject of concern. The percentage of literate individuals in the 2011 census was 74.04%, compared to 16.07% in 1951, with 82.14% of males and 65.46% of females, respectively. The literacy rate in Kerala was the highest, 90.02%, and the state of Bihar had a lower average of 50, the lowest in India. It depicts an ever-present difference between the male and female counterparts. India is the biggest democracy in the world with billions of people and of course, nearly half of them are women. Then, what is the impact of the education of women in India on its development? Without education of girls, families are also affected. The education of girls is becoming one of the priorities of the Indian society. Girls have to be educated, not because it is a choice. Everyone desires to do away with gender inequalities in education (Singh, 2016).

### 1.1. Literature Review

(Saha, 2023) In this article, the author defines that Empowerment of women is a crucial element of development discourse. It is quite clear that positive change and transformation of an unequal society can only be achieved through the empowerment of women. Women education is significant in societal development. Education is an accomplishment of women empowerment as it provides them with the ability to react to the challenges, to resist their traditional role and modify their lives. The emancipation of women is realized in a multifarious manner through education. It prepares women in a manner that they can receive instructions in developing their personality.

(Kmila Habib, 2019) The author highlighted that education and employment are of great importance as a positively related variable with the women empowerment in the decision making, the control over the resources and voice. Education assists women in securing jobs, and jobs enable them to be self-sufficient and economically empowered which in turn results into their empowerment.

Sundaram (2014) this article emphasizes that education is the most powerful tool for women's empowerment, which in turn leads to overall social and economic development.

Despite the constitutional guarantees of equality, women continue to face discrimination, inequality, and marginalization in many areas of life, especially in rural societies.

(Sharma, 2017) In this paper, the researcher finds that the primary determinant of women empowerment, prosperity, growth and wellbeing is education. This capacity will be brought by the means of empowerment and empowerment will be brought by basic education, and rural development will be brought by the empowerment of women.

Keohane (2020) Article finds that the changing role of women in leadership and the challenges they continue to face. It highlights that although women today are more visible in leadership positions than ever before, they still encounter significant structural and cultural barriers. Women's leadership has increased due to education, suffrage, feminism, and social change. However, persistent barriers like gender stereotypes, unequal domestic responsibilities, and a lack of supportive policies limit their progress. The article argues that women's leadership potential is shaped by societal conditions, and achieving equality requires structural reforms and changing attitudes toward women in power.

Thompson (2001) this article explores the relationship between women, class, and education, focusing on the experiences of working-class women. It argues that both the formal and informal education play an essential role in mould women's identities, awareness, and ability to challenge inequality. Using personal narratives and feminist perspectives, the author highlights how traditional studies have often ignored women's voices. While education provides opportunities for empowerment and social mobility, it does not automatically eliminate class and gender inequalities. The article emphasizes that structural barriers and unequal power relations persist, making broader social and political change necessary to bring off true equality and improve the lives of working-class women.

(Yeasmin, 2018) In this article, the writer explores Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's vision and his contribution to women empowerment and emancipation through the lens of social justice, education, and legal rights in India. As a staunch advocate of gender equality, he also emphasizes human rights regardless of caste, class, creed, and gender.

## **1.2. Research Gap**

Current study on empowerment of women and the role of education in India is usually focusing on one of the traditional obstacles or new challenges separately and trying to combine both in a combined analytical approach has seldom been done. Also, a lot of the literature focuses on policy making instead of critically evaluating gaps in the implementation and actual effect on access to education by women. There is also a lack of holistic research that directly links education to the multidimensional aspects of empowerment—social, economic, political, and psychological—thereby creating a need for more integrated and empirical analysis in this field.

## **1.3.Objectives**

1. To understand the relationship between women's empowerment and education in India

2. To analyze the major policies and constitutional provisions for education of women in India.
3. To identify major traditional and new challenges in the educational access of women.
4. To make suggestions for inclusive education for women's empowerment.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

1. What is the core relationship between education and the empowerment of women?
2. How does access to education empower women?
3. What are the governmental provisions and policies for women in the Indian Constitution?
4. What are the major contemporary challenges faced by women in getting inclusive education?

#### **1.5. Methodology**

The study is mainly based on qualitative and analytical methods. The author mostly uses the secondary sources, such as- scholarly journals, books, the Census, government reports, government policies and provisions, and a broad feminist approach. Mainly, this research adopts a descriptive approach to examine the relationship between formal education and women's empowerment in India. Also, the author uses a comparative framework to analyze the impact of education and emerging challenges faced by women. Lastly, the findings are thematically synthesized to highlight the trends, policy implications, and major outcomes for the inclusive education of women in India.

#### **2. Conceptual framework: Education, Empowerment and Women**

The function of education as an effective tool of societal change and gender equality is well-known. It increases the knowledge, skills, confidence, and the ability of women in decision making, hence empowering them both personally, socially, and economically.

Education assists people in building their comprehension, thinking capacity and personality to enable them to work in society. Mahatma Gandhi defines “education as a way to bring out the best in a person—body, mind, and spirit”. Education is widely defined as formal, informal, and non-formal, but a powerful mechanism through which individual and society shapes by promoting knowledge, critical thinking and overall development, and women are not exception from this scope. So, education of women in India is a process of providing women with equal access to education to improve their literacy levels, awareness and ability to make decisions and contribute to the community. Empowerment is basically a multi-dimensional process which leads to the transformation of individual through the allocation of power. While a woman transforms from within towards positive direction and empowered from inside, they can be capable of making decisions for their own life and protest against the social discrimination and injustice imposed upon them. Women empowerment is a very crucial aspect of human development as well as holistic development of a nation (Maiti, 2021).

## **2.2. Historical Background of Education and Women's Empowerment**

Early societies had a high status and respect for women. Gargi and Maitreyi were highly educated women in ancient India and were involved in philosophical debates. Women were allowed to have an education and religious practices, and they could select their life partners through systems such as the swayamvara. They also played a significant and respected role in the family and the society (Preek, 2024). But in the medieval period the status of women degraded greatly because of many changes in society, politics, and culture. A number of restrictive practices were popular and include purdah pratha, child marriage, and sati, which curtailed the freedom and independence of women. The women had their access to education significantly curtailed, and they were mostly restricted to domestic responsibilities. The patriarchal norms took center stage, and this further limited the role of women in the open and social life. Some other reasons for decline of women's status in this period include foreign invasions and political instability, the rise of rigid patriarchal norms, the widespread social evil, and the decline of educational opportunities (Preek, 2024). The awareness of the women empowerment in India started during the colonial times in the organized social reform movements. New concepts of equality, Western education, and ideas inspired reformists, such as Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, to oppose practices such as sati and encouraged women to be educated. Legislation was enacted to strengthen the women's position. This was the onset of consciousness and slow advancement in the rights of women. During the national movement, women actively contributed to the struggle for freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and gained their political consciousness and their role in society. The Constitution of India, since its independence, has assured women equal rights and protection of the law (Preek, 2024). Empowerment, as an element of development, nowadays is a central and developed objective of education and government efforts. All in all, the empowerment of women has been achieved to a great extent, but there are still obstacles to complete equality. After independence, the Indian constitution guaranteed equality and fundamental rights of women. Women were given equality in education, work and politics. Various laws were enacted to prevent discrimination and social evils like dowry and child marriage. Additionally, government schemes were introduced to promote women's welfare and empowerment.

## **3. Constitutional Provision for Women's Education**

The Constitution of the Republic of India provides a robust framework for education, which clarifies the Union and State responsibilities in this field, and supports the right to education for women. The Preamble of the Constitution of India sets the stage by highlighting justice, liberty and equality of status and opportunity, and non-discrimination for all citizens. The Fundamental Rights include provisions for equality and protection. Equality before the law is enshrined in Article 14, and prohibition of discrimination on several grounds, including sex, is outlawed in Article 15(1). However, Article 15(3) allows the state to make special provisions for women and children, and Article 16 provides for equal opportunity in public employment. The Directive Principles of State Policy reinforce this perspective on social and economic justice. Article 39(d) advocates equal pay for equal work and Article 42 ensures decent working conditions and maternity benefits. Article 45 emphasizes the need for free

and compulsory education for children, while Article 46 mandates protection of the educational and economic interests of weaker sections, especially Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Moreover, Fundamental Duties mandates parents and guardians to provide education to their children (6-14 years) under Article 51A (k). These constitutional provisions establish a robust legal and moral framework to promote women's education. They promote equality, foster state policies and play a significant role in women empowerment and inclusive development in the country.

The Five-Year Plans by India prioritized women's education as the means of social change and development. Initial strategies were aimed at increasing basic literacy and access to girls, but subsequent strategies provided specific programs on female education and empowerment. Special focus was put on gender gaps minimization, better enrolment, and dropout prevention. All in all, the following plans contributed to the empowerment and increased education of women as one of the most important empowerment tools.

National Commission for Women (NCW) is a statutory institution that was established in 1992 to safeguard and advance the rights of women in India. It examines legal protection, receives gender discrimination grievances, and counsels the government on policies that enhance the welfare of women. It is significant in the empowerment and gender justice of women.

#### **4. Dimension of Women Empowerment**

Women's empowerment is a complex concept- it cannot be seen as a one-dimensional concept. It entails widening the capacity of women to make decisions, open opportunities, and exercise rights in various spheres of life. The key dimensions of women's empowerment are:

**4.1. Social Empowerment** - This aims at enhancing the position of women in society. It incorporates non-discrimination, education, health, and the removal of such practices as child marriage and gender-based violence. The social empowerment assists the women to acquire dignity and equal respect.

**4.2. Educational Empowerment** - Empowerment is anchored on education. It improves the knowledge level, level of rights awareness, and level of decision-making. With education, women have greater chances of engaging in economic and political activities and fighting against social inequalities.

**4.3. Economic Empowerment** - It is essential to be economically independent. This is the access to employment, equal wages, property rights, financial resources, and access to entrepreneurship. Women have bargaining power in the family and society when they earn and have their own income.

**4.4. Political Empowerment** - This includes involvement in political activities like voting, running in elections, and decision-making. This aspect is reinforced by policies such as women's reservation in Panchayati Raj (73rd and 74th CAAs) institutions in India.

**4.5. Psychological Empowerment** - It means creating self-confidence, self-esteem, and awareness in women. It helps them to oppose oppression, make their own choices, and defend their rights.

**4.6. Legal Empowerment** - This will make women aware of and capable of exercising their legal rights. Legislation on domestic violence, dowry, and harassment in the workplace is very crucial, and it must be well enforced.

**4.7. Cultural Empowerment** - It involves breaking traditional stereotypes and patriarchal norms that restrict women's roles. Freedom of expression, movement, and cultural life involvement should be encouraged.

Women's empowerment is holistic—progress in one dimension supports others. For true empowerment, efforts must be integrated across social, economic, political, and educational spheres, along with strong policy implementation and societal change.

## **5. Challenges to Women's Education**

The situation of women's education in India has changed greatly since independence, with the constitutional provisions in the Constitution of India, as well as the policies such as the Right to Education Act, 2009. The level of female literacy and enrolment has improved, and the gender gap has been minimized. Nevertheless, issues like dropout, rural inequalities, and socio-cultural obstacles remain. Challenges to education can be broadly divided into **traditional** and **contemporary** factors:

### **5.1. Traditional Challenges:**

Conventional/ traditional Problems are -

- 5.1.1.** Social norms such as patriarchy and gender discrimination- Deep-rooted beliefs tend to put men at a higher position than women, denying girls the opportunity of education and even to make decisions.
- 5.1.2.** Girls' early marriage and domestic duties - Girls are married off very early, or they are overburdened with household chores, which disrupt or terminate their education.
- 5.1.3.** Poverty and favoring boys' education- In families with low income, the resources that are available are normally spent on the education of boys, because they are the future earners.
- 5.1.4.** Cultural barriers to movement and education of girls- Social practices and safety issues- Girls are not allowed to travel to schools or to study beyond a certain level.

These traditional barriers have seen to it that many girls are not afforded equal educational opportunities, putting a direct limitation on their skills, independence, and awareness. Consequently, the empowerment of women is yet to be complete and balanced, particularly in marginalized societies.

### **5.2. Contemporary Challenges:**

- 5.2.1.** Digital divide and technology accessibility- A significant number of girls, particularly in rural and marginalized locations do not have access to Smartphone's, the internet, and digital skills, restricting their ability to access modern learning.

- 5.2.2. Low standards of education and infrastructures- Insufficient teachers, insufficient sanitation and learning facilities, and low learning achievements deter girls in their education.
- 5.2.3. Safety issues and school dropouts- Fear of being harassed, unsafe traveling, and lack of secure school settings are some of the major factors that increase the rate of school dropouts among girls.
- 5.2.4. Economic strains, migration, and evolving job requirements - Financial instability compels families to focus on work instead of education, and the shifting nature of job markets requires skills that most girls have not acquired.
- 5.2.5. Government implementation failure - Despite the many policies that are in place, poor implementation, corruption, and lack of monitoring of the policies minimize their actual effect on the education of women.
- 5.2.6. Limitations of the Right to Education Act, 2009 - The lack of effect of the Act due to poor execution, attention given to elementary education only, and gaps in quality limit its success in facilitating further education to girls.
- 5.2.7. Pressure of the National Education Policy 2020 -Although ambitious, it has implementation pressures, a focus on digital and structural changes that may impose adjustment pressure, particularly on disadvantaged girls.

With these modern challenges, women are still not allowed equitable access to quality education, which still tries to frustrate the full empowerment of women.

## **6. Discussion and Conclusion**

Despite 78 years of independence, Indian women still face many social and cultural barriers. They continue to face more problems than in many developed countries. Gender equity means the achievement of equality in all areas regardless of gender (Mandal, 2013). In this regard, education is a powerful tool for women's empowerment as it helps them to tackle difficulties, challenge gender roles and bring about change. While India has seen progress in education, gender inequality still exists, suggesting more needs to be done to promote women's education in India (Kabita, 2021). It is imperative that women who are empowered to empower their children are given the right life skills at the current times. They are to be empowered without any form of discrimination and should be given equal rights. Being a fast-growing economy, India, nevertheless, is still behind in terms of gender equality. Education and women's empowerment are deeply linked; education equips women with knowledge, skills, and confidence, enabling them to make independent choices, participates in the economy, and claims their rights in family and society. Female education is key to a more balanced and equal society. Educating girls can impact not just their lives but also their families' and communities' lives. Women with an education open the door to equality and enable them to defend their children's rights, leading to a positive impact on future generations (Twowings, 2025). Despite the implication of various constitutional provisions and governmental policies, the women which consist half of our society are still facing new

challenges in getting an equal and quality education. Therefore needs a continuous campaigning of awareness, reforms in the RTE Act (at least 6-18 years), and commitment to substantive equality in education. In short, education is one of the most powerful tools for women's empowerment because it transforms personal capability into social and economic change, but progress depends on removing barriers like discrimination, poverty, and limited access to quality education, many more contemporary challenges faced by them and making it Inclusive for Women Empowerment.

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