ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 3| March2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

EMPOWERING INDIAN WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION: SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S VISION AND MODERN INITIATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Swami Vivekananda defined education as the expression of the innate perfection within every individual. Inspired by this philosophy, this article explores the importance of educating women in India and its impact on society, family, and the nation. Education equips women with knowledge, confidence, and the ability to make independent decisions. It also enables them to participate actively in social, cultural, and economic development. Despite progress since independence, India still faces a gender gap in literacy, with rural and marginalized women being most affected. The article examines key government initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), and the Mahila Samakhya Programme, which aim to provide equal access to education and empower girls. Educated women can challenge social barriers, prevent harmful practices like early marriage, and raise responsible and capable children, ensuring a brighter future for the country. By gaining practical skills, moral knowledge, and academic learning, women become self-reliant and contribute meaningfully to economic growth and social progress. In conclusion, women's education is essential for personal empowerment and national development. Swami Vivekananda's vision of life-building, character-making education aligns with modern policies, emphasizing that a nation's progress is inseparable from the progress of its women.

KEYWORD: *Education, Women Empowerment, Modern initiative, Swami Vivekananda*

INTRODUCTION

The question of women's education and empowerment has remained central to the discourse on social transformation, particularly in postcolonial societies like India. Even before these ideas became popular worldwide, Swami Vivekananda shared strong and progressive views about the role of women in building the nation. His ideas were based on Vedanta philosophy and went beyond the limits of his time. Even today, his thoughts continue to influence discussions on gender equality and social justice. Vivekananda strongly believed that a society cannot develop without improving the condition of its women. He saw education as the main tool for empowerment. For him, education was not only about formal learning, but also about building confidence, character, and independence. While many thinkers of the nineteenth century limited women's education to household roles, Vivekananda supported a broader form of education that would help women take equal part in social, economic, and spiritual life.

In today's world, where globalization and policy changes are shaping society, Vivekananda's ideas are still very relevant. Problems like unequal access to education, financial dependence, and social inequality still exist, especially in developing countries. His ideas match well with modern views on women's empowerment, such as freedom, decision-making power, and equal opportunities for all. This study focuses on a critical understanding of the ideas of Swami Vivekananda regarding women's education and empowerment, and explores their relevance in the present socio-educational scenario. Even though India has achieved noticeable progress in the field of education, several challenges continue to exist. As per the 2011 Census, the female literacy rate stood at about 65.46%, reflecting a clear gap when compared to male literacy levels. This gap highlights that women's education still requires serious attention.

By linking Vivekananda's thoughts with current social realities, the paper attempts to show that his ideas are not limited to the past but remain meaningful even today. His strong belief in education as a path to self-reliance, confidence, and personal growth makes his views highly applicable in the modern context. Thus, his vision can play an important role in shaping a more balanced and sustainable approach to women's empowerment in contemporary society.

Education According to Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda believed that the human mind already possesses immense potential, and education acts as a catalyst that brings out this inner knowledge. He compared knowledge to a spark hidden in flint, which is ignited through the friction created by education. Thus, education is a process of self-discovery and realization of one's inner capabilities.

- Vivekananda defined education as the *"manifestation of the perfection already in man."*
  It means knowledge and power already exist within us—education helps to bring them out.
- He stressed that education should be **man-making**, not just information-giving. It should develop strength, confidence, courage, and self-reliance in individuals.
- According to him, the main aim of education is **character formation** Qualities like truthfulness, discipline, morality, and responsibility are more important than mere academic success.

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- Education should develop **body, mind, and soul**. It should create a balanced personality, not just intellectual growth.
- He supported **practical knowledge** over rote learning. Education should prepare a person to face real-life challenges.
- True education builds **self-belief** and makes a person independent. It removes fear and weakness.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Every investigation is being investigated in the purpose to fulfil some objectives. This study tries to achieve the objectives which are as follows –

1. To understand the perspectives that inspired Swamiji to think on women's life.
2. To identify the thoughts, ideas, aims and philosophy of Vivekananda into the area of women education.
3. To portray the activities of Vivekananda in uplifting the women's status and position in the Indian society.
4. To evaluate the relevance of his thought on women education in present day.

METHODOLOGY

The approach adopted in this study is both analytical and reflective. It examines Swami Vivekananda's philosophy and ideas concerning women's education and further assesses how relevant his principles are in the present-day scenario.

Need and Importance of Women Education: Women's education is widely recognized as a crucial factor for achieving social equality and sustainable development. In India, although notable progress has been made, gender disparity in education still persists. According to Census 2011, the female literacy rate was 65.46% compared to 82.14% for males, indicating a significant gap. More recent data from the National Statistical Office (NSO, 2017–18) shows improvement, with female literacy rising to around 70.3%, yet it still remains lower than that of males. Furthermore, reports like the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21) highlight that many women, especially in rural areas, continue to face barriers such as poverty, early marriage, and lack of access to quality education.

This educational disadvantage limits women's participation in the workforce. Educated women are more likely to participate in economic activities, make informed health and family decisions, and contribute to the overall development of society.

The importance of women's education was strongly emphasized by Swami Vivekananda, who believed that no nation can progress unless women are uplifted. His famous idea that "a bird cannot fly with one wing" clearly reflects the need for equal development of both men and women. He advocated education as a means of building strength, confidence, and independence among women, enabling them to solve their own problems. His vision aligns closely with modern development goals, where gender equality and women's empowerment are considered essential for national progress.

The Government of India has also introduced several initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and National Education Policy 2020 to improve female education and reduce gender gaps. Despite these efforts, challenges remain, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Therefore, strengthening women's education is not only a social responsibility but also an economic necessity for inclusive growth. In this context, providing education to women leads to multiple dimensions of development and empowerment. Educated women are able to:

- Women learn about their rights and can protect themselves from unfair treatment.
- They become confident and can take their own decisions.
- They can earn money and support their family.
- Knowledge about health, cleanliness, and good food habits helps their family live better.
- They can take part in social and community activities.
- They can raise good and educated children.
- Gender inequality can be reduced and early marriage can be avoided.
- Skills and talents can be understood and used properly.
- Leadership roles in different fields can be taken up.
- They can help in the growth and development of the country.

Current Situation of Girs Education in India

In independent India, education has gained great importance and has been supported by various government policies and programmes. As a result, the education system has grown quickly in recent years. However, many women are still deprived of education, and the gap between male and female literacy continues to be a serious concern.

The following facts and figures clearly show the reality of this problem and indicate that it still remains a major challenge.

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Table 01: Literacy rates in India(1951-2011)

YEAR	PERSONS	MALES	FEMALES	MALE FEMALE GAP IN LITERACY RATE
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7	9.1
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1	9.5
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8	10.4
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9	12.7
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3	17.6
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.84	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India

Table 01 shows The literacy rate in India has shown a steady and significant improvement from 1901 to 2011. In 1901, the overall literacy rate (Persons) was only 5.3%, which increased to 74.04% in 2011. This shows that the education system in India has expanded greatly over time. Male literacy has always been higher than female literacy throughout this period. In 1901, the male literacy rate was 9.8%, while the female literacy rate was only 0.7%. This indicates that women had very little access to education in the early years .The gap between male and female literacy was very high in the early years. In 2011, although the gender gap in literacy reduced to 16.68%, it still indicates that inequality between male and female education continues to exist. this gap started to decrease due to government policies and educational programs aimed at promoting female education. By 2011, although the gap had reduced, it still existed, showing that gender inequality in education has not been completely removed. India has made remarkable progress in literacy over the years, but there is still a need to focus more on female education to achieve complete equality.

Table 02: Ranking of States and Union Territories by Female literacy rate: 2011

Rank	India(State/Union Terriotory)	Female Literacy rate
1	kerala	91.98
2	Mizoram	89.40
3	Lakshadweep	88.25
4	Tripura	83.15
5	Goa	81.84
6	Andaman & Nicobar Island	81.84
7	Chandigarh	81.38
8	Puducherry	81.22
9	NCT of Delhi	80.93
10	Daman & Diu	79.59
11	Nagaland	76.69
12	Himachal Pradesh	76.60
13	Sikkim	76.43
14	Maharashtra	75.48
15	TamilNadu	73.86
16	Meghalaya	73.78
17	Manipur	73.17
18	Punjab	71.34
19	West Bengal	71.16
20	Guajrat	70.73
21	Uttarakhand	70.70
22	Karnataka	68.13
23	Assam	67.27
24	Haryana	66.77
25	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	65.93
26	Orissa	64.36
27	Chhattisgarh	60.59
28	Madhya Pradesh	60.02

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29	Andhra Pradesh	59.74
30	Arunachal Pradesh	59.57
31	Uttar Pradesh	59.26
32	Jammu & Kashmir	58.01
33	Jharkhand	56.21
34	Bihar	53.33
35	Rajasthan	52.66
	All India	65.46%

Table 02 indicates that there is a wide variation in female literacy rates among different states and union territories in India. Kerala ranks first with a female literacy rate of 91.98%, followed by Mizoram (89.40%) and Lakshadweep (88.25%), showing a very high level of female education in these regions .On the other hand, states like Bihar (53.33%) and Rajasthan (52.66%) are at the bottom of the ranking, indicating low female literacy and serious educational challenges. It is also observed that most of the southern and northeastern states perform better in female literacy, while many northern and central states lag behind. West Bengal, with a literacy rate of 71.16%, falls in the middle group, showing moderate progress. Overall, the table highlights significant regional disparities in female literacy in India and suggests the need for stronger efforts to improve women's education in low-performing states.

Current Policies

The current policies for women's education in India clearly reflect the ideas of Swami Vivekananda, who believed that a nation cannot progress without the education of women. Government initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and the National Education Policy 2020 focus on providing equal opportunities and encouraging girls' education. Vivekananda highlighted the need to make women strong, confident, and self-dependent through education, which can be seen in these modern efforts. These policies not only aim to increase literacy but also promote overall development, independence, and dignity among women, which is closely connected to his idea of character-building education. To improve women's education and reduce gender inequality, the Government of India has introduced several important schemes and policies.

1. **Mahila Samakhya Programme:**The Mahila Samakhya Programme was launched in 1988 under the guidance of the New Education Policy of 1968. It was designed to empower women, particularly those from rural areas and socially or economically disadvantaged groups. When the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was established, a committee was formed to review the programme and assess how effectively it was functioning.
2. **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBV):**The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) Scheme was launched in July 2004 to provide education to girls at the primary level. It mainly focuses on rural areas where female literacy is very low and girls have limited access to schooling. The schools set up under this scheme follow a 100% reservation system: 75% of seats are for younger classes, and 25% are reserved for girls from families below the poverty line (BPL).
3. **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):**The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme was launched in 2015 to improve the status of the girl child in India. It focuses on preventing gender-based discrimination and promoting education for girls. The programme aims to increase awareness about the importance of girls, improve their enrolment and retention in schools, and ensure equal opportunities for their overall development.
4. **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana:**Introduced in 2015, this savings scheme helps families save for the education and future of their daughters. It encourages parents to invest in their girl child's education, ensuring financial support for higher studies.

Recommendation

Improving women's education in India requires multiple steps. First, more schools should be built, especially in rural areas, to reduce distance barriers, and girls should receive scholarships, free textbooks, uniforms, and other financial support to continue their studies.

- Build more schools, especially in rural areas, to reduce distance barriers.
- Provide scholarships, free textbooks, uniforms, and other financial support.
- Conduct awareness programs for parents and communities about girls' education.
- Improve the quality of education with trained teachers and modern methods.
- Include vocational training and life skills in the curriculum.
- Prevent social barriers like child marriage and gender discrimination.
- Monitor and strengthen government schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, KGBV, and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan.
- Encourage girls to participate in sports, debates, and leadership activities

CONCLUSION

Swami Vivekananda rightly emphasized that a nation cannot progress unless its women are educated and empowered. He believed that women are the mothers of future generations, and their education directly shapes the character, values, and abilities of the next generation. Educated women are not only able to take their own decisions and support their families but also contribute actively to society and the nation. According to Vivekananda, women should learn practical skills like home management, cooking, sewing, hygiene, and moral education, along with subjects like science, arts, and history, so that they become confident, independent, and capable of facing life's challenges.

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Education also allows women to break free from old superstitions and social barriers that have limited their roles for centuries. It gives them the power to think critically, make informed choices, and fight discrimination and inequality. In modern India, government schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, KGBV, kanyasree prakalpa(2013) and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan reflect Vivekananda's vision by providing access, support, and encouragement to girls and women, especially in rural and marginalized communities. These programs aim not just at literacy but at overall development, self-reliance, and dignity.

In short, educating women is not only about personal growth but also about national progress. When women are educated, confident, and empowered, families become stronger, communities prosper, and the country moves forward. Swami Vivekananda's vision and today's initiatives share one goal: to make women strong, independent, and respected, which will ultimately lead to a brighter, more progressive India . Education for women is the key to building a just, equal, and developed society.

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