



“Women's education and empowerment in India”

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Abstract

Women's education is a powerful instrument for social, economic, and cultural transformation in India. Education enables women to develop knowledge, skills, confidence, and awareness of their rights, thereby strengthening their participation in family, community, and national development. Despite significant progress in female literacy and access to education, many Indian women continue to face challenges such as poverty, gender discrimination, early marriage, inadequate educational facilities, and social barriers. This study examines the relationship between women's education and empowerment in India, focusing on how access to quality education contributes to economic independence, improved decision-making, greater political and social participation, and enhanced awareness of health and legal rights. It also highlights the importance of government initiatives, community participation, skill development, and inclusive educational policies in reducing gender inequalities. Empowering women through education benefits not only individual women but also families and society as a whole. Therefore, ensuring equal access to quality education for girls and women is essential for building a more equitable, self-reliant, and progressive India.

Keywords: Women's Education, Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality, Female Literacy, Education in India, Economic Independence, Social Development, Government Initiatives, Skill Development, Inclusive Education.

Introduction

Women's education and empowerment are essential for the social, economic, and overall development of India. Education provides women with knowledge, skills, confidence, and awareness, enabling them to make informed decisions and participate actively in family, society, and the workforce. An educated woman is better equipped to understand her rights, access opportunities, contribute to household income, and support the education and well-being of the next generation.

India has made considerable progress in improving women's access to education through constitutional provisions, government programmes, and various social initiatives. However, challenges such as poverty, gender discrimination, early marriage, school dropout, lack of educational facilities, safety concerns, and

traditional social attitudes continue to affect the education and empowerment of many women, particularly in rural and disadvantaged communities.

Women's empowerment goes beyond providing access to education; it involves creating opportunities for women to achieve economic independence, participate in decision-making, exercise their rights, and contribute equally to society. Education serves as a foundation for this empowerment by developing capabilities and reducing social and economic inequalities. Therefore, promoting quality and inclusive education for girls and women is crucial for achieving gender equality and sustainable national development in India.

A woman is an important member of the family, and her status has been enhanced from ancient times. The word "mother-in-law" comes before "father-in-law". She is equivalent to God. In society, a woman who appears in multiple roles, such as mother, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, elder sister, and so on, is well-educated; nevertheless, the entire family is educated. Education is equally important for men and women. In the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first centuries, it is critical for a woman to receive Krishna.

Women have been drawn to the art of education since ancient times and have achieved great success. Women became Brahma Vadini during the Vedic period. It was required to remain celibate during the period, and there have been incidents of marriage. Lopa Mudra Kadru Romusa Apala Vishwa Vara Devi Ghosha Avalomi Jarita Kama Yami Urvashi Indrani, Yami Gaupayana Savitri Agamrani, etc. During the Rig Vedic period, ladies who achieved happiness gained spiritual understanding. As a result, women of the time had extensive spiritual knowledge. The Upanayana ceremony symbolized opening one's inner self in order to receive wisdom. This lecture took place among the tranquil hills and forests. At the time, women and men were treated equally in terms of education. During the Vedic period, women's education advanced. Philosophy was a very important branch of study. Women eventually became philosophers. It is worth noting that she was both a student of education and a teacher. She was thought to be Saraswati, who was the center of dispute. During this time, women like Kargil Maitri rose to fame.

During the Sutra era, women were increasingly elevated. They were specialists on the Vedas and Upanishads. They were also versed about arithmetic and other sciences. They held the post of instructor.

When Buddhism was dominant, Buddha permitted women to marry. Jainism also helped slightly. Women have historically been travelers, mathematicians, doctors, singers, and orators. In a culture where religion was central, women were equal to males in all aspects, but the proportion was small.

Women were eventually reduced to the status of slaves. The majority of them lost their freedom. They were disconnected from schooling. They became housewives. They rotted inside the four walls. In a male-dominated culture, women were respected. With the arrival of the British, women began to thrive. Female-only schools were established. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the Brahmo Samaj continued their education and pioneered women's education. Schools opened, allowing individuals to learn how to read, write, and do math. Education went public. Backward communities, including Dalits, began attending school. "Educating a man educates an individual, but educating a woman educates the entire family; women's empowerment means Mother India is

empowered," said PT Jawaharlal Nehru. Women's education in India is extremely vital to the country's overall growth. It helps to develop half of the human resource. However, it also contributes to improve the quality of life both at home and outside. It is not improper to say that education is the solution to all problems. Several thinkers have defined education, but M. Phule's definition is the most essential. According to M. Phule, "education means demonstrating the difference between good and evil".

Although Indians revere knowledge as the goddess of essence, it is ironic that Indian women have always been denied educational opportunities. Education equates to power, and in India, it has primarily been concentrated in the hands of men. The early British educational surveys conducted in the Madras Presidency in 1822 brought the absence of girls from formal schools to public attention. In 1881, the Hunter Educational Commission reported that only 2 percent of women in British India were literate, albeit, as with many early colonial surveys, the surveyors concentrated solely on school enrollment and did not count females who were taught informally at home. Literacy rates were abysmally low on the eve of independence in 1947, with women at 6% and males at 22.6%. Since then, they have made sluggish but steady development, with considerable improvements since the 1980s. In 1961, literacy rates were 15.3% (women) and 40.4% (men); in 1981, they were 28.5% (women) and 53.5% (men); and in 2001, they were 15.3% (women) and 40.4% (men). However, women's education continues to trail substantially behind that of men, with discrepancies expanding in states such as Bihar, where rates are 33.6% (women) and 60.3% (men), compared to Kerala, where rates are 87.9% (women) and 94.2% (men). Women's goals over the last century included educating better moms and wives for the nation. However, certain urban literate segments are beginning to recognize that women are a national resource that India cannot afford to squander in this competitive age of globalization and information technology.

Education in Ancient India.

For the most of Indian history, education was defined as the oral and written transmission of religious scriptures, as well as the acquisition of survival and artisan skills. For example, some Adivasis (indigenous people), such as the Birhor in Jharkhand, had higher gender equality when it came to learning the art of toolmaking. However, Sanskritization and Westernization, as "civilizing" agents, have diminished women's basic rights in many tribal groups that have since been integrated into mainstream culture and economics. Images of deities and female genitalia can be found among artifacts from the literate Indus Valley Civilization (6000-1650 BCE), and some seal seals indicate that priests may have practiced the Vriksha religion. The inhabitants plainly worshiped nature's feminine aspects, a vision of divinity that is still prevalent in India today. However, male power was also revered, and there is no evidence of a matriarchal culture. The lack of gender-specific places in houses and public buildings indicates that women enjoyed freedom of movement, but we still don't know how and where schooling took place.

The entrance of patriarchal Aryan clans around the start of the second millennium had a profound impact on Indian notions about gender equality. The oral transmission of the Vedas (books of wisdom) to satisfy the gods was their most prized talent. This type of oral learning, known as shruti (heard insights), proved essential for knowledge development, though these Sanskrit hymns were ultimately written down in the Devangari alphabet.

Initially, a few female initiates wearing the sacred thread of the twice-born elite castes recited the Vedas. The Rig Veda (1500-100 BCE) has references to a few brahmadrishinis (female bard-poets), including Lopamudra and Ghasha. Even in the 800s, there were passionate female intellectuals such as Gorgi and Maitreya in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad and Savitri in the Mahabharata.

Because of geopolitical causes that led to patriarchal supremacy, the Vedas became the exclusive preserve of male Brahmin caste priests, with women's learning supplementing men's. Women were permitted to study "smriti," which comprised the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana, as well as later writings like the Dharma Shastras (law books) and Puras (old legends) including mythology about Hindu deities. Boys were taught in open classrooms beside trees or on open verandas (payanas) of buildings. Meanwhile, upper-caste girls were typically kept out of the public view, sitting in rooms adjacent to pails and studying non-religious subjects like smriti and arithmetic.

Thus, in 525 BCE, we hear of learned women such as Queen Mahotmi, the Buddha's foster mother, who battled to create the first nunnery. The Thirigthā, a hymn portion of the Buddhist Pali canon, was authored by learned female ascetics such as Mitta and Patacara. Jainists also respect early female Tirthankaras (Fjord Crossers) or instructors, and the religion supported female monks. However, throughout time, misogyny crept into the writings, undermining female sexuality and undervaluing women's brains. During the Tamil Sangam era (200 BCE-500 CE), South Indian Dravidian society appears to have recognized outstanding women. Approximately 470 writers wrote Sangama poetry, including 154 female sages like Auvaiyar. Furthermore, despite male domination, women wield authority in three of the five Tamil epics, which center on **knowledgeable women**.

By the first century, when society absorbed new immigrants across ethnic lines, Brahmin writings like the Manav Dharmashastras (Laws of Manu) strengthened gender and caste hierarchies. These texts celebrated women's home duties while condemning their sexual appetites. Artisan guilds shared craft skills, while both the working and elite castes passed down oral traditions through centuries. Lower castes were barred from literacy, and women's education became mostly informal and haphazard. After the sixth century, in the medieval atmosphere of invasions, battles, and feudalism, wealthy women retreated deeper into the domestic sphere, receiving informal instruction at home until the nineteenth century.

Medieval Women's Education

Despite patriarchal rules and prejudices, there were some female poet-saints and writers during the medieval period. Thus, 'Nandal', 'Karyaikkal Ammaiyar', 'Akkamahad'vi, 'Gangasati', 'Lalla', and 'Mara' have left behind a heritage of religious (bhakti) compositions in regional languages. In addition, a group of educated women in South India used to attend public schools with boys. They were lower-caste temple dancers (dvasis), who were almost never Brahmin ladies. During the first millennium, dvasis were ceremonially married to temple deities in South India, and they served as repository for Indian dance and musical traditions. However, by the seventeenth century, many had become court dancers and courtesans, deviating from the traditional role of the female householder. In 1822, Governor Monroe conducted a study of schools in southern India and discovered that, aside from the Dwasis, no other girls studied alongside the boys on the journey. Despite the Prophet

Muhammad's wife and daughter being literate and powerful, and the Islamic belief in salvation through the written Quran, Muslim women in India had similar educational status. The patriarchal people that brought Islam to the subcontinent kept their women in women's homes (jenna). If women went out, they wore a veil (purdah). Women who rejected the purdah were barred from rising to prominence. Thus, the sole Muslim queen of India, Sultana Razia (13th century AD), was immediately ousted by men. Wealthy women were frequently taught by female teachers (yustad as) in Jenna, and some have left records, such as Mughal princess Gulbadan (sixteenth century), who wrote an exquisite royal history in Persian. Like Hindu dawadsis, Muslim courtesans (tawaif) were taught to read and write. In the eighteenth century, the tawaif Mahlaka Bai Chanda composed lyrical Urdu songs. Ordinary Muslim boys and girls were taught the Quran in mosque schools (madrasas), but this frequently involved oral recitation of the sacred verses. During this time, orthodox Muslim and Hindu patriarchs were typically concerned that a literate female might compose love letters and engage in obscene behavior. In North India, both Muslim and Hindu women wore severe purdah. In South India, affluent Muslim women wore purdahs, whilst Hindu women lived in home isolation but had more freedom of movement. The purdah, which served as a major barrier to women's enrollment at formal schools, became a source of contention among famous women's reformers during the twentieth century. Another significant barrier to girls' education was the practice of underage marriage among Hindus and Muslims. Muslim women's reformers disagreed on the extent to which purdah should be observed. Sharifa Hamid Ali and Dr. Rahmatunnisa Begum believed that it affected girls' health and hampered their attendance at school. Initially, Nazar Sajjad Haider claimed that parents were more inclined to send veiled daughters to school, but he later rejected purdah. In 1914, the Begum of Bhopal organized a Muslim Women's Educational Conference in Allahabad, and philanthropists established schools for girls, increasing female literacy.

Colonial era

European conquest resulted in the political decline of Indian governments as well as the decline of local educational institutions. Catholic missionaries began teaching Christianity in Goa and elsewhere in the sixteenth century, while Protestant evangelists established schools in southern, eastern, and western India in the eighteenth century, making notable efforts to bring girls to school without regard for caste. The early colonial state had little interest in education, although it did encourage missionary efforts, and British officials assessed educational capacity by reading and school attendance. Oral and informal learning were no longer as vital. When the British Parliament provided a significant subsidy to the East India Company in 1813 to promote education in India, evangelists descended in droves to preach in schools. Female missionaries began teaching primary classes to girls who had acquired English from the Bible and converted to Christianity. Indian rulers such as Ronis Lakshmibai and Parvatibai of Travancore provided financial support to the missionaries' educational efforts. J. E. D. Bethune, Ram Gopal Ghosh, and Jaikissen Mukherjee established the Calcutta (Kolkata) Girls' School in 1849, which was financed by the government. In 1854, Charles Wood's Dispatch to the Educational Institution launched a new program of aid to private schools. Soon after, Gopal Kistana Pillai requested a grant for his girls' school in Madras (Chennai). However, the first significant advancement in

secular and secondary education for girls happened in 1877. Mary Carpenter, a distinguished teacher, encouraged the government to create secular teacher training centers in the Presidency capitals of Calcutta, Bombay (Mumbai), and Madras. They followed the same school principles that the Maharaja of Vijayanagara had established in Madras.

Child marriage was a significant hurdle to females' education. Girls in the highest Hindu castes were married before reaching puberty, at which point they could have attended municipal or mission schools. Girls who married at the age of eleven or twelve no longer attended public school; if they were lucky, they were taught at home. Female literacy did not improve much until the Sarda Act of 1930, which raised the marriageable age for girls to fourteen. However, Christian converts educated their females, resulting in high literacy rates. This enraged Hindu reformers, whose daughters had not attended mission schools, and they sent them to schools with secular curriculum. In 1904, Annie Besant published *The Education of Indian Girls*, which set the groundwork for a curriculum for girls' schools. Reform organizations such as the Prayer Society, the Arya Samaj, the Roma Krishna Samaj, and the Theosophical Society established schools that taught both Indian culture and Western subjects like geography and hygiene. Indian nationalists advocated for compulsory education and increased government support for schools. The shortage of female teachers and doctors prompted the development of teacher training institutes and colleges, including the Lady Hardinge Women's Medical College in Delhi in 1916 and Queen Mary's College in Madras in 1914. Besant also sought to establish a women's university in Adyar in 1916, while women reformers established vocational training centers for working-class women.

Since independence, the Indian government has attempted to increase girls' school attendance with initiatives such as midday meals, free books, and uniforms. From 1951 to 1981, this welfare effort raised elementary school attendance. The National Education Policy, adopted in 1986, sought to reform education in accordance with each state's social framework and wider national aims. It underlined the importance of education in promoting democracy and women's rights. The new program aimed to achieve social transformation through redesigned textbooks and curricula, increased school funding, school expansion, and policy reform. The emphasis was on expanding vocational centers and basic education for girls, secondary and higher education, and rural and urban institutions. The research attempted to connect issues such as low school attendance to poverty and the dependency on girls for housework and childcare for siblings. The National Literacy Mission also worked with female instructors in villages. Although the minimum marriage age for girls is currently eighteen, many marry significantly younger. As a result, female dropout rates in secondary schools are high.

However, Indian women's education has increased significantly since independence. Many metropolitan women have received advanced education in science, medicine, computer technology, and social sciences. India's mission today includes female doctors, nurses, teachers, and social workers. However, the number of females in crucial sectors is increasing, and female professionals are not being compensated fairly; for example, Indian women scientists are among the most talented in the world. Gender differences in schooling will persist until girls are treated equally with boys; patriarchy and sexual predation are decreased; and female feticide and

infanticide, which are mirrored in India's gender gap, are eradicated. Following independence, women who had previously attended primary, secondary, and high schools enrolled in college. Today, women have entered every profession of education. Women now have equal educational opportunities as males. They are housewives, teachers, doctors, technicians, scientists, and security guards.

Education broadens women's work opportunities and helps them achieve financial independence. Health and Nutrition: Educated women take better care of their own and their children's health. This lowers the neonatal mortality rate. Social Change: Education is an effective technique for preventing child marriage and gender prejudice. Decision-making power: Women's roles in the family and society grow, and they may make their own decisions.

Education alone does not guaranty a woman's economic independence. She needs to establish a sense of national identity. Culture needs to be protected. Our religion has to be resurrected. The country must strengthen its social, economic, moral, scientific, and educational systems. Women must take the lead in the advancement of the nation. It is critical that the country be well-educated through the education it receives.

Conclusion

I'd like to emphasize that education is critical for all girls, male or female. Education is a critical factor in the empowerment, prosperity, development, and welfare of females. Educated women not only encourage their daughters' education, but they can also provide appropriate direction to all of their children. Furthermore, educated women can aid to lower infant mortality and population increase. However, the position of women in India is improving day by day. Previously, parents did not allow females to leave the house, not just for academics. Challenges Despite the fact that female literacy rates are rising over the world, including in India, many girls remain illiterate. The biggest challenges include poverty, superstitions, and a lack of basic services.

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