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## Women's Education In India And Its Impact On Socioeconomic Development

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### **Abstract**

An essential element of India's socioeconomic development is women's education. Due to institutional flaws, sociocultural limitations, and economic constraints, women have historically had fewer opportunities for education. Particularly in rural and deprived populations, caste-based discrimination, early marriage, and traditional gender roles continue to limit girls' access to their educational institutions. Educational disparities become harsher by economic obstacles such as poverty and the invisible costs of education. High dropout rates among girls are caused by societal issues such as poor infrastructure, substandard education, and safety concerns. Furthermore, even if programs like the Right to Education Act (2009) and others seek to increase access and quality, their effectiveness is frequently weakened by inconsistent enforcement and implementation flaws.

This paper aims to establish the relationship between women's education in India and its impact on socioeconomic development. Economic growth and social justice are two aspects of socio-economic development, which is a broad concept that implies an improvement in the social potential, quality, and standard of individuals and the communities in which they live. Several studies reveal that that higher the education of women, greater is their participation in decision making and they acquire progressive opinion on different issues. The social influence of women's education is substantial. Moreover, the women go beyond social responsibility and can have a positive impact on the economy. Thus, a nation's high levels of development, including its economic growth, are correlated with an increase in the number of educated women living there. Women's education also leads to women's empowerment.

**Key Words:** Women's Education, Socioeconomic Development, Educational Opportunities, Gender Disparity, Women Empowerment, Social Responsibility.

### **Introduction**

Education is universally acknowledged as a powerful catalyst for empowerment and societal progress, particularly for women. Education facilitates people enhance their analytical thinking and reasoning skills, which in turn helps them cultivate confidence, self-worth, and self-respect. Better health and hygiene, nutrition, higher child survival rates, and increased health education and awareness have all been linked with education (Dundar & Haworth, 1993; Lee, 1998). It has been a key component in breaking down barriers, encouraging economic independence, and advancing gender equality all across the world. In addition to fostering personal growth, education helps women benefit society as a whole. Women with higher levels of education are more likely to advocate for their rights, take part in decision-making processes, and make significant contributions to social stability and economic prosperity (UNESCO, 2021). In other words, education elevates women's socioeconomic status and increases

their life comprehension (Azam, 1993). Anderson (1988) also acknowledged that education enhances women's ability to exercise their rights and responsibilities.

Economic and social equality for women is considered as vital for any country to prosper and progress, particularly in a developing country like India. Indian constitution discourages discrimination against women and grants men and women equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic, and social arenas. Mahatma Gandhi (1937) treated Woman as the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity. Even the "World Convention on Education" (1990) also called for the development and promotion of female education. The conference determined to improve the quality of education, to remove all obstacles to active female engagement in education and the most essential to eradicate all forms of sexual discrimination in education. Women's education has a positive and long lasting impact on the socioeconomic development of a nation as it raises their earnings which contributes to GDP growth as well as leads to societal progress. (Nogueira et al., 2022).

Development in the socioeconomic sense refers to the enhancement of people's quality of life via better jobs, incomes, education, and skill development. According to Shekhawat and Rathore (2023), it is the process of social and economic change driven by environmental and cultural factors. Changes in the structure are directly linked to economic development since they enable increased production, improved facilities, higher revenue per capita, and ultimately a higher standard of living (Yang & Geng 2022). A key component of socioeconomic development is fostering social justice since, among other things, the benefits of economic growth are distributed equitably among the people based on factors like gender and race (Nogueira et al., 2022). The goal of socio-economic development is to improve these factors ensuring that the outcomes are positive and long-lasting. This includes things like fostering business-friendly environments, creating job opportunities for the citizens, and offering social services like healthcare and education.

### **Status of Women's Education in India through the Ages**

The status of women's education in India indicates a complicated evolution throughout millennia, influenced by social, political, and cultural factors. As witnessed by engaging in intellectual debate of esteemed female leaders like Gargi and Maitreyi, women's education was venerated in several scholarly traditions in ancient India. But during the Middle Ages, women's educational possibilities declined because of social and religious restrictions that imposed on women domestic duties and restricted their access to formal education. The status of Women's education, however, witnessed some changes during the British colonial era, particularly as a result of the efforts of social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, who campaigned for women's education and the prohibition of customs like child marriage and Sati. But the overall impact was minimal in spite of these efforts, and significant disparities between different groups and domains prevailed.

Women's education received more attention in India after independence. The right to education was guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, and a number of laws and initiatives were put in place to advance gender equality. The aim of various educational policies like the National Policy on Education (1968), the National Policy on Education (1986), the Right to Education Act (2009) and the more recent National Education Policy (2020), was to make education more accessible to all, including women. However, regional differences, economic barrier, and ingrained sociocultural norms still pose a challenge to women's access to high-quality education. This journey illustrates the continuous conflict between progressive reforms and deeply rooted traditional practices, underlining the significance of sustained efforts to ensure that all women and girls receive an equitable education.

### **Need and Significance of Women's Education in India**

Women's education plays crucial role in India's socioeconomic development. It is essential in many ways to promote gender equality and ending the cycle of poverty because it enables them to make wise decisions, engage in the workforce and contribute to economic growth. Furthermore, educated women are better equipped to speak up for their rights, provide for their families, and promote constructive social change in their communities. Educationally empowered women are more inclined to invest in their children's education and well-being, which helps society as a whole by improving health outcomes, lowering child mortality rates, and promoting overall development. Thus, ensuring women's access to high-quality education is not merely an issue of equality and justice but also a vital strategic imperative for the development and economic growth of the country.

## Review of Related Literature

Poonam (2024) analysed the role of women's education in the socio-economic benefits regarding urban-rural disparity in India. She argues how educational achievements affect economic and social status and suggests expert solutions for the existing gaps. According to her analysis, the roots of the problem lie in the fact that education, health care, and employment opportunities significantly differ in urban and rural areas. In urban areas due to better infrastructure there are various employment opportunities including better access to resources, higher education facilities, and many other opportunities in the health sector. These advantages On the other hand, the people of rural area suffer with several issues like poor education and health facilities, and limited opportunities in employment sectors and mostly depend on agriculture having low wages.

Asadullah and Yeasmin (2022) explored the impact of women's education on socio-economic development. The study revealed that decrease in the educational gender gap leads to gender equality which is the prerequisite both inside and outside the classroom to ensure equal rights and opportunities for people across genders. Women education is directly related to high levels of development including economic development. Women who are educated have better pay which, in result, boosts national economy. On the other hand, low literacy rate hugely affects women's lives, their families and economic progress of the country.

Singh and Verma (2022) examined the need and importance of socio-economic equality for Indian women. The findings revealed that Literacy, health, balanced diet and nutrition are interrelated which directly impact women's development. Educated women can be more conscious about health care, nutrition, sanitation and safer environment for herself and her family. The other key indicators of socio-economic development found in their study are the income, earnings and female employment.

Gebre (2020) investigated the role of women's education on economic development in the context of Gimbo woreda of south west Kafa zone. The findings revealed that educated women positively impact economic development despite the fact that girls were mostly in a hostile condition. According to the researcher, women's education should be enhanced in order to promote women's participation in unindustrialized economic policies and also make arrangements for their social and economic safety.

Malik (2016) examined the role of women's education on their socio- economic status in Haryana. The study demonstrated that education plays a significant role in the socioeconomic development of women. The findings also revealed that educated woman were able to get better job opportunities as compared to less educated or uneducated women.

Bangura and Mambo (2023) explored the barriers to women education and its effect on the slow socio-economic development, particularly in African societies. The main barriers identified by the researchers included the parental discrimination, pressure for early marriage, poverty, lack of school facilities, tradition, female genital mutilation (FGM) and discrimination by the teachers. The study also demonstrated these barriers in women education is directly correlated with the socio-economic development of families.

## Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the issues and challenges related to women's education.
2. To study the impact of women's education on social development.
3. To study the impact of women's education on economic development.

## Research Methodology

The researcher has used the exploratory research design of descriptive research to find out the role of women's education in socioeconomic development. The study relies on secondary data collected through literature survey, national and international reports, journals, books, and the relevant websites etc.

## Issues and Challenges to Women's Education

The journey of women's education has not been smooth in India. The socio-cultural set up has been perpetuating gender disparities in education. Traditional gender roles ascribe women largely to household chores and caregiving responsibilities, lowering education to a secondary priority. Moreover, many underprivileged, low-income families believe that educating a girl would prove only economic waste because a girl's education will benefit her husband's family, not her own. Meaning thereby, women undergo with various issues and challenge such as:

1. **Socio-cultural Challenges:** In Indian social structure some families have the perception that there is no need to educate girls because they have to perform the duties of a wife and mother only. In addition to that educated women do not respect tradition, social customs and cultural practices. Due to the patriarchal structure women are considered subservient to men and women's overall development is often sidelined. This also gives space to the discrimination against women that further undermines the efforts to ensure universal education for girls. Therefore, women face following challenges at social and cultural level:
  - **Traditional Gender Roles:** In Indian society traditional gender roles consider women primarily for household responsibilities. Furthermore, in many community girls have to compromise with their education at school or college level since they are expected to perform duties of an assistant in domestic work, look after their younger siblings, or work as a labourer in informal sector so that they can provide financial help to their family. Particularly in rural areas where women's education is perceived less favorably, these roles may contribute to greater dropout rates among girls.
  - **Child Marriage:** Despite legal restrictions on the minimum age of marriage child marriage is a prevalent practice in many parts of India, most frequent in rural and low socioeconomic communities. Child brides are often forced to leave their education abruptly, restricting them of opportunities for personal and intellectual growth. Early marriage also becomes the reason of early pregnancy which affects their physical and mental health.
  - **Caste and Class Discrimination:** For many girls, especially those from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and economically disadvantaged groups, the combination of caste and class presents additional challenges. Social stigma and gender discrimination may restrict these girls' access to education and lower the standard of their education.
  - **Religious and Regional Influences:** Women's education is also impacted by India's diverse religious and regional customs. Religious beliefs in various societies may discourage or restrict women's access to education. Some regions have made more progress than others, and regional differences in educational priorities and practices make the disparities even worse.
2. **Economic Challenges:** Women's education also faces several challenges at economic level. Due to economic constraints and conventional gender norms, economically disadvantaged families tend to put greater emphasis on male education than female education. This inclination restricts girls' access to early educational opportunities, therefore sustaining a cycle of injustice. In fact, women undergo various challenges on economic ground such as:
  - **Poverty:** For many Indian women, poverty continues to be a major obstacle to education. Due to ingrained gender biases and the belief that investing in sons would provide larger benefits, families with limited financial resources often favor the education of sons over daughters. Because of this, girls are more likely to be dropped from school or never attend at all.
  - **Cost of Education:** Even when families understand how important education is for their daughters, they might not have the means to pay for things like books, uniforms, school fees, and transportation. For many girls from low-income families, education is an unaffordable privilege due to additional expenses like exam fees and additional tuition added to already low finances.
  - **Employment Opportunities:** Many Families consider that there is little chance of a return on their investment in a girl's education, particularly if there are few job opportunities. Therefore, investment in girls' education is also discouraged by a shortage of employment opportunities.
3. **Institutional and Structural Challenges:** In addition to socio-cultural and economic challenges women's education is also hampered by many other institutional and structural challenges. These challenges include:
  - **Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities:** In many sections of India, especially in rural and remote areas, inadequate infrastructure is a major problem. A difficult educational setting for female students is compounded by the absence of basic facilities in schools, such as separate washrooms for boys and girls. Lack of private, clean toilets discourages girls from going to school when they are menstruating, which increases absentee and lowers academic performance. Additionally, families are reluctant to send their daughters to school because of lengthy journeys on unsafe roads or the lack of adequate transport facilities, especially in rural and remote areas where schools are few and usually located far from residential areas. The absence of these resources undermines the learning environment and increases the dropout rate for girls.

- **Gender-Sensitive Curriculum:** The lack of gender-sensitive curriculum and teaching materials maintains stereotypes that is inefficient to deal with varied needs and experiences of girl students. Therefore, Curriculum should be reformed so that it can promote gender equality, question stereotypes, and empower girls to pursue diverse educational and career paths.
- **Teacher Training and Support:** Gender equality initiatives in education are hampered due to the lack of training and assistance for teachers in neutralizing gender prejudices and establishing inclusive classrooms. Professional development programs are crucial to enable teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to support students coming from diverse socioeconomic status.

In order to promote gender equality and highlight the long-term benefits of educating girls the government has introduced various programs and policies such as Mahila Samakhyas Programme (1988), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Program (2004), the Right to Education Act (2009) and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2015). Along with that other initiatives such as Pratham's Girls' Education Program (1995), Nanhi Kali Project (1996) etc. have been taken by Non-governmental organizations to support girls from underprivileged backgrounds. The policies related to providing scholarships, stipends, and financial aid to disadvantaged groups, including girls of low financial background, minorities, and differently-abled individuals along with reservation policies in educational institutions to ensure fair representation for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and minorities (Government of India, 2020) have been implemented effectively.

### **Impact of Women's Education on Socioeconomic Development**

Women's contribution is very pertinent in the national economy and when they are educated they become more productive citizens. Educated women are more efficient and they can get diversified employment opportunities and get higher pay, that would enable them to support their families with daily necessities, health care, and education (The World Bank Group, 2016). Meaning thereby, promoting women's education can lead to a growth premium in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) trends and decrease in the gender employment disparity can increase per capita income (The World Bank Group, 2016).

**Impact on Social and Cultural Development:** Education significantly transforms women's life in India in the context of social and cultural development. Through education women are able to question and alter socio-cultural prejudices and perceptions towards women that led to the emergence of new norms. Educated women are loud and assertive, conscious of their rights and duties that helps in changing the conventional gender roles and unfair treatment of women. It empowers women to make decisions at home and in the community, promoting women's leadership (UNESCO, 2022). Meaning thereby, decrease in the gender gap in education also endorses gender equality, a vital factor to create better job opportunities and equal rights for all.

Education tremendously affects women's position in terms of marriage and family planning which results in reduced fertility rates, lower infant mortality rates, and lower maternal death rates. Women with a higher level of education are more involved in family decision-making process in which they are also better able to take health-related decisions for themselves and their children. It has been found that children are advantaged from having an educated mother over an educated father several ways, particularly in terms of higher survival rates and better nutrition. Moreover, Children, particularly girls, are more likely to continue their school education when their mother is educated. It is also noteworthy that educated women are less victim of domestic abuse regardless of other social status markers such as employment position.

Women's quality of life is enhanced when they are educated. In Indian society which is stratified and rigid with caste system, patriarchy and regional differences, the education for women can make the society more liberal and open creating opportunity for women leadership and their overall development (Yang & Geng 2022). Education also increases the possibility of political participation among women and they may participate in civic engagement and attend political meetings securing benefits for themselves through political activities. In the countries where women are well educated they have a higher chance of democratic administration.

**Impact on Economic Development:** Women's education plays crucial role in the economic development of a country. It is quite evident that investment in education yields good return. According to Harry Patrinos (2016), a lead economist at the World Bank, the profitability of education is indisputable, universal, and global. If men and women are at the same pedestal regarding human capital, productivity, economic growth and rate of return to education, keeping education away from women's reach would prove economically wasteful. Meaning thereby, the gender gap in education is undesirable in terms of its impact on economic development. Women's education also promotes the fair distribution of income in a society. A society has lower total economic disparity when there is lower gender discrepancy in educational attainment.

The employment opportunities in India highly depend on education and socio-economic status. Education avails various employment opportunities and better pay for women, particularly, in sectors like technology, service industries, and administration that demand specific training, qualifications, and education. An individual's income level is also determined by education. Women with the standardised educational qualification have higher earning capacity as compared with less educated women who are mostly restricted to the employment opportunities related to the sectors like agriculture, tradesmen, and labourers where their employees pay them with lower wages. Education also provides women a better position regarding health and health information. They are more aware of their health and available health care due to their higher literacy level and easy access to information technologies like the Internet and other media like newspapers, magazines, and TV whereas these facilities are less accessible to women with lower literacy level.

### Conclusion

Thus it can be concluded that women's education has a huge impact on socioeconomic development. Well educated and financially stable women have better status in family and society. Educated women are thought to have greater access to, knowledge about and choice in health practices and family planning tools such as contraceptives which leads to reduced fertility, infant mortality and maternal mortality rates. Women with the standardised educational qualification have more employment opportunities and higher earning capacity as compared with less educated women. Meaning thereby, reducing the gender gap in education fosters gender equality, which is crucial for both inside and outside of the educational setting since it ensures equal rights and opportunities for people of all genders. However, despite the fact that the government's affirmative action has significantly improved the socioeconomic status of women, they continue to lag behind their male counterparts due to the issues of illiteracy, corruption, bureaucratic delays, and lack of awareness that undermine these efforts. Furthermore, there are instances where laws related to the prohibition of child marriage and compulsory education for children are not properly implemented. Particularly for girls from underprivileged backgrounds, the gap between policy and practice often leads to pervasive educational inequalities. Therefore, it is imperative that schools, universities, and both urban and rural communities should host more and more community awareness and development programs and workshops in which the media can also play crucial role. By recognizing the interconnectedness between education, gender equality, and socioeconomic development, we can work toward a future when all women and girls have opportunity to reach their full potential and make valuable contributions to a flourishing society.

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