

# Women Upliftment and Education: An Analysis

Preeti Nagora

Assistant Professor Department of Geography Govt. Arts College, Kota

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## INTRODUCTION

Women upliftment means raising the status of women socially, economically, politically, and legally so they can live with dignity, equality, and freedom of choice. Among all tools of empowerment, education is the most powerful and permanent. It does not just teach literacy; it builds awareness, confidence, skills, and agency. The story of modern India is incomplete without understanding how a girl with a book in her hand changes not just her own life, but the destiny of her family, community, and country.

### Historical Background: From Denial to Right

For centuries, Indian women were largely denied formal education. Manusmriti-era norms, medieval invasions, and colonial neglect kept female literacy at 0.6% in 1901. The first cracks appeared with 19th-century reformers. Savitribai Phule opened India's first school for girls in 1848 at Pune and faced social abuse for it. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and Bethune championed girls' schools. SNDT Women's University, established in 1916, was a landmark.

After 1947, the Constitution gave equality under Article 14 and special provisions under Article 15(3). The National Policy on Education 1986 declared —Education for Women's Equality as a key goal. Yet in 1951, only 8.9% of Indian women could read and write. The journey from there to 77.5% female literacy in 2021, as per NFHS-5, is one of the biggest social revolutions in human history.

### How Education Uplifts Women: The Four Pillars

#### A. Social Upliftment

Education changes mindsets first. An educated woman marries later, has fewer and healthier children, and resists practices like dowry and domestic violence. Data proves it: NFHS-5 shows child marriage among illiterate women is 40.6% vs 4.9% among women with 12+ years of schooling. Educated mothers ensure 90% of children are immunized. They participate in household decisions — 89% of women with secondary education have a say in major purchases vs 67% with no schooling. Education thus breaks the cycle of early marriage, poor health, and voicelessness.

#### B. Economic Upliftment

Education is the bridge from home to workplace. Each additional year of secondary schooling increases a woman's earnings by 10–20%. In India, graduate women have a labour force participation rate of 28.7% vs 15.2% for illiterate women, PLFS 2023-24. Schemes like Stand-Up India have given 81% of loans to women entrepreneurs, most of whom are educated. An educated woman invests 90% of her income in her family's nutrition, health, and education, compared to 35% by men. This creates an intergenerational multiplier effect.

#### C. Political and Legal Upliftment

Education creates citizens, not just subjects. The 73rd and 74th Amendments reserved 33% seats for women in Panchayats and Municipalities. Today 46% of local representatives are women. Studies show educated women pradhans invest 60% more in drinking water and education than male counterparts. Education also spreads legal literacy — knowledge of the Dowry Prohibition Act, Domestic Violence Act, and property rights. A literate woman is 3 times more likely to approach police or courts.

#### D. Psychological Upliftment

Perhaps most important, education gives self-worth. It replaces —I can't with —I will try. It creates role models. Kalpana Chawla, Tessy Thomas, Gita Gopinath — every girl who sees them believes she can be them. ASER surveys show that girls who stay in school till Class 12 aspire to professional jobs at 3x the rate of those who drop out at Class 8.

#### 4. Government Efforts: From Access to Agency

India's policy has evolved in 3 phases:

1. Access Phase 1951–2000: Focus on opening schools. Result: Female literacy 8.9% → 54%.
2. Retention Phase 2001–2015: SSA, Mid-Day Meal, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, free cycles in Bihar. Result: Girls' GER at elementary 99.2%.
3. Outcome Phase 2015–Now: Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, NEP 2020, Gender Inclusion Fund. Goal: Not just schooling, but learning and livelihood.

**Key schemes:** NSIGSE gives cash to SC/ST girls to finish Class 12. Pragati Scholarship funds 10,000 girls in engineering each year. NEP 2020 promises 100% GER by 2035 with no stream barriers, so a girl can study physics and pottery together.

#### Challenges That Remain

**Despite progress, the journey is half-done:**

1. Dropout: 12.6% girls drop out at secondary level due to toilets, safety, distance, and housework.
2. Quality: ASER 2023 says only 35% of Class 8 girls can do simple division. A certificate without skills is a weak tool.
3. Digital Divide: Only 33% women use internet vs 57% men. This excludes them from online jobs and learning.
4. Job Gap: India has gender parity in higher education enrollment, yet female LFPR is only 37%. Education is not converting to employment due to lack of safe transport, creches, and flexible jobs.
5. Social Norms: 89% rural parents cite —safety as reason to stop daughters' college. Early marriage still ends education for 1 in 4 girls.

#### The Way Forward: From Literacy to Leadership

1. Keep Girls in School: Free sanitary pads, functional toilets, secure hostels, and transport. Rajasthan's Sharde hostels show 94% retention vs 60% for day scholars.
2. Skilling with Schooling: NEP's vocational courses from Class 6. Every girl should leave school with 1 digital skill + 1 livelihood skill.
3. Higher Education Reform: More women's hostels, scholarships for STEM, and return-to-education programs for married women.
4. Change Norms: Teach boys gender equality. Use media to normalize women in labs, factories, and Parliament.
5. Link to Jobs: Apprenticeships, work-from-home options, and strict anti-harassment laws will raise FLFPR.

### CONCLUSION

Women upliftment is not charity; it is strategy. The IMF estimates that closing the gender gap in labour force can increase India's GDP by 27%. And the first step to that is a girl in school.

Kerala, with 92.1% female literacy, has the lowest infant mortality and fertility in India. That is not coincidence — it is causation. When we educate a woman, we educate a mother, a worker, a voter, and a leader.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said, —I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved. By that measure, India has come far since Savitribai Phule was pelted with stones for teaching girls. But we must go further — from literacy to leadership, from classrooms to boardrooms, from access to agency.

Because an educated woman does not just uplift herself. She lifts her family out of poverty, her community out of prejudice, and her nation toward progress.

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