




WOMEN'S AWAKENING: EMPOWERMENT THROUGH AN EMPHASIS ON EDUCATION OF SISTER NIVEDITA'S ASPECT

Firoz Mondal ¹  & Dr. Brotati Chakraborty ² 

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Author Details:

¹ Research Scholar, School of Education, Adamas University, Kolkata, India; ² Assistant Professor, School of Education, Adamas University, Kolkata, India

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Brotati Chakraborty

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Abstract

Women empowerment represents probably most important aspects of modern society which may be called a transformation that has been taken place in the societal perspective on women advancement, moving away from patriarchal norms. This empowerment not only drives societal progress but also fortifies its socio-economic structure. Empowering Indian women, who make up nearly half of the population, contributes to the strengthening of the national economy. Education is seen as a key factor in women's empowerment, as it equips women to tackle various challenges, effectively perform their traditional roles, and initiate significant changes in their lives. However, despite the increase in educational opportunities, gender inequality continues to exist in India; thus, considerable efforts are still required to improve the quality of women's education in the nation. There exists a vast pool of untapped potential within women potential that has not yet been fully harnessed. Since education serves as both an 'input' and an 'outcome' in human development, promoting equity in the education sector will create a supportive environment for women and facilitate their rise as entrepreneurs. Sister Nivedita, a devoted disciple of Swami Vivekananda, dedicated her entire life, spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries, to the cause of awakening women's power in India. Sister Nivedita's multifaceted contributions encompassed areas such as education, social reform, feminism, and playing a vocal role in establishing women's rights. Through an exploration of her life story, we trace her journey from Ireland to India and discover the profound experiences that inspired her to dedicate herself to the noble mission of empowering Indian women. Moreover, the pivotal role Sister Nivedita played in upholding the dignity of Indian women stands as a shining testament to her unwavering dedication and foresight. Education, health, and income are intricately connected, forming a triad that influences overall development. This paper delves into how education plays a pivotal role in empowering women, while also examining the challenges and necessary transformations.

Keywords: *Development, Education, Women Empowerment, Sister Nivedita's reformation*

Introduction

Education is regarded as a fundamental necessity and an indispensable right for the citizens of any nation. It serves as a powerful instrument for reducing inequality, as it equips individuals with the necessary tools and skills to become self-reliant. Since women frequently face discrimination in various spheres of life, the need for education is particularly urgent for them. Education is considered a pivotal stepping stone toward women's empowerment, as it enables them to confront numerous challenges, challenge traditional gender roles, and bring about positive changes in their own circumstances. In the 21st century, the importance of women's participation in the advancement of society and the economy (López Quintero et al., 2024) is gaining increasing recognition. However, in a developing nation with a vast population like India, women continue to grapple with issues such as economic dependency and limited employment opportunities. Women's empowerment is essential for building a brighter future, not only for individual families and society at large, but for the entire nation. The primary objective of this empowerment is to assist women in becoming self-reliant, attaining economic independence, fostering a positive self-image, overcoming various challenges, and actively participating in social and political development initiatives. Women's empowerment constitutes a fundamental element of social progress, ensuring equal opportunities, rights, and freedoms for women (Vijaya, 2024).

At the close of the nineteenth century, a compassionate and resilient woman with a noble spirit arrived in India, dedicated to improving human welfare. This woman was Margaret Elizabeth Noble, (Barua, 2020) an Irish national. Embracing her role as a social reformer, she traveled from Europe to India. Margaret hailed from a religious family, with her father serving as a Christian evangelist. The values of compassion and empathy were instilled in her from a young age, leading her to advocate for the vulnerable and needy. Professionally, she was a teacher, having taught at various institutions across England and Ireland. In 1892, she founded her own school in Wimbledon, where she implemented an innovative teaching approach. Her students engaged in interactive activities that imparted essential lessons. Additionally, she offered an adult education program for those interested in learning modern teaching methods. The unique characteristics of her school contributed significantly to its popularity (Jana, 2019). Sister Nivedita's efforts occurred during a pivotal time in India's history, characterized by colonial domination and social reform movements. Examining her contributions sheds light on the obstacles women faced in a colonial setting and the impact of female reformers in overcoming these challenges. Her life and work illustrate the potential of women to lead and instigate social change. Insights into her methods for empowering women socially and economically can guide current initiatives aimed at advancing gender equality and women's rights. Sister Nivedita's focus on education as a tool for empowerment remains highly relevant today (Bhattacharjee, 2023).

A detailed review of various research literature and documents clearly indicates that there are numerous challenges or obstacles to women's empowerment, which have historically hindered women's progress and are likely to continue to do so in the future (Simon & Hasan, 2025). Nevertheless, we firmly believe that genuine change can only be achieved when women themselves resolve to permanently cast off their disempowered state. To attain social, educational, and economic empowerment, it is imperative that women make decisions that are closely aligned with their own unique needs and aspirations. We strongly maintain that every individual bears the ultimate responsibility for their own life; therefore, to navigate life's diverse challenges and reach the pinnacle of success, everyone needs to acquire the necessary skills. It is never possible to achieve true freedom without the mindset or willingness to make your own life decisions independently. Women can make highly significant contributions to sustainable development, and for this very reason, (Simon & Hasan, 2025) it is essential to provide them with the necessary opportunities and resources to pursue higher education, participate in the workforce, and seek employment beyond the confines of the home. In the context of the 21st century, this issue demands the utmost priority for the advancement of women's empowerment. It can be said with confidence that if these opportunities can be effectively ensured, the goals of sustainable development will undoubtedly be realized.

Review literature

Women's empowerment refers to a condition where women are afforded the chance to engage fully in the social, political, and economic aspects of life (Bayeh, 2016). Empowering women involves establishing a supportive environment that enables them to execute government programs and organizational policies that influence their lives (Murphy, 2024). Women's empowerment signifies a transition for women from a state of oppression to one where both the oppressor and the oppressed hold equal status in social, political, and economic realms (Debnath, 2024). The notion of empowerment is more comprehensible when it is contextualized within the realms of social, educational, economic, political, and psychological empowerment of women. Social empowerment for women focuses on addressing the gender inequities that persist between men and women in society (Somani, 2022). This paper explores Sister Nivedita's challenges and commends her successful efforts in overcoming the constraints of both her Irish heritage and Indian culture, while also emphasizing her important contributions to humanity as a whole (Biswas, 2024). Empowering women fundamentally refers to enhancing educational opportunities for women, enabling them to make significant decisions regarding their own lives and those of their families (Tamuli & Mishra, 2023). Sister Nivedita significantly advanced international intercultural understanding and women's education. Her legacy is forever tied to her beloved Master, akin to St. Clara's connection with St. Francis. However, unlike the gentle Poverello, the commanding Swami subjected his followers to strict evaluations before acceptance. Despite this, Nivedita focused on his kindness rather than his severity, as noted by Romain Rolland. This highlights the experiences of St. Clara and Sister Nivedita as religious women navigating patriarchal structures in both Christian and Hindu monastic communities (Mukherjee, 2017). The psychological empowerment of women pertains to the process through which women enhance their motivation, self-interests, and morale to engage more actively in national initiatives, including education, politics, health concerns, agricultural matters, and development programs (Adhikari et al., 2023).

Objectives

- To study the influence of education on the empowerment of women.
- To study the feminist movement of Sister Nivedita in the perspective of women education.
- To examine the obstacles and transformations in education regarding women's empowerment.

Methodology

The present study is a historical study based on qualitative research method. Data collected from various secondary sources like published and unpublished resources, such as records, books, journals, magazines etc. the data were analyzed through content analysis. This study mainly depends on written documents.

Importance of Education in Women's Empowerment

Education plays a pivotal role in the prosperity, development, and overall well-being of women. For many years, it has been recognized as a fundamental catalyst for social change and advancement within any community or country (Cruz-Sandoval et al., 2023). This is particularly true for women and girls, as education is crucial for their survival and empowerment. Research has demonstrated that educating women can effectively tackle pressing social challenges such as dowry practices and unemployment. Furthermore, it promotes social unity and establishes a strong foundation for future generations.

The capacity of women to engage in decision-making processes, both within the household and at the societal level, serves as a crucial measure of empowerment. This study explores the elements that affect women's decision-making authority and their participation in decision-making entities.

The empowerment of women necessitates the eradication of discriminatory practices and the advancement of social freedom. This research investigates the social limitations and obstacles encountered by women in India, which encompass gender-based violence as well as limitations on mobility and engagement in public areas.

Need for Women's Empowerment

Empowerment allows women to gain knowledge, skills, and techniques that will assist them in their personal and social development, while also cultivating a sensitivity to societal issues. It is crucial to make special efforts towards the education, health, and employment of women. Economic empowerment is vital for enhancing the female sex ratio; however, such empowerment can only be achieved when women receive an education.

The absence of education is the fundamental reason behind the exploitation and neglect of women (Arora et al., 2024). Only through literacy and education can women comprehend the constitutional and legislative provisions in India that are designed to empower them. Education serves as both a means of affirming potential and confirming performance (Jaya Shree Priyadarshini, 2023). The empowerment of a girl begins when an enterprise makes that empowerment actionable. This journey is also fulfilling for a mother, transforming her from a challenging situation to a prosperous one. When women receive an education, they will be equipped to contribute to nation-building. Empowerment necessitates significant intervention from governments as well. These interventions require well-structured strategies with clearly defined roles for women, implemented systematically (Satya Prakash, 2021). The concepts of women's development and women's empowerment are interrelated both conceptually and methodologically. Therefore, enhancing education for women is crucial in enabling them to achieve their objectives on par with men across various aspects of life, while fostering and maintaining a culture of unity, equity, and dignity. The addition of cultural and knowledge value strengthens the argument for social liberation, political development, and economic empowerment. Education equips women with economic stability, which serves as a foundation for all forms of women's empowerment, (Cruz-Sandoval et al., 2023) including social, psychological, technological, and political empowerment. It empowers them to surmount challenges.

Feminist Movement of Sister Nivedita

Sister Nivedita was instrumental and innovative in the feminist movement, particularly in the realm of women's education during her time. As a dedicated disciple of Swamiji, she faithfully followed his teachings. Upon her arrival in Kolkata, she worked to realize Swamiji's vision. She founded a school in Bag Bazar with the goal of advancing women's education. While she acknowledged that this effort was modest, she was confident it would expand over time. Nivedita noted that illiteracy and bias were the two main obstacles confronting Indian society. These attitudes are the root cause of India's stagnation. Nivedita observed a remarkable trait in Indian women. They tirelessly and selflessly dedicate themselves to their families (Vaidya, 2023). The day begins early and extends into the night. They worked hard to achieve their own desires and happiness in order to ensure the comfort of each family member. Nivedita recognized the inherent commitment in Indian women. While she sought to enhance their lives, she aimed to preserve their dignity. She never intended to impose a Western lifestyle on Indian women. She admired their spiritual devotion and patience. Nivedita recommended exploring Eastern literature. In her view, these works can be elevated and enriched women's minds. She wished to retain the purity and innocence of Indian women. She believed that the principle of respecting elders in a family is a significant virtue (Vaidya, 2022).

Sister Nivedita primarily focused on women empowerment through education. She strongly believed that education was crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty and social inequality that women faced. To achieve this, she established schools and educational institutions that provided girls and women with access to quality education.

Nivedita believes that this development is possible only because of education. While she recognizes the role of industry and commerce, she insists that educated people are key to progress (Islam & Soy, 2025). She argues that technical education is needed, but advanced research is equally important for national development, just as technical education without research is like a branch without a tree. Comprehensive progress is essential for a developed nation, and she stresses the importance of human unity for strength and resilience. Education is the pathway to a self-sustaining state. Sister Nivedita championed equal educational opportunities for women in India, working to break down cultural and societal barriers (Ramusack, 1990). She identified illiteracy as the root of India's struggles and was committed to education for all. Nivedita addressed various aspects of education, including primary, secondary, and university education, women's education, and training in arts and crafts, recognizing education as the 'problem of problems' in India, and was disheartened by the public's lack of awareness on the issue.

Obstacles to women's empowerment

Violence is considered as the foremost barriers to women empowerment, with physical, emotional, and psychological abuse being deeply rooted in societal norms. This pervasive issue not only hinders women's progress but also contributes to a decline in the female sex ratio, reflecting the severe impact of such violence on women's lives and their ability to prosper in society (Dwipayanti et al., 2025). Empowering women involves much more than simply achieving financial independence; it necessitates a deep commitment to advancing gender equality in every aspect of life. This includes advocating for equal opportunities in education, (Chand & Karre, 2019) healthcare, and employment, as well as challenging societal norms and stereotypes that hinder women's progress. True empowerment means creating an environment where women can flourish which make choices freely, and participate fully in all areas of society, ensuring that their voices are heard and valued.

Guardians who lack formal education often hesitate to enroll their daughters in schools or other educational institutions. This reluctance significantly limits the opportunities available for these young girls, hindering their ability to learn and develop personally. As a result, they miss out on valuable experiences that could contribute to their growth and future success.

Early marriages (Kanji et al., 2024) often result in young girls leaving school prematurely. This trend is due to the lack of social awareness about the importance of female education. Many families may not recognize the long-term benefits of educating their daughters, leading to decisions that prioritize marriage over schooling. As a result, the cycle of educational disadvantage continues, limiting opportunities for young women and impacting their prospects.

It is essential to transform women's views about themselves and their empowerment. This transformation involves not only changing their self-perception but also actively working to reshape societal images that depict women as weak, dependent, and passive. Instead, women should strive to embody qualities of independence, proactivity, strength, and determination, thereby redefining their roles and capabilities in society.

Conclusion

Problems such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality cannot be eradicated solely through individual human effort. In this regard, the equal and active participation of women is indispensable. Without access to education, it becomes difficult for women to recognize their own rights and realize their own significance. The primary objective of women's empowerment is to work towards ensuring higher literacy rates and the expansion of education, improved healthcare for women and their children, equal rights over productive resources, greater involvement in economic and commercial activities, awareness of their own rights, and an improved standard of living; concurrently, (Lakshminarayanan & Thomas, 2022) it aims to foster self-reliance, self-confidence, and a sense of self-worth among women. Sister played a crucial role in the significant East Bengal famine of 1906. She arrived in India to assist Swamiji with women's education, but she also became involved in the independence movement in Bengal (Khatun, 2025). Her remarkable contributions to the development of Indian society are unforgettable. Her generous spirit and kindness established her as a notable figure in Indian history. Sister Nivedita was a compassionate, noble-hearted, and dynamic woman. She was a devoted follower of Swami Vivekananda, whose philosophy of life greatly influenced her (Taraphdar, 2016). Upon arriving in India, she began to follow in Swamiji's footsteps. She understood that the plight of Indian women could be alleviated through education. Sister Nivedita's impact on women's education is profoundly significant. In this paper, I will discuss Sister Nivedita's exceptional contributions to Indian society.

Recently, the central government launched the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' scheme, (Agnihotri & Malipatil, 2018), which emphasizes the social and economic empowerment of girls. This initiative aims to create awareness and strengthen the effectiveness of welfare services for women. It is essential to implement such programmes across the country to bring about the desired changes. It is crucial to remember that, like men, women must take an active role in the journey of lifelong learning, and therein lies the essence of true empowerment.

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