

Education as the Bridge between Constitutional Rights and Women's Empowerment in India

Srimanta Patra. ^{1*}, Debasmita Kar. ¹, Dr. Manikanta Paria²

¹PhD Research Scholar, Jadavpur University, Kolkata-700032

²Assistant Professor, Jadavpur University, Kolkata-700032

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines education as a way for women to fully exercise their legal rights. The Indian Constitution has a set of laws that say everyone is equal and should be treated with respect, but in real life, these rights are not always given to women. This study says that education is very important because it helps connect the laws that are written down with what happens in life. The paper looks at four areas. How women can use the law to help themselves, how they can earn their own money, how they can take part in politics and how they can make their own decisions about their health. It shows that when women are educated, they know more about their rights, they can make decisions, and they are more involved in their communities. Educated women are better able to say what they want, get what they need and fight against things that're not fair. The study shows that education changes women from people who just receive what they are given to people who can make things happen. The paper ends by saying that we need to teach people about their rights in school so that we can have a society where everyone is treated equally and everyone is included.

Keywords: Education and Empowerment, Women's Constitutional Rights, Gender Equality in India, Legal Literacy, Economic Independence.

INTRODUCTION

Although many constitutions say men and women are equal, this does not always mean they are treated equally in life. Women around the world still face unfair treatment and are not well represented, and encounter many obstacles in social, political and economic areas. For example, statistics from around the world show that fewer women work than men and women make up about 26.5% of national legislatures (World Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2024). These facts show a gap between what the law says about equality and what women experience in society.

India's Constitution has a plan to promote equality between men and women. The Fundamental Rights, which include Articles 14 to 18, guarantee that everyone is equal before the law and that no one can discriminate based on gender. Article 15(3) also allows the government to make special rules to help women and children because they have been treated unfairly in the past. The laws against exploitation and the interpretation of Article 21 protect women's rights to dignity, privacy and personal freedom. The courts have also supported these protections by recognising that women have the right to make choices about their bodies and personal lives. However, just having these constitutional guarantees is not enough to change the way people think and behave. Many women, those from poor communities, do not know about their legal rights or do not have the means to use them. This shows that legal rights are only useful if people know about them and can use them. Education is very important in making these promises a reality. It is not about reading and writing or getting a job; education helps people become aware, think critically and feel confident enough to stand up against

injustice. Some scholars, like Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2000), say that education helps people develop the skills they need to be free.

The Indian Constitution provides a powerful vision of equality and dignity that is central to women's empowerment. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution ensures that every individual is equal before the law, creating a foundation to challenge gender-based discrimination. Building on this, Article 15 of the Indian Constitution not only prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex but also allows the state to take special measures for women, recognising the need for substantive equality. Further, Article 21 of the Indian Constitution has been interpreted broadly to include dignity, autonomy, and personal freedom, which are essential for women to live with self-respect. Importantly, Article 21A of the Indian Constitution guarantees free and compulsory education, making education a key tool through which women can become aware of and exercise their rights.

The role of the judiciary has been crucial in giving real meaning to these constitutional promises. In *Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration*, the Supreme Court recognised that a woman's right to make decisions about her own body is an integral part of personal liberty, thereby affirming reproductive autonomy as a fundamental right. Similarly, in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India*, the Court declared the right to privacy as a fundamental right, closely linked to dignity and individual choice. These judgments highlight how constitutional rights are not merely abstract ideals but living principles that directly shape women's everyday lives.

To translate these legal guarantees into reality, several policy frameworks have been introduced. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act plays a vital role in ensuring that children, especially girls, have access to free and quality education, thereby reducing gender disparities. In addition, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme aims to address deep-rooted social biases against girls by promoting their survival, protection, and education. Together, these constitutional provisions, judicial interpretations, and policy initiatives demonstrate that education is not just a legal entitlement but a transformative force that enables women to claim their rights and participate fully in society.

In India, education helps women understand their rights, be economically independent, participate in politics and make choices about their health. By giving women the power to understand and use their rights, education changes them from people who are just protected into active participants in democracy. So education is the key that turns the ideals of equality, dignity and freedom into real experiences.

Rationale of the study

The Indian Constitution says that women should be treated equally and have dignity and protection. There is a big difference between what the Constitution says and what women really experience. Women do not always get to exercise their rights because of inequalities, men being in charge, and people not knowing about these rights. Education is very important to fix this problem. It helps women learn and think critically about their rights. Education tells women what the Constitution says about protecting them. This means women can take part in society, the economy and politics. They can say something when they see something that's not fair. So we want to see how education can really help women use their rights and be equal. We want to know if education can make a difference for women and give them the equality they deserve. The Indian Constitution and education are very important for women to have rights. Education helps women know about their rights and use them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature shows that education is key to helping women gain power and enjoy their rights. Many experts believe education does more than just teach facts. It helps women make their choices, join society and get fair treatment.

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum say education helps people have control over their lives and turn their rights into real freedom. In India, education is vital for achieving equality and fairness. Some experts think laws alone can't make things equal. MacKinnon, Nivedita Menon and Flavia Agnes say women need to know about their rights and have education to use them. Research finds that education helps women earn more and have social status.

Studies by Duflo and the World Bank show that education increases women's earnings and helps them make decisions. Education also helps women join politics and make health choices by being more aware and able to think. Many girls in India still face problems like poverty, unfair treatment and unequal access to schools. The United Nations Children's Fund says these problems limit girls' education.

So, experts want an education system that helps women have equal opportunities and be empowered.

Research Questions

1. How does education bridge the gap between the constitutional guarantees of equality and the lived realities of women in India?
2. In what ways does education enhance women's legal awareness and agency to claim and exercise their constitutional rights?
3. How does educational attainment influence women's economic empowerment and their capacity to achieve social and financial equality?

Research Objectives

1. To examine how education functions as a mediating factor between constitutional rights (*de jure*) and women's lived experiences (*de facto*) in India.
2. To analyse the role of education in enhancing women's legal literacy, economic independence, and political participation.
3. To evaluate how educational empowerment contributes to women's health, bodily autonomy, and dignity as guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Conceptual Framework

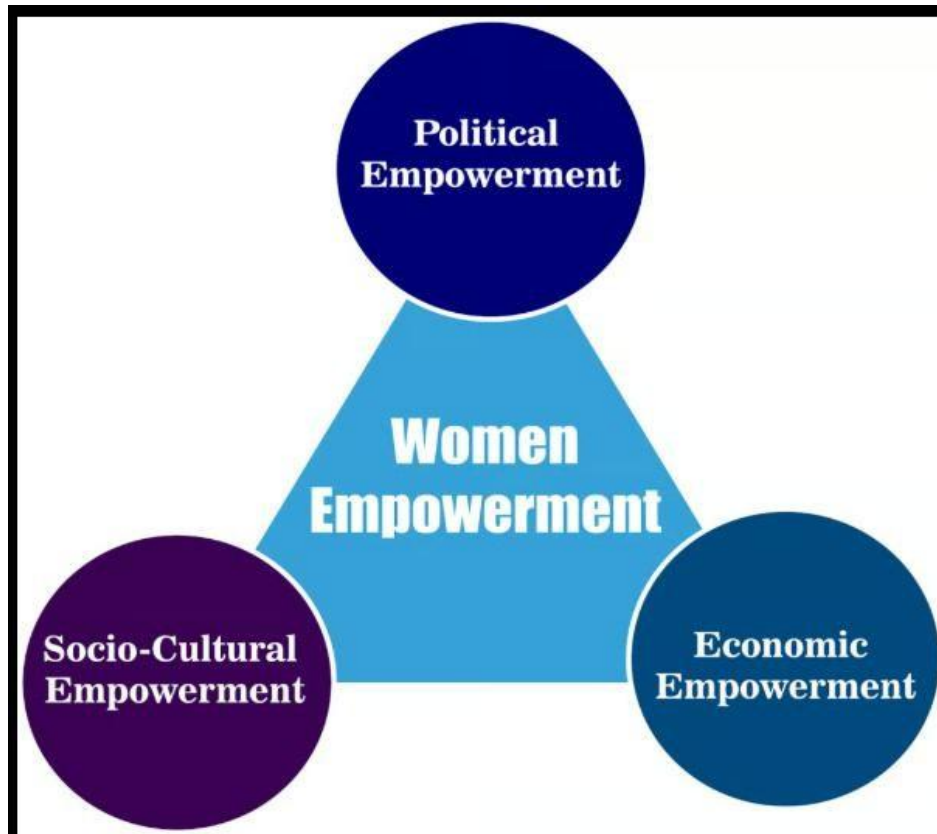
This study conceptually positions education as a transformative bridge between constitutional guarantees and women's lived realities. While legal provisions such as Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, Article 15 of the Indian Constitution, Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, and Article 21A of the Indian Constitution establish formal equality, they do not automatically ensure substantive empowerment. Drawing on constructivist and capability-based perspectives, education is understood as a process that builds awareness, critical thinking, and agency. It enables women to interpret their rights, make informed choices, and participate in social, economic, and political life. In this sense, education functions not merely as a developmental input but as a mediating force that translates legal entitlements into actionable capabilities.

Education as a Foundation for Women's Legal Awareness and Empowerment

Education is really important for women to know and use their rights. It helps women understand the law and be more independent financially. Education also helps women take part in their communities and make their voices heard. When women know their rights, they can stand up for themselves. Get help when they need it. There are laws like the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act that protect women.

Education teaches women how to use these laws and get help from the system. It shows them how to file complaints and get help. This means women do not have to rely on others to help them. Education also helps women get jobs and be financially independent. This independence helps women be equal and have dignity.

Education is also important for women to take part in making decisions in their communities. It helps them become citizens who can influence what happens in their country. Education helps women go from voting to being fully involved in making their country a better place. So education is the key to helping women know their rights, get involved in their communities and take part in making their country a better place.



Education as a Tool for Health, Bodily Autonomy, and Dignity

Education helps ensure women's health, bodily autonomy and dignity. These are important for the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The right to life is not about surviving. It is also about making well-informed choices and having personal freedom. Educated women know more about health, hygiene and nutrition. This helps them make decisions about having children, their health and planning their families. A study by UNESCO in 2022 found that children of educated mothers are more likely to survive.

Education also helps women make choices about their bodies. It gives them the knowledge and confidence to say no to things like marriage and forced reproduction. The Supreme Court said in 2009 that women have the right to make choices about their reproduction.

However, some things make it hard for girls to get an education. These include poverty, unemployment and fixed ideas about men and women. Schools can also be unsafe. To fix these problems, we need to make sure everyone follows the Right to Education Act. We also need to make schools safe and teach children in a fair way, to girls. We must work with communities to change attitudes and support girls' education. This will help empower girls and lead to governance.

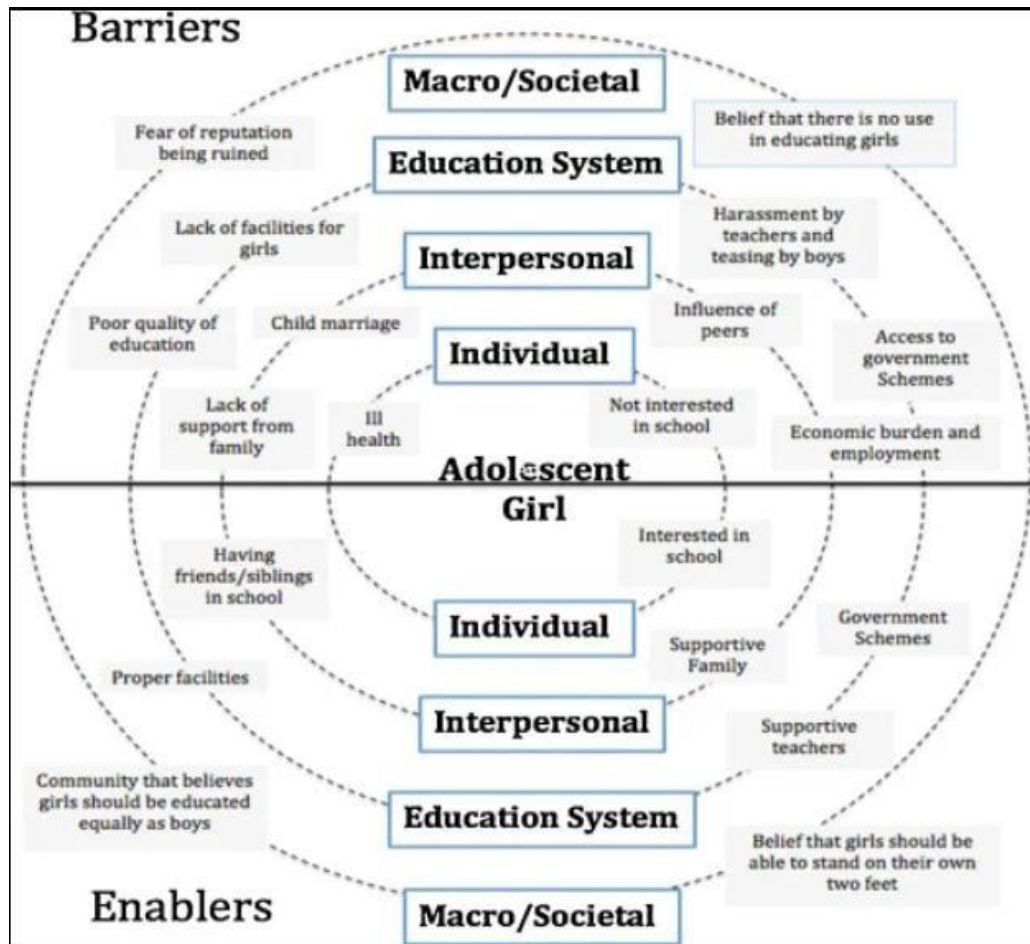
Multi-level Barriers and Enablers Affecting Adolescent Girls' Education

The education of girls is affected by many things that are all connected. These things can be found at levels, such as the individual level, the level of people they interact with, the level of schools and the level of society

as a whole. At the level, things like not being interested in school, being sick or not being motivated can make girls not want to go to school. If a girl is really interested in learning and wants to be independent, that can be a big help.

At the level of people, they interact with what their family thinks, what their friends think and whether their teachers support them are all very important. If a girl's family does not support her, if she is afraid of what people will think or if her teachers or classmates are mean to her, that can make it very hard for her to keep going to school. On the other hand, if a girl has a family that supports her, friends who are positive and teachers who encourage her, that can make a big difference. The education system itself can also be a problem. Things like teaching, not having the right facilities for girls and not having a safe place to learn can all make it hard for girls to go to school. If the school has good facilities and teaches in a way that includes everyone, that can make learning easier. At the level of society as a whole, things like beliefs can affect girls' education. For example, some people think that it is not necessary to educate girls, or they want girls to get married young. They do not have enough money. These things can all make it hard for girls to go to school. If the government and the community support girls' education, that can be a big help.

Overall the education of adolescent girls is complex and requires a lot of different solutions, at all these levels. We cannot just focus on one thing we need to do things at the same time to really make a difference in the education of adolescent girls.



METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach combining doctrinal and thematic analysis. Constitutional provisions and Supreme Court judgments were selected for their authority in defining and interpreting women's rights, while UNESCO and World Bank reports provide empirical and global perspectives. Doctrinal analysis helps interpret legal frameworks, and thematic analysis identifies key patterns such as legal awareness, access to education, and economic empowerment, offering a comprehensive understanding of how education links constitutional rights with women's empowerment in practice.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of this study brings the findings into direct conversation with its central research questions, particularly how education enables women to move from having formal constitutional rights to actually exercising them in everyday life. The analysis shows that while legal guarantees such as Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, Article 15 of the Indian Constitution, Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, and Article 21A of the Indian Constitution provide a strong normative framework, the research question regarding their practical realisation finds its answer in the role of education. Education emerges not simply as a supporting factor, but as the enabling condition that allows women to understand, claim, and negotiate these rights within social structures that may otherwise restrict them.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings align closely with constructivist and empowerment-based frameworks, which view learning as an active process through which individuals construct knowledge and agency. Education enhances women's "capability" in an Amartya Sen-inspired sense, expanding their real freedoms to make choices and act upon them. It also reflects elements of connectivism and self-directed learning, where access to information—especially legal and civic knowledge—strengthens autonomy and participation. In this sense, education functions as a bridge between abstract legal provisions and lived experiences, translating rights into awareness, awareness into agency, and agency into action. This bridging role is evident in how educated women are better able to access legal remedies, participate in decision-making, and challenge discriminatory practices.

However, the discussion also reveals important gaps that prevent this bridge from being fully effective. Structural inequalities—such as poverty, rural-urban divides, and deeply rooted gender norms—continue to limit access to quality education for many women. Even where schooling is available, the absence of gender-sensitive pedagogy and legal literacy means that education does not always translate into empowerment. Policies like the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act and initiatives such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme have made significant contributions, yet their impact is uneven due to gaps in implementation and monitoring. Thus, while the study strongly supports the argument that education is the critical link between constitutional rights and women's empowerment, it also underscores that this link is neither automatic nor universal. It requires sustained institutional support, inclusive educational practices, and a conscious effort to integrate legal awareness into learning. Without addressing these gaps, the promise of the Constitution risks remaining aspirational rather than transformative.

Research Findings

The findings of the study are supported by secondary data and empirical reports, which demonstrate the tangible impact of education on women's empowerment. According to World Bank (2023), increased female educational attainment is positively correlated with higher labour force participation, indicating that education enhances women's access to economic opportunities. Similarly, UNESCO (2022) reports that India's female literacy rate has risen to over 70%, reflecting significant progress, though disparities persist across rural and marginalised communities. At the same time, workforce participation among women in India remains relatively low (around 25% as per recent estimates), suggesting that education alone does not automatically translate into employment, thereby highlighting structural and cultural barriers. Educational outcomes also reveal gender gaps in access to higher education and skill-based training, which limit women's upward mobility. These findings reinforce that while education contributes to awareness, confidence, and decision-making capacity, its empowering potential is often constrained by socio-economic inequalities and implementation gaps in policies such as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act and the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme. Thus, empirical evidence supports the central argument of the study: education plays a critical role in advancing women's empowerment, but its effectiveness depends on broader structural support, inclusive policies, and equitable access.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study examines how education plays a vital role in turning constitutional promises into real

opportunities for women in India. While legal provisions like Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, Article 15 of the Indian Constitution, Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, and Article 21A of the Indian Constitution provide a strong framework, their impact depends on awareness, access, and effective implementation. Education empowers women by building confidence, improving decision-making, and opening pathways to social and economic participation. However, challenges such as gender bias, unequal access, and weak policy execution still limit progress. Strengthening gender-sensitive education, promoting legal awareness, and ensuring safe learning environments can help bridge this gap. Ultimately, education is not just about learning—it is a powerful means of enabling women to claim their rights and shape their own futures.

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